



GEORGIAN BAY  
BIOSPHERE  
MNIDOO GAMII

# Annual Report

2022/2023



Aanii, Greetings!

The past year has been a wonderful year of growth. New relationships have developed, some key programs have expanded, and we are witnessing a broader base of support than ever before!

Our work in biodiversity conservation has taken a landscape governance approach, building on years of partnerships, to work across jurisdictions and disciplines to develop strategies and tools for protecting species at risk and their habitats. Over the past four years, several species have been given an important boost against the threats they face. Roads that are known “hot spots” for reptile mortality have been improved or fenced, adding a further level of protection.

Community well-being has grown through food security initiatives like our 30 backyard gardens and support for 10 community gardens throughout the region - providing healthy food and gardening skills to a growing number of people. Our gardening resources include guidebooks and webinars, workshops and seed swaps, to build capacity for more sustainable food systems.

Similarly, the Integrated Community Energy & Climate Action Plans (ICECAP) program secured new members, and helped move area municipalities and First Nations through a successful inventory of greenhouse gas emissions, future projections, and evidence-based GHG reduction targets. Our team worked with volunteers to craft a Regional Climate Action Plan that will mobilize climate initiatives across the sectors of buildings, transportation, and waste.

At the same time, we deepened our commitment to allyship with Indigenous communities by taking a new approach to our State of the Bay ecosystem health program. By intertwining traditional science with Indigenous knowledges, we’re learning ourselves and helping others to see the worldviews and values of Anishinaabek communities within Mnidoo gamii, Spirit of the Great Lake, or Georgian Bay. We express our gratitude to each individual who shared their time and knowledge with us during the year. Miigwech.

On November 3, we celebrated the first International Day of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, and throughout the year attended or hosted over 100 events and spoke with thousands of people of all ages.

As we celebrate 25 years of incorporation this year, and approach 20 years as a UNESCO biosphere next year, we celebrate the fantastic year of growth we’ve experienced and extend our gratitude to the countless supporters, members, donors, partners, and advisors who share in our success. Thank you all.



Rebecca Pollock, PhD

**Executive Director**



Peter Ashmore

**Chair**



Greg Mason, MES

**General Manager**





# Caring For People and Place

Since 2004, our charity has managed the UNESCO biosphere reserve designation through partnerships that enhance knowledge exchange, facilitate collaborative projects, and create synergy for joint efforts.

By facilitating dozens of partnerships, we are advancing regional sustainability and biodiversity conservation through education and action! We are proud of the many projects we participated in this year that advanced our mission in the communities along eastern Georgian Bay.



# Sustainable Communities

In 2022, we were able to expand our food gardens program with a backyard garden pilot project, vegetable planter distribution and workshops, and community garden maintenance and coordination. Sustainable food systems are an important part of being a UNESCO biosphere reserve. A key factor in sustainable food systems is knowledge sharing and building capacity for people to grow their own food.

## Backyard Gardens

We built 30 backyard gardens as part of a pilot project to reduce barriers to gardening, increase access to healthy, affordable food, and to increase the physical and social capacity for gardening. We worked with partners Shawanaga First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Wasauksing First Nation, and the Mary Street Centre to promote the project and recruit families. The project provided the materials and support necessary to help 30 area families construct backyard gardens, and mentor them through the growing season to ensure their success!



With our support, families were able to expand on and/or develop the skills they needed to become accomplished gardeners and grow healthy, affordable food that they could harvest in their backyard.

Having a garden in participants' backyards increased physical access, and mentorship increased success for new gardeners as they become more experienced in growing their own food. Seventy five individuals benefited from having a garden in their backyard. This project increased food security, supported Indigenous food sovereignty, and contributed to overall well-being.

## Community Gardens

In May 2022 we built six raised beds as part of the new MacTier Community Garden! The garden plots were easily taken up by eager gardeners. In addition to the raised garden plots, the site also had installed a fence to keep deer out, rain barrels, compost bins, and places to sit. Thanks to the Township of Georgian Bay and MacTier Public Library for their support in this project!

In partnership with Community Living Parry Sound we help coordinate and maintain 75 community garden plots among seven gardens within the Town of Parry Sound. Gardeners agree to donate 20% of produce to help people in need. Throughout the 2022 growing season, 455 lbs of produce was donated to local food programs!



# Conservation

## Exploring Spaces for Biodiversity

Funding was received from the federal government to extend our biodiversity work in eastern Georgian Bay with the goal of exploring how geographic spaces can further contribute to the protection and conservation of biodiversity on a landscape scale.



