

Tread Lightly with Water: Protecting Lake Simcoe Starts with Us

Water shapes life in our communities — it's our source for drinking, recreation, habitat, and identity. In the Lake Simcoe watershed, where many Barrie residents live, the health of the lake is inseparable from how we manage stormwater, development, salt use, and municipal priorities.

While conservation groups do vital work, lasting change also requires public awareness, political will, and accountability. This is how we “tread lightly” to protect our lake — not just in small daily steps, but by pushing upstream on policy, infrastructure, and civic responsibility.

Who's Working to Protect Lake Simcoe

[Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition](#)

Also known as the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition (RLSC), this umbrella environmental group brings together dozens of member organisations to advocate, educate, and monitor actions across the watershed. Their work includes mapping threats, tracking funding, raising public awareness, and pushing for strong policy enforcement.

They critique funding and action gaps, often pointing out the “disconnect between promises and deliverables” in water quality strategies. [Investigating the Disconnect in Lake Simcoe's Water Quality Strategy](#).

[Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority \(LSRCA\)](#)

The LSRCA is the local authority tasked with watershed management, conservation, monitoring, permitting, and restoration in the Lake Simcoe basin.

Their **Strategic Plan (2022–2024)** emphasises collaboration, science-based decision-making, climate resilience, and public engagement.

They also manage programs like [LEAP \(Landowner Environmental Assistance Program\)](#) which supports private landowners with technical advice and funding for restoration on their property, which helps reduce runoff and erosion.

Government & Funding Initiatives

- The federal Canada Water Agency announced over **\$1 million** in 2025 to support three freshwater projects targeting phosphorus runoff, sustainable farming practices, and municipal stormwater efforts. [Government of Canada](#)

- The Ontario government publishes annual reports under the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, and allocates funding toward remediation and monitoring. [2023 Minister's Annual Report](#)
- However, many critics argue that funding is too piecemeal, that stormwater infrastructure retrofits lag behind, and that phosphorus and salt loads are rising despite targets. [Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition](#)

The Current Challenges: Why We Can't Be Complacent

Phosphorus Overload

Reducing phosphorus is central to improving water clarity, reducing algal blooms, and protecting cold-water fish habitat. But the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan aimed for ~44 tons per year of phosphorus loading — in practice, recent monitoring shows levels in the 70–90 ton range.

Urban stormwater, agricultural runoff, septic systems, and atmospheric deposition remain significant contributors.

Road Salt & Chloride

Salt is another creeping threat. Chloride levels in the lake continue to rise as winter deicing practices leach into waterways. Yet policy changes on salt use remain limited and underfunded.

Infrastructure & Retrofits Lagging

Some stormwater ponds and municipal drainage systems were built decades ago and were never designed to filter out nutrients. Retrofitting them is expensive. RLSC has called attention to the mismatch between funding promises and actual infrastructure upgrades.

Political Inaction & Accountability Gaps

- Budgets are often allocated to studies or small programs rather than large-scale fixes.
- There is often weak public reporting on outcomes — for example, how much phosphorus was actually removed. RLSC demands more transparent tracking.
- Some development pressures (new housing, roads) create more impervious surfaces and runoff, challenging efforts to reduce pollutants.

What You Can Do: Tread Lightly with Water — And Raise the Volume

Beyond using rain barrels and choosing native plants (covered elsewhere), here are ways people in Barrie and the watershed can help push systemic change:

1. Stay Informed & Monitor Reports

- Read the [Minister's Annual Report on Lake Simcoe](#) to see how Ontario is performing on targets.
- Follow annual [LSRCA watershed health reports](#) (phosphorus, chloride, stormwater) via their website.
- Check [RLSC's](#) blog and publications to see their critiques and calls to action.

2. Speak Up — Contact Your Elected Officials

Raise the voice of citizens when it comes to water health:

Official	Role	What to Ask / Request
MPP (Provincial)	Oversees provincial environment, infrastructure, and regulation	Push for stronger funding and enforcement in the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan
Ontario Minister of the Environment, Conservation & Parks	Sets provincial policy and oversight	Demand accountability, transparent targets, and salt/phosphorus policy changes
Municipal Councillors / Mayors	Control local stormwater, zoning, development	Ask about retrofits, green infrastructure upgrades, bylaw updates
Conservation Authority (LSRCA) Board	Directs watershed-level planning	Encourage more frequent public reporting, science-based targets

You can often find contact emails and submission forms on their websites.

3. Engage in Public Consultations & Submit Feedback

Whenever new developments, zoning changes, or municipal budgets are proposed — weigh in with considerations for runoff, buffer zones, rain gardens, and low-impact designs. Bodies like LSRCA and municipalities often open comment periods.

4. Join or Support Advocacy Groups

Become a member or donor to **Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition** (RLSC) or local water protection groups. Help amplify their advocacy, events, mapping efforts, and public pressure.

5. Push for Infrastructure Change Locally

Work with neighbourhood associations or community groups to propose green infrastructure (e.g. bioswales, permeable pavements, rain gardens) and encourage municipal support or pilot projects.

6. Ask Tough Questions Locally

When budgets, land development or infrastructure plans are discussed:

- “How will stormwater runoff be managed?”
- “How much phosphorus / chloride reduction is expected?”
- “What monitoring will measure success, and will it be public?”

A Call to Action: Let’s Hold Our Water Stewards Accountable

Lake Simcoe isn’t someone else’s lake — it’s ours. The watershed supports drinking water, habitat, recreation, and quality of life for Barrie and beyond.

The boots-on-the-ground work by LSRCA, RLSC, and partner organisations is essential. But the missing piece is public vigilance, civic demands, and demanding that elected leaders move from announcements to measurable, transparent action.

If you believe that water is worth protecting, join in:

- Read the latest **LSRCA reports** and **Minister’s Annual Report**
- Subscribe to **Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition** communications and share them
- Contact your MPP, municipal leader, and conservation authority — ask for clarity, funding, and enforcement on phosphorus and salt pollution
- Participate in public consultations, developments, and budget hearings
- Support or propose green infrastructure projects in your neighbourhood

We don’t need to invent new tools — we need to turn up the pressure so existing plans, funds, and agencies deliver for Lake Simcoe. Together, we can tread more lightly on water — and protect this precious resource for generations to come.