



# A Canada Water Agency in the Sault: Summary of Community Discussions

What We Heard in the Algoma District



JANUARY 2022

## Who is the Sault?

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We are at once in the middle of Canada and yet connected to six provinces via the flow of water from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We have a large educated professional, academic and technical workforce. Two post secondary education institutions with experience in networked learning, information sharing and process implementation. Sault Ste. Marie has significant experience utilizing outside resources to impact change and bring desired results to large projects. We also have ongoing relationships that provide these resources to others whether it be smaller regional communities or larger industrial or commercial endeavors. Sault Ste. Marie is also a leader in green energy which is important as we continue to create, build and analyze large data to better make decisions with regards to water use, treatment and management.

Water's role in our history mirrors Canadian and Indigenous history – e.g., the fur trade, industrialization, and water recreation. Sault Ste. Marie's relationship with water is a microcosm of Canada's. This relationship makes Sault Ste. Marie uniquely situated to host a new Canada Water Agency.

*Excerpt of a written contribution by an Algoma District community member. Adapted with permission.*



# Acknowledgements

## OUR PLACE

These community discussions took place in Robinson-Huron Treaty territory—the traditional territories of Garden River First Nation, Batchewana First Nation, Métis Nation of Ontario, Missanabie Cree First Nation, and many others (including our friends across the colonial Canada-US border). We recognize and uphold the collaborative spirit of the Two-Row wampum (Gä•sweñta') and Dish with One Spoon wampum (Gdoo-naaganinaa).

We thank the Indigenous peoples and nations surrounding Baawatigong (St. Marys River) for their stewardship of the lands, waters, air, and everything within them, which settlers have benefited from often at the expense of original peoples. We recognize the many injustices perpetuated by colonialization, which continue to impact individuals, societies, and environments across Nayaano-nibiimaang Gichigamiin (Great Lakes region).

With these acknowledgements, we have engaged in community discussion with an intent to progress towards a more respectful and collaborative future. We are grateful to our Indigenous contributors for your willingness to collaborate in your territory—chi miigwech.

## OUR PEOPLE

Many individuals contributed to the work presented in this document. The City of Sault Ste. Marie Canada Water Agency Task Force is comprised of the following members:

- **Matthew Shoemaker**, Mayor, City of Sault Ste. Marie
- **Christian Provenzano**, Former Mayor, City of Sault Ste. Marie
- **Cory Gardi, City Councillor**, City of Sault Ste. Marie
- **Tom Vair**, Deputy CAO, City of Sault Ste. Marie
- **Rick Van Staveren**, Director of Economic Development, City of Sault Ste. Marie
- **Travis Anderson**, Director of Tourism & Community Development, City of Sault Ste. Marie
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- **Ryan Namespetra**, Natural Environment Coordinator, Sault College
- **Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone**, Project Coordinator, Lake Huron North
- **Dr. Paula Antunes**, Freshwater Researcher and Consultant

We thank the City of Sault Ste. Marie's City Council for supporting this initiative, and Lake Huron North for dedicating their Project Coordinator's time to facilitate and summarize our discussions. We could not have carried out these discussions without the support of Jessica Maione (Economic Development Officer, City of Sault Ste. Marie), Grace Zhang (Business Analyst, Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre), Sarah Constable (Leader of Experiential Learning, Algoma District School Board), Celeste Schoahs (Co-op Student), Amanda Comegna (Administrative Assistant, Office of the Mayor, City of Sault Ste. Marie), Prabhleen Bhatia (Vice President Campus Affairs, Algoma University Students' Union) and the teachers who facilitated discussion with their students.

Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to the 200+ contributors from our community who dedicated time and meaningful discussion to guide our effort to invite the Canada Water Agency to Sault Ste. Marie—**THANK YOU, MIIGWECH!**

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### FRONT AND REAR COVER IMAGES:

City of Sault Ste. Marie

# Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>WHAT WE HEARD .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Introductions.....	8
Current State.....	8
Actions.....	9
Future State .....	10
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
– for a proposal and for a Canada Water Agency in the Sault	



# Executive Summary

## BACKGROUND

The Government of Canada is establishing a Canada Water Agency to improve freshwater management across the country. The City of Sault Ste. Marie partnered with Lake Huron North to bring community voices to the table as we develop a formal proposal to the Government of Canada to invite the Agency to the Sault. This report summarizes those community voices.

## ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

Ten in-person and virtual discussions were held between August 24 and December 11, 2021 (inclusive). We heard from 208 individuals who represented perspectives of local organizations, Indigenous persons, youth (ages 15-24), and the general public.

## WHAT WE HEARD

Sault Ste. Marie is an excellent location for a Canada Water Agency for reasons including our central location, proximity to a key navigation location and many fresh water areas, the immense cultural and historical significance of this region (being a 'meeting place' among the rapids), and that we recognize the unique approaches needed across the country due in part to our rural-urban community. We also provide a new space for collaborative policy, being a smaller community in Canada's North—an underrepresented demographic for government offices. We are also home to a vibrant freshwater research ecosystem that spans across the Canada-US border—e.g., expertise within multiple post-secondary institutions, the private sector, and all three levels of government.

Despite all this, there are opportunities to improve. Like in other areas across Canada, our history of urban and industrial development have had impacts on our environment and on the health of our peoples.

Community members highlighted that the presence of industry is an opportunity to explore and develop policies and practices for 'clean growth'. We are excited about our collective responsibility (Sault and across Canada) to demonstrate leadership in freshwater remediation.

The need for further education and conversation was a major component of our community members' perspectives. Misinformation (about water governance), language, ethics, ways of knowing, and human rights were all discussed. We need to have conversations to ensure a common understanding of how integral water is to our lives—while recognizing that this relationship with water is different for different peoples and parts of Canada.

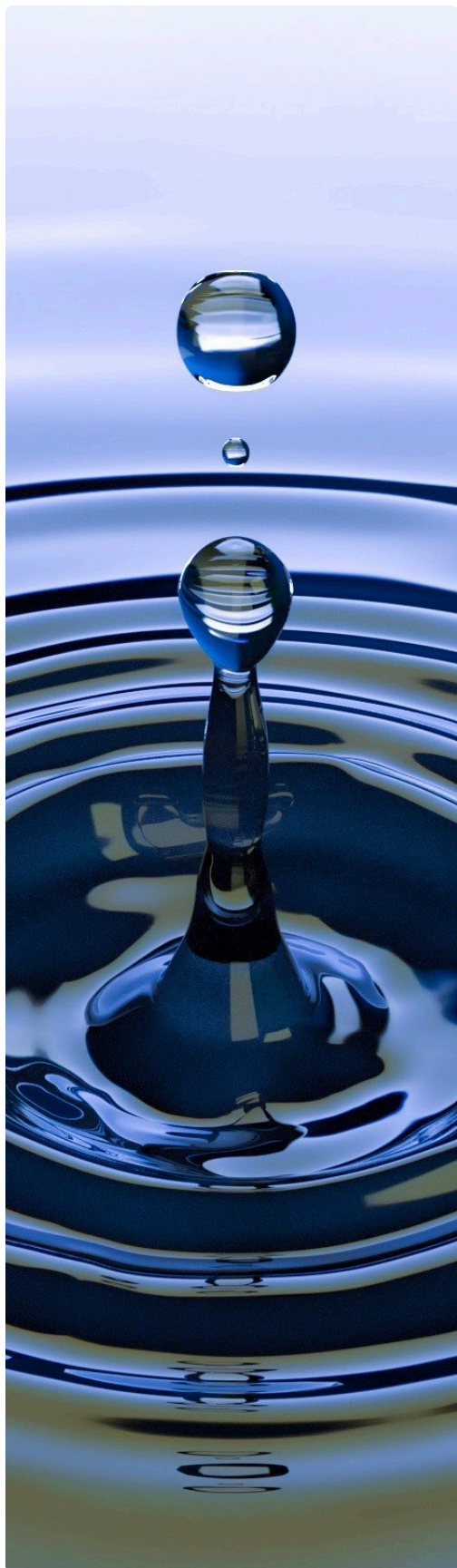
Voices from across the community—representing industry, non-profit organizations, youth, and Indigenous persons—were strongly aligned in the need to form stronger and more productive relationships with both industry organizations and Indigenous nations. In addition, community members hope a CWA will be supplemented by local strategies and actions to address issues that are not within the federal purview.