While protecting and conserving large natural areas is important, we understand that humans have always been, and continue to be, intrinsically linked to and a part of nature. Thus, we have placed an increased focus on bringing together multiple ways of knowing and caring for the land. In year one of this project, we set out to understand how the Biosphere community views biodiversity conservation, and grow knowledge and familiarity of biodiversity values, functions and their importance. We did this by creating and implementing a Biodiversity Communications, Learning and Engagement Strategy to gather knowledge of local biodiversity through a region-wide community survey, and inform the public on biodiversity-related concepts through social media campaigns, storytelling, and outreach events. For example, we held a guided snowshoe with the public to talk about winter wildlife and biodiversity, and prepared to launch numerous iNaturalist challenges and bioblitz events in partnership with First Nation communities, Parks, and local cottager associations.

Additionally, we built upon our work with partners to improve management actions for biodiversity conservation in priority areas. We did this by collaborating with First Nation land managers, municipal planners and conservation practitioners to discuss acquiring improved habitat modeling of the region to better inform conservation management plans and actions. Lastly, we worked alongside local Land Trusts to compile property documents and biodiversity data needed to officially recognize their properties as Protected Areas under the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database.



# Conservation

## Protecting Species at Risk

This was Maamwi Anjiakiziwin's fourth year, a collaborative initiative designed to develop shared leadership for stewardship among municipal, provincial, federal and Indigenous jurisdictions within eastern Georgian Bay. In 2022, we had our biggest field team yet to help us lead on species at risk road ecology, best management practices, citizen science, and turtle egg rescue projects.

## Innovative Design to Protect Reptiles at Risk

The region is home to six species of turtles and five species of snakes that are designated as species at risk. All reptiles are at-risk of road mortality as they move between habitats and use road surfaces for different biological purposes. Snakes are particularly vulnerable as they bask on roads, and turtles face high risks as they nest on road shoulders. This was the third year that field biologists monitored roads in the region from May to October by our biologists on e-bikes to determine reptile “hotspots” where more efforts could be focused to reduce species mortality.



In 2022 on three roads within the Biosphere, we found 386 reptiles on the road and 113 turtle nests during ecology surveys to determine mortality ‘hot spots’.



As a result of years of monitoring, we were able to identify a reptile mortality “hot spot” within the Township of Carling and partnered with them to install innovative mitigation measures at a high-risk wetland crossing. In Fall 2022, a concave fence was installed along the roadway which will lead reptiles (and other wildlife, including fish!) to four culverts that will act as safe eco-passages, connecting both sides of the wetland. Our target species for this project are large-bodied species such as Eastern Foxsnakes, Massasauga Rattlesnakes, Snapping Turtles, and Blanding's Turtles.

There is no proven method to effectively divert or attract snakes or turtles away from roads other than fencing. To protect reptiles from roads we need physical barriers, like fences, to direct reptiles towards crossing structures (e.g. culverts), which they can then use to safely bypass the road. Without fencing to direct wildlife towards these crossings, they continue to cross the roads normally and risk getting hit by cars.

# Conservation

This fence is a pilot design for species like Foxsnakes and other climbing snakes. Results will be monitored with a researcher in partnership with Laurentian University to help us test the design. This research will help us learn how to use the same or similar designs in other areas, including other parts of Ontario, across Canada, and the United States.

*“With funding for conservation action being limited, it is important to test innovative and cost-effective designs to reduce reptile road mortality. If we can implement effective and inexpensive solutions, that will be a win for all stakeholders, especially the snakes!”*

**–Dr. Jackie Litzgus, Laurentian University Biology Professor**

## Turtle Egg Rescue

In 2022, field biologists collected an incredible 2,324 at-risk turtle eggs from the sides of roads! After collection, eggs were carefully transported to the hatchery at our office where they were labeled, counted, and organized into incubators. Eggs incubate for an average of 60 days before hatching. Each clutch is monitored and misted during the incubation period. When the eggs hatch, each hatchling is cleaned and allowed to absorb their yolk sack before being released into the closest wetland to where their respective nest was laid. Egg rescue work provides a critical boost to species at risk - whose populations face natural predation and threats such as roads and habitat loss. This program is a local response to protecting biodiversity that we know is threatened globally.

## Water Quality Testing

Each year we work with partners and produce water quality monitoring reports which may include: phosphorus levels, benthic monitoring results, fish community information, any concerns requiring additional monitoring, and recommendations. In 2022, we wrote five reports which help inform the bigger picture around water quality in the Biosphere region and teach residents about potential threats.



