

FRENCH RIVER SOURCE WATER PROTECTION COMMITTEE

A meeting of the French River Source Water Protection Committee was held at the Tatamagouche Branch Library on May 22, 2025, at 10:00am.

- Present:** Councillor Sherry Martell, Chair
Mayor Christine Blair
Jim Baird, Citizen Representative
Mark LeFresne, Village Commission Rep
Alex Feix, North Shore River Restoration Rep
Greg Watson, Citizen Rep, Watershed
Dan Troke, CAO
Paul Smith, Director of Community Development
Michelle Boudreau, Director of Public Works
- Absent/Regrets:** Greg Cummings, Watershed Planner, NSECC
- Introductions:** The meeting was called to order at 10:05am and the chair completed introductions.
- Approval of Agenda:** An agenda was prepared and circulated for the Committee's review and approval.
- Moved by Mark LeFresne and seconded by Jim Baird
- "That the agenda be approved." Carried unanimously
- Approval of Minutes:** Minutes from the meeting held on May 14, 2024 were circulated for the Committee's review and approval.
- Moved by Mayor Blair and seconded by Greg Watson
- "That the Minutes from the meeting of May 14, 2024 be approved as presented." Carried unanimously.
- Business Arising:** Alex Feix provided an update on the activities of the North Shore River Restoration Group. After working for 25 years in the Waugh and French Rivers, they decided to update their name from the North Colchester River Restoration Group to the North Shore River Restoration Group. They hope to expand to other local rivers along the North Shore, including within other Counties. They have taken on the Wallace River (which now has a watershed management plan) and River Phillip and are seeking funding from Cumberland County to assist with projects. They are potentially going to take on River John as well. They have expanded their connectivity surveys to look at rivers, culverts and bridges and have identified funding opportunities for when fish ladders are added to culverts. Other initiatives include working with the Salmon Association, looking at carbon measurements, and purchasing equipment such as pH monitors.

They have a contract with DFO to maintain the fish ladder on Waugh's River and are taking on a major project on the old Wentworth highway bridge which includes forks, pools and major rocking project. They work with volunteers, and also last year they had 2 full time volunteers and one summer student plus Brent. Some of the funding for these types of projects comes from Clean Foundation, but that funding was reduced recently.

They will be meeting to discuss the algae issues in Matattal Lake. This lake also contains small mouth bass which is a concern. Alex would like to know more about the blue green algae and Michelle will put him in touch with Dalhousie University, who have been studying algae in the watershed for a number of years. Also, weather patterns are changing to be more intense so structures that have been up for years are now gone. Fiona damage has also had an impact on local rivers and streams. The Association is prioritizing which stream sections require work, where can fish pass, deciding on travel paths and prioritizing those with connectivity to habitat areas.

Mayor Blair inquired about the red Survey. In the Fall when salmon spawn, the association counts the reds/ gravel bars where eggs are deposited. The Association will continue to focus on maintenance in French River Water Shed area. Bedrock in the upper reaches of the watershed proves challenging for river improvements. Beavers also have a negative impact on fish passage.

Paul asked about the watershed plan for the Wallace River. Alex noted that Nick McInnes would have more details on the plan, but it generally looks at length and volume of tributaries, where improvements are required, and what types of instream work (rocking, tree planting, riparian restoration) can be carried out. Areas that are getting wider and shallower due to erosion are a concern, as they create warmer waters and lower flows. It was suggested that the Association could present to Council. They currently receive an annual grant of \$5,000 from the Municipality. Part of the reason they have expanded their scope and changed their name is also to leverage more funding and improve partnerships with other local organizations.

Committee Terms of Reference

Michelle reviewed the Terms of Reference with the committee. She explained that the Hydrogeological Study which is included in Council's capital budget is aimed at finding additional water volume/sources for the Tatamagouche Water Utility. This could mean extra volume taken from the French River or identifying alternate sources.

Protected Watershed Area Designation & Regulations

Michelle reviewed the regulations with the committee. The recent decision by the Province to promote uranium mining was discussed – none of the subject areas are within the French River watershed.

County Wide Planning:

Paul Smith provided an update on County Wide Planning. During the last meeting, a county wide plan and By-law were in the process of being developed. The final plan was approved by Council at the end of March; however, we are still waiting on Ministerial approval. Deadline to submit an updated plan was March 31, 2025.

In relation to the watershed area, the new plan includes many of the committee's objectives to protect water. The plan is required to meet statements of provincial interest on housing, infrastructure, flood risk and drinking water, and it recognizes the importance of source water in Tatamagouche, Debert, Stewiacke and Town of Truro. These areas need to be protected through Land Use By-law requirements. The updated plan increases the riparian zone from 10m to 15m along any waterway, whether inside or outside the water shed area. This is essential to reducing velocity and removing sediment from runoff before rivers are impacted.

The plan has no authority over forestry, agriculture or mining regulations as they fall mainly fall under provincial authority. However, the new land use plan provides a framework to help address issues within the watershed and the plan can be revisited to address concerns that were not previously identified. The updated plan has identified ALL Water Shed areas within Colchester, which are automatically flagged when someone applies for a permit. The applicant is then aware of any related sensitivities.

Greg asked if there was an opportunity to incentivize the regulations. Paul stated that a bigger discussion would be needed. Also, this could potentially be out of the scope of our legislation rights through planning documents.

Alex questioned on whether other municipalities had been consulted regarding their watershed strategies. Paul noted that the public consultation and outreach during the plan development was extensive and included some discussions with other municipalities.

Forestry Management Plan:

Paul Smith provided an update on the Forestry Management Plan which was prepared last year for Municipally owned lands. Council received a presentation last year from FRC who prepared the plan. Recreation staff are actively following the plan in the Municipal parks. There may be potential to expand the concepts in the plan through a public awareness campaign to privately owned properties.

Paul will provide an update at the next meeting re: items we could extract from the plan for public education/stewardship. Paul will also have the plan posted on our website. It may be beneficial for Council to revisit the plan and potentially have FRC come back and give another presentation since we have new council members. Paul to coordinate.

Greg inquired if the County still accepts lands that are donated. Paul said yes.

Paul suggested putting together an info pamphlet to incorporate forestry best management practices and information on riparian zones. Alex expressed a concern with illegal dumping. Staff noted that our balefill in Kemptown will accept garbage at no charge from County residents and this information could be included in the pamphlet. Greg mentioned that gates are no longer working to keep out illegal dumpers.

Greg mentioned he is working with Ducks Unlimited and trying to get federal money to increase buffers along waterways for species at risk. May be helpful to get Ducks Unlimited to come in and talk about this approach. Habitat protection by default will benefit watersheds. Greg will explore this further.

New Business

Paul: Areas designated as Protected Watersheds by the Province usually have an encumbrance put in the deed to create awareness. When the French River Watershed became designated, for some reason the encumbrance wasn't added to properties. Paul is working with the provincial land registry to add this encumbrance to these properties that fall within the watershed. Owners would not pay for this change.

Greg has seen listings promoting the property being in a protected water area.

Paul recommended inviting FRC to next meeting to discuss possible public education topics.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be scheduled for Thursday, September 18, 2025. Committee members will be notified when a location is confirmed.

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 10:47am.

Michelle Boudreau,
Recording Secretary