Our vision for a water-secure future for everyone includes that water is elevated and respected, a holistic approach to watershed stewardship is used, management is well-coordinated by and with diverse people and organizations, and that we take advantage of opportunities offered by technological innovations. Citizen scientists would have a stronger role to play in a future fresh water regime, and Indigenous leadership is considered core to a successful Canada Water Agency.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A PROPOSAL AND FOR A CANADA WATER AGENCY IN THE SAULT

We conclude this report with 10 recommendations that summarize the perspectives presented throughout this report. These recommendations are listed and described on page 13.

# Background



The Government of Canada is establishing a Canada Water Agency to improve freshwater management across the country.

On June 28, 2021, Sault Ste. Marie City Council approved the formation of a Task Force to explore this potential opportunity. The Task Force consists of City Staff from the Community Development and Enterprise Services Division, as well as external stakeholders.

The Task Force is developing a proposal to bring the Canada Water Agency to our community. A significant component to developing a formal proposal to the federal government is engaging in community discussions for input, feedback, and ideas on the Canada Water Agency. We sent out multiple calls to participate across the Task Team's diverse networks, through the media, and on social media.

This "What We Heard" report is the culmination of these discussions. The report shares the key themes and messages we heard from the community discussions hosted between August and December 2021.

To deliver these community discussions, the City of Sault Ste. Marie partnered with Lake Huron North, a local network of community organizations collaborating on water quality objectives across Algoma District.

The sessions were facilitated by their Project Coordinator, Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone.

**For more information about the City's initiative, please visit:**

**[www.cwassm.ca](http://www.cwassm.ca)**

A companion document to this report, capturing the complete and unedited contributions of community members, can be found on this website.

Additional input, questions, or comments can be submitted to [cwaproject@cityssm.on.ca](mailto:cwaproject@cityssm.on.ca).



# Engagement Timeline

Ten in-person and virtual community discussions were held over five months to gather input from local organizations, Indigenous persons, youth (ages 15-24) and the general Algoma District community. Through this process, 208 individuals contributed their perspectives, including 12 written comments sent to our team. All contributors had the opportunity to review this report prior to publication, with some providing additional feedback.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS (16 PARTICIPANTS)**

- In-Person Meeting on Tuesday August 24th, 3-5pm, at the Waterfront Adventure Centre, Sault College
- Online Meeting on Thursday August 26th, 11am-1pm

## **INDIGENOUS PERSONS (6 PARTICIPANTS FROM THREE FIRST NATIONS)**

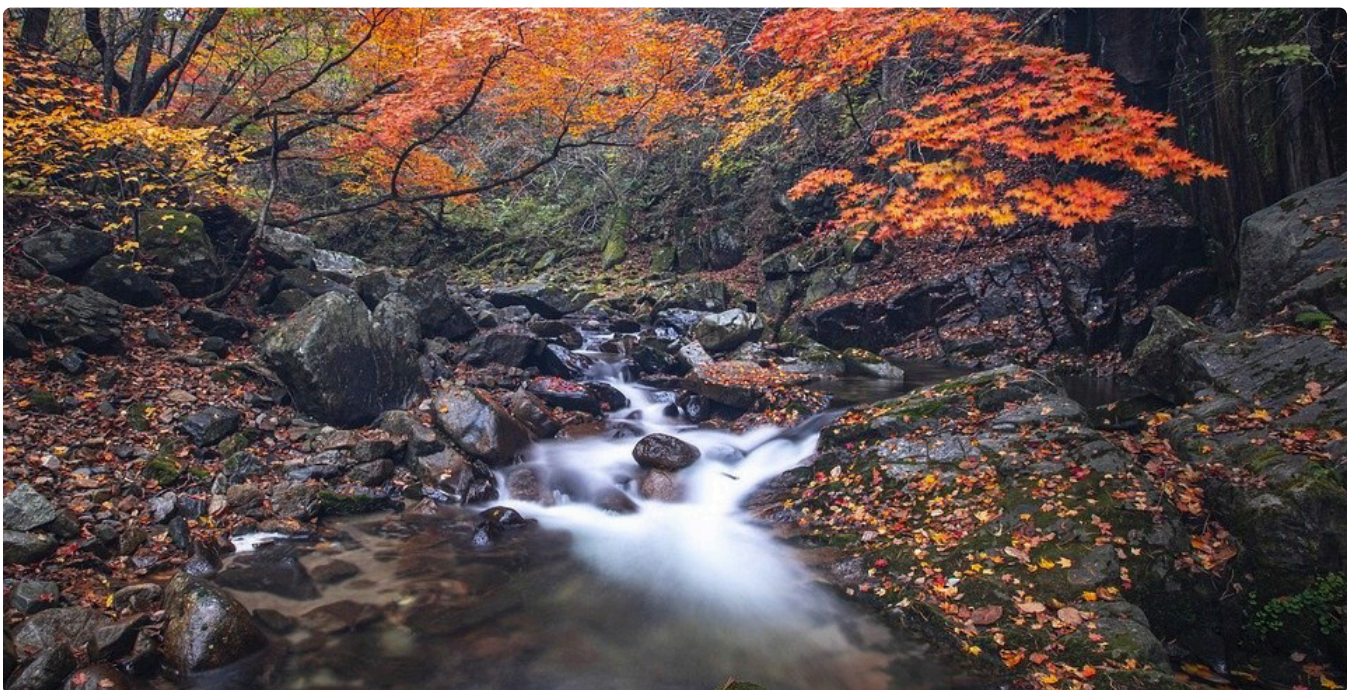
- In-Person Meeting on Wednesday August 25th, 10am-1pm, at the Arbor, Algoma University
- Online Meeting on Wednesday, September 1st, 1-3pm

## **YOUTH (152 PARTICIPANTS)**

- Online Meeting 1 - Algoma District School Board on Tuesday, October 26th, 10-11am
- Online Meeting 2 - Algoma District School Board on Tuesday, October 26th, 1-2pm
- Online Meeting 3 - Post-secondary Students on Monday, November 8th, 11:30am-1pm
- Online Meeting 4 - Mayor's Youth Advisory Council on November 26th, 4-4:30pm

## **ALL COMMUNITY (22 PARTICIPANTS)**

- Online Meeting 1 on Saturday, September 11th, 11am-1pm
- Online Meeting 2 on Saturday, December 11th, 11am-1pm



# What We Heard

## Introduction

The community discussions included an introductory presentation on the City's initiative and context about freshwater water management in Canada. Each community discussion was structured around three main themes:

- 1. Current State:** (Why) is the Sault a great place for a Canada Water Agency?
- 2. Desired Future State:** What is your vision for a secure freshwater future in Algoma District and across Canada?
- 3. Actions to move from Current State to Future State:** How do we achieve the vision?



## Current state

### SAULT STE. MARIE IS AN EXCELLENT LOCATION FOR A CANADA WATER AGENCY

We are centrally located, mid-way across Canada, at the hub of the Great Lakes, on a U.S.–Canada border and at a critical navigation point (shipping); therefore, Sault Ste. Marie is a prime location for a Canada Water Agency.

This is a place of enormous cultural and historical significance: at the heart of Turtle Island (northeast North America), *Baawitigong* (“place of the rapids”, or the St. Marys River) is a recognized meeting place rich with collaborative history across nations. Six Indigenous nations currently call this territory home, each of which contributes to leadership in freshwater stewardship.

As Federal agencies are typically not located in smaller communities (especially in the North), the Sault provides a ‘neutral’ or new space for collaboration, negotiation, and policy process to take place – a space that can provide real opportunity to recognize and work with Indigenous nations across Canada.

As an urban-rural community, we value a central coordinating vision, but we recognize that unique, localized approaches are needed across the country.

### WE ARE HOME TO A VIBRANT FRESHWATER RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

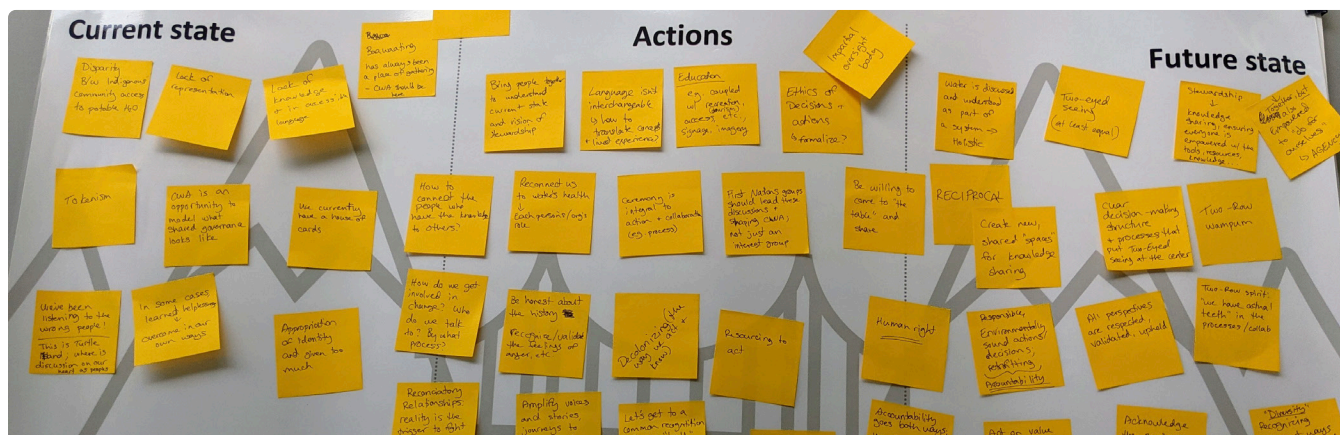
We have immense local expertise (research, education, policy) and existing binational cooperation in academia, business, and government. Examples of academic collaborators include Sault College, Algoma University, Shingwauk Kinooamaage Gamig (University), Lake Superior State University, Lakehead University, and others. Our active networks are already undertaking meaningful work in governance and the blue economy.

We are also home to major industries due to our rich natural resources—e.g., forestry and mining. Also in our vicinity is the Turkey Lakes Watershed, which has been the site of decades of federal research about the impact of human activities on Canadian Shield ecosystems, acid rain, climate change.

Finally, our many high quality secondary and postsecondary schools are well positioned (geographically and academically) to collaborate on research and in shaping innovative solutions. Collectively, these organizations present an opportunity for a Canada Water Agency to create career pathways and opportunities for the development of tomorrow’s fresh water leaders.



# What We Heard



## OPPORTUNITIES TO LEAD

Like many communities across Canada (and the world), generations of settlement and growth have had unintended effects on the health of our environment and the people who subsist on it. This history, and the presence of heavy industry today, are part of our story as a nation – resulting in the mandate to create a Canada Water Agency. Our community members call for more effective management (including prevention and remediation) of pollutants in our waters—whether industrial or consumer (e.g., plastics)—alongside industry innovations and collaboration with Indigenous nations locally and across Canada.

Community members highlighted that the presence of industry is an opportunity to explore and develop policies and practices for ‘clean growth’. For example, the electric arc project at Algoma Steel has made it a world leader in ‘green steel’ production; community members encourage further innovations for industries across the region.

We are excited about our collective responsibility (in Sault Ste. Marie and across Canada) to demonstrate leadership in freshwater remediation.

## Actions

### EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Communication was a major aspect of our discussions, whether identifying the need to educate the general public about water management and stewardship in Canada or simply opening the lines of communication between Canadian governments, researchers, community members and Indigenous nations.

Concerns exist that misinformation or lack of awareness (about freshwater governance in Canada) may result in some community members to be concerned that a Canada Water Agency is a threat to local (industry) employment; however, most participants agreed this may be addressed with good messaging by key community champions.

Language, ethics, ways of knowing, and human rights were raised in several distinct yet related conversations, which often began with a recognition of our colonial history and its effect on our peoples and our waters. Policy, management, and decision-making processes must reflect a culture change across Canada in appreciation of these discussions. Ultimately, we need to have conversations to ensure a common understanding of how integral water is to our lives—while recognizing the diversity of relationships with water for peoples across Canada.

# What We Heard

## RELATIONSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND SHARED SPACES

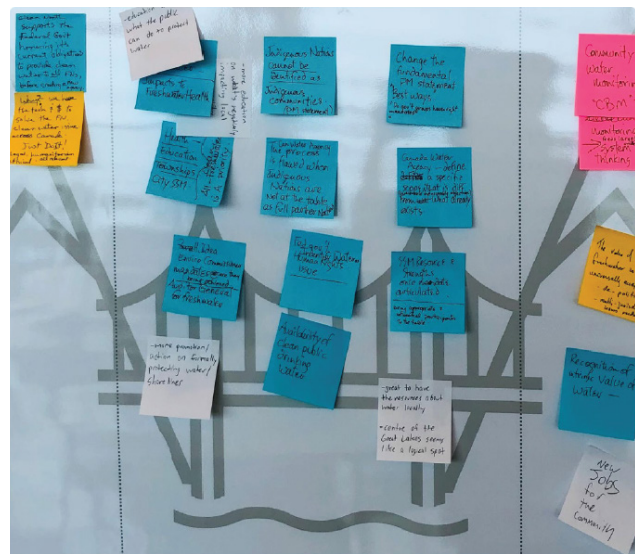
Following the above discussions, the need to work together—people, industry, governments—evolved into a conversation about collective impact. Community members highlighted opportunities to act locally while supporting a national mandate or strategy for fresh water that would bring Canada to the forefront of global innovation and sustainable water stewardship.

Voices from across the community—representing industry, non-profit organizations, youth, and Indigenous persons—were strongly aligned in the need to form stronger and more productive relationships with both industry organizations and Indigenous nations. Most participants expressed the need to ensure Indigenous perspectives, approaches, and persons lead—or at least have a core, partnering role in—future management (stewardship) and decision-making of our waters.

## MORE THAN A CANADA WATER AGENCY

While community members are supportive of bringing the CWA to the Sault, we recognize it is not a solution to all water challenges. Community members hope a CWA will be supplemented by local strategies and actions to address issues that are not within the federal purview. For example:

- Participants highlighted the need for education of community members (there is likely a role for local management bodies like Conservation Authorities, NGOs and academic institutions).
- Beyond awareness/education, community members (youth and adult) were keen to be more engaged in water monitoring and management processes but felt there were limited opportunities to support water quality objectives locally.
- In addition to mitigation and adaptation of the many challenges that may fall within the purview of the CWA, community members suggested we must all – including industry and NGOs – consider upstream preventative measures to ensure remediation efforts are lasting.



## Future State

### FRESH WATER IS ELEVATED AND RESPECTED

Water is not just critical for life, it is life, the ‘life blood of our earth mother’. This perspective was shared by many participants from across our region, followed by a call to recognize Canada’s large lakes as more than a resource. These places have immense social-economic value as the original navigable ‘highways’, primary regions of settlement over our history, and meaningful cultural and spiritual values for our First Peoples as well as Canadians.

Community members also frequently called for management to take a more holistic approach in the way the watershed and their many challenges are viewed. Many community members called for an ‘upstream approach’ to prevent and control pollution, hold polluters accountable, and recognize the connections between air, land, surface water, and groundwater.

# What We Heard

## **INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IS CORE TO A SUCCESSFUL CANADA WATER AGENCY**

Participants were consistent in their voice that Indigenous nations must be respected as equal partners in the governance of lands and waters across the country. We recognize the need to bring together distinct Indigenous and Canadian knowledges in a way that celebrates our diversity while collaborating to ensure healthy, safe, and accessible waters for everyone.

That Indigenous communities in our region and across Canada have yet to access or maintain reliable, safe drinking water is unacceptable to all community members who participated in our discussions. This was a main concern of several discussions.

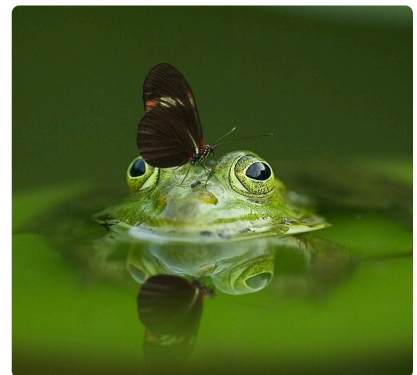
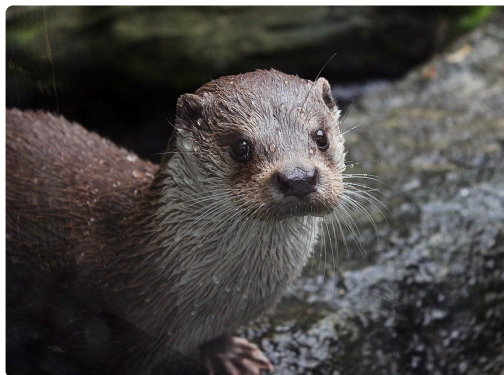
## **FRESHWATER MANAGEMENT (STEWARDSHIP) IS WELL-COORDINATED AND DIVERSE**

Organizations and people must work across boundaries and disciplinary or cultural siloes to share information, communicate experiences, collaborate on and coordinate action. Multiple levels of government—e.g., Great Lakes Forestry Centre and Ontario Forest Research Institute—would work with Indigenous nations to build a new culture of governance. Mandates, roles, and responsibilities must be clearer to minimize duplication or gaps. Community members envisioned a fresh water regime in which governance, the economy, society, and the environment are inextricably linked.

Finally, citizen scientists should have a stronger role to play in a future fresh water regime, including implementing community-based monitoring and surveying. Community members would participate more actively in local decision-making and would co-create actions that would be collaboratively implemented. Resources would be made available for community and Indigenous-driven efforts to lead water stewardship.

## **FUTURE-PROOFING WITH TECHNOLOGY (AN OPPORTUNITY)**

The history of water is one of mechanization—boats, pumps and dams. The future of water is technological—data, communication and education. With the proliferation of the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, data management and remote communications, we—a small and somewhat remote city at the center of the Great Lakes—can anchor the new Canada Water Agency.