*Our citizen science iNaturalist project reached over 5,000 species and 80,000 unique observations*



*Our team was busy preparing the 2023 State of the Bay report by gathering the available research, summarizing environmental indicators and emerging trends!*



*We work with townships across the region to train municipal staff on Best Management Practices for species at risk, invasive species, and wildlife interactions.*



*Shawanaga First Nation completed a joint project with us about lake sturgeon (nme).*



# Education

## Lessons-in-a-Backpack

Since 2010, we have been connecting kids to nature. We take classes on hikes and do hands-on learning during the school year. The focus of our Lessons in-a-Backpack is on biodiversity and stewardship for ages 5 to 15. Biosphere staff were busy visiting classrooms across the Biosphere region delivering our Lessons-in-a-Backpack programming with a focus on biodiversity and stewardship for ages 5 to 15. On average we visited schools weekly, and were able to reach over 1,000 public school students with engaging lessons covering topics such as Animal Tracks, Pollinator Power, and Biosphere Birds.

## Kids in the Biosphere

We were able to expand the impact of our Kids in the Biosphere program by hosting free monthly events for families to attend! With this program, our goal is provide different environmental, cultural, and heritage topics to connect children with the landscape, learn about human impact, and promote ecological literacy. In total, 140 children attended fun and educational monthly events that we hosted including the Christmas Bird Count, Meet The Turtle, and Kids Can Grow: Container Planting!

## Biosphere Walks

Biosphere Walks were held monthly with hundreds of people of all ages participating - including residents and tourists - who were keen to learn more about ecology, culture, and conservation. In the past year, some highlights were:

- Reptile Walk
- Wetland Plants
- Invasive Species
- Winter Ecology
- Learn Your Spring Birds
- Aquatic Ecosystem Fish
- Geology Rocks
- Mushroom Foray

## Turtle Hatchery Tours

For the first time, we were able to offer educational tours of our turtle hatchery! We welcomed over 200 adults and children on 25 tours where they learned all about our turtle egg rescue and conservation work: why and how we collect the eggs, how the eggs are categorized, weighed, and kept at specific temperatures, and once hatched the very specific protocols we follow to ensure their health.



*"The more I can expose the kids to snakes and turtles and learning about them, the more prepared they will be to help take care of them and have concern and respect for wildlife and habitats around us"*

**-Tour Participant**



Georgian Bay Anishinaabek Youth (GBAY) is an Indigenous youth-led initiative in partnership with Georgian Bay Biosphere. GBAY works to support Indigenous youth along the rivers and eastern shore of Mnídoo Gamii (Georgian Bay).

## Bemishkaajig

In summer 2022, they organized the second annual four-day canoe trip called Bemishkaajig with Wasauksing First Nation. Bemishkaajig provided the opportunity for Indigenous youth to experience and strengthen their relationships with their homelands, waters, and each other.



## Hide Tanning Camp

In November 2022, GBAY partnered with Magnetawan First Nation to host a 5-day hide tanning camp! The camp was led by invited Knowledge Holders and enabled youth to connect with and revitalize traditional Anishinaabek knowledge and aadziwin (way of life).

## Basket Making Workshop

In partnership with Wasauksing First Nation, GBAY hosted a 4-day Basket (Mkak) Making Workshop. People of all ages were welcomed to participate with the aim to develop a strong sense of belonging, community, and cultural connectedness.

One elder who suggested the workshop was extremely happy - making jokes, laughing, and smiling the whole time. She wrote in her survey: “you are never too old to understand that our ancestors are always showing us our connection to the land if we just stop and listen.”

## Cultural Protocols

By way of creating systemic change within the organization and those we work with, supporting local reconciliation efforts, and creating time and space with Indigenous organizations, communities, individuals, volunteers and staff, the GBB is committed

to advancing United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).



Cultural Protocols were thoughtfully drafted over many months with the intention to guide the work of GBB on Anishinaabek cultural protocols, practices and approaches to delivering culturally appropriate work and maintaining strong relationships with community. As a resource for GBB staff and volunteers, this document is intended to guide GBB's commitment to reconciliation by advancing local, national, and international efforts. Following Indigenous protocols supports the recognition of Indigenous heritage, cultural, and Treaty rights. The Protocols encourages culturally appropriate working practices and promotes improved communications between all parties with an interest in Indigenous Knowledges and cultures.

**Follow @GBAnishinaabekYouth**

# Climate

The Integrated Community Energy and Climate Action Plans (ICECAP) partnership has grown and achieved important milestones this past year. Established in 2019, ICECAP is an efficient and cost-effective way for communities to inventory their GHG emissions, set targets for mitigation, and take specific actions to meet those goals. The program also tracks progress towards goals and identifies local and regional opportunities for funding for major projects. GBB coordinates ICECAP with the Biosphere region.

During the summer of 2022, Moose Deer Point First Nation and Shawanaga First Nation joined the ICECAP partnership, joining eight other members.

As part of ICECAP, members moved through the various stages in the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program. The Township of McDougall and the Township of Whitestone accelerated through their first year, developing a baseline measurement of greenhouse gