

Groundwater Guardian, Eh?

Groundwater Guardian in Canada's City of Cambridge

by Paul Willms, Cambridge Groundwater Guardians

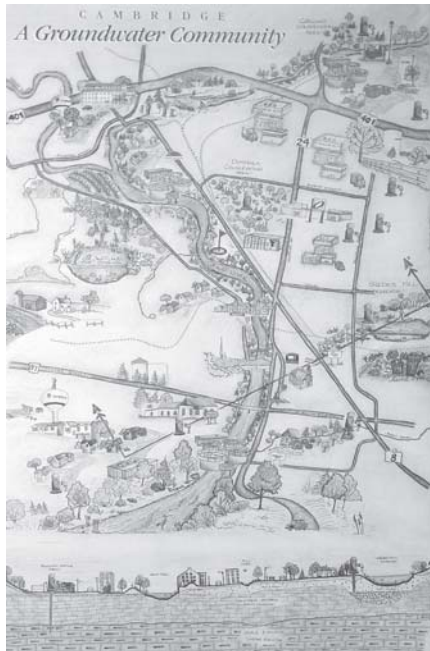
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The City of Cambridge is currently the only Groundwater Guardian Community in Canada. Since 1997, Cambridge's Groundwater Guardian team has undertaken various groundwater protection and conservation activities. Next September, Cambridge Groundwater Guardian will be celebrating its 10th anniversary. This article recognizes the 10-year journey and the people who have contributed so much to groundwater education in our community.

The City of Cambridge is located in the heart of Southern Ontario, Canada, approximately a one hour drive west of Toronto, and a three hour drive northeast of Detroit. The City is a local area municipality within the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (a Groundwater Guardian Affiliate), the largest urban area dependent upon groundwater in Canada. Cambridge is situated at the confluence of the Grand and Speed Rivers, which are important sources of drinking water for a number of communities. Underlying bedrock aquifers supply most of the drinking water to Cambridge (population 130,000) and others within the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (total population of approximately 500,000).

The City relies on 27 water supply wells up to 60 meters (200 feet) deep. The highest producing wells occur in the heart of the City and supply

almost half of the water used by residents and industries. Many of these wells date back to the 1900s, with the first wells being drilled in 1891. Approximately 80% of the water used in the City is drawn from groundwater. The remaining 20% comes from the Grand River and is pumped into the Manheim Aquifer and mixed with groundwater before distribution.



Although this precious resource is a source of drinking water, other water uses place a great strain on its availability. However, attitudes towards water usage and conservation have begun to change with recent water use restrictions, educational activities and events, and very successful incentive programs (rain barrels, high-efficiency toilet replacement programs, etc..

Groundwater Guardian

Cambridge Groundwater Guardian is an active working subcommittee of the Cambridge Environmental

Advisory Committee, which is appointed by City Council. It consists of dedicated volunteers with various interests and areas of expertise. The group has remained focused on education initiatives over advocacy. As a subcommittee under the City's administration, its accomplishments are reported to Council and therefore draw considerable City support. The need for a Groundwater Guardian was identified as a community objective in the City strategic plan in the 1990s.

The Big Groundwater Picture

Walkerton is a small town of about 6,000 people located northwest of Cambridge. And like Cambridge, it too is dependent on groundwater as its source of drinking water. In May 2000, several serious flaws in Walkerton's drinking water system resulted in seven deaths and waterborne disease affecting almost half the residents of the town. As a result of that tragedy, a public inquiry identified the need for government actions and planning that focused on "source water protection" at the watershed/regional level in Ontario. Cambridge Groundwater Guardian has created displays and information materials in partnership with the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, and looks forward to greater involvement in other source water protection efforts.

The Future of Cambridge Groundwater Guardian

As Dave Smyth, long-time Groundwater Guardian member, remarked in noting the longevity of the group,

"Our mandate has not run dry." Whereas single-issue advocacy groups or task forces disband at the end of their mandate, Cambridge Groundwater Guardian has stayed the course, and continues to develop new ways to tell the groundwater story. With continued city growth and new source water protection requirements, Cambridge Groundwater Guardian will be busier than ever in the coming years!

Remembering a Leader

September 2007 will mark Cambridge's tenth year of designation as a Groundwater Guardian Community. Paul Puodziunas, a resident of nearby Brantford, and April Souwand, the City's Senior Environmental Planner, were instrumental in the formation of the first Groundwater Guardian committee. The City had been obtaining its water supply from groundwater for more than 100 years and the municipal water supply infrastructure and administration were long established.

As a charter member of Groundwater Guardian and its first Chair, Paul recognized the need for improved public awareness about groundwater, and worked tirelessly over the next decade to promote groundwater education in Cambridge. In his own pleasant style, Paul was a willing and vigorous participant in all Groundwater Guardian activities. Sadly, on August 29, 2006, Paul lost a struggle with leukemia at 54. He leaves many friends who remember the commitment, vibrancy and smile so prevalent during his life.♦