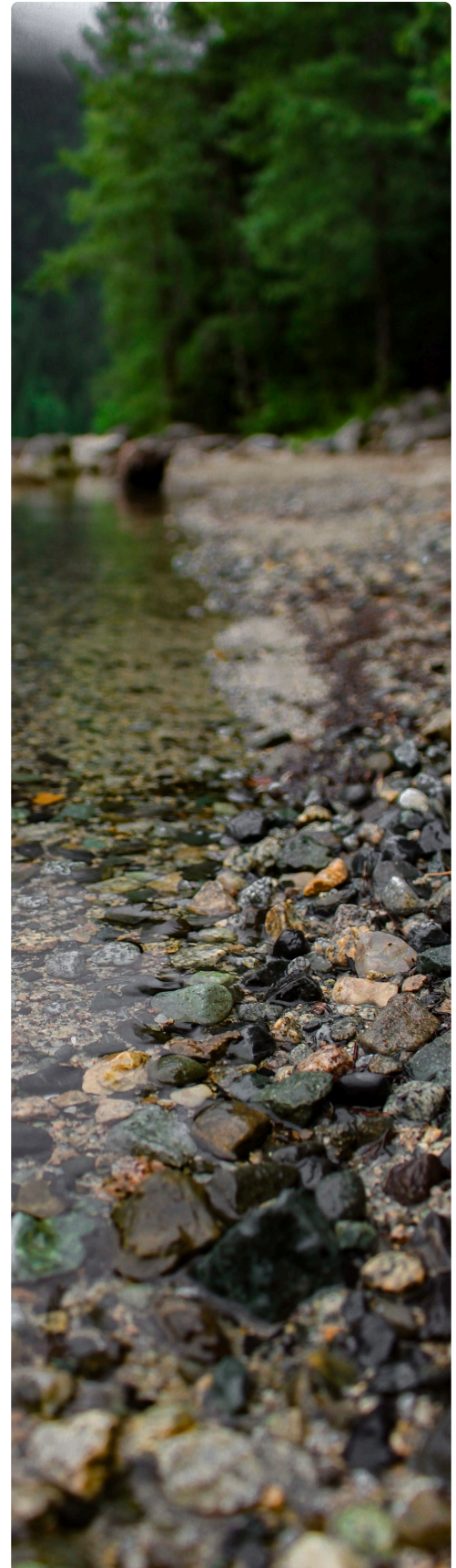


# Recommendations

## —for a proposal and for a Canada Water Agency in the Sault

1. Our location is amazing, but don't make this the focus.
2. Focus on our people—our expertise, our collaborative approaches and potential, our ability to lead with innovation, our historical diversity and our rich culture.
3. Seize the opportunity to build our story based on community growth, from past polluters to present-day healers, through meaningful partnerships between industry, government, and the community (as an example to follow).
4. A holistic systems approach to governance and science should be encouraged—integrating social, economic, and environmental spheres; connecting air, land, surface water, and groundwater; connecting climate change and other 'distinct issues' to water quality; incorporating upstream preventative measures alongside mitigation and adaptation.
5. Decisions, management, and action should be informed by diverse ways of knowing, enhanced through technologies.
6. Indigenous nations, perspectives, culture, and knowledge should be at the core of a Canada Water Agency. If we want to return the waters to their former condition, we need to learn from those who lived in harmony with those waters.
7. There is much work to do regarding relationship building (between community members, industry, government, Indigenous nations); however, we have all the ingredients to we need to get started!
8. Enable and empower community members and Indigenous nations (e.g., provide education/awareness and funding) to understand and actively participate in management and decision-making processes, monitoring of water quality, and to collaboratively design and implement actions.
9. Ensure collective action and shared spaces (including data sharing, different ways of doing) are possible to achieve.
10. Waters should be swimmable, drinkable, fishable—usable and healthy—by/for all (human and non-human).

***This report highlights some of the common perspectives shared by residents of Algoma District from August–December 2021. The full perspectives (e.g., summary notes from each of our meetings, copies of the written comments we received) are available on our website as accompanying documents to this report. To request copies, please email our team at [cwaproject@cityssm.on.ca](mailto:cwaproject@cityssm.on.ca).***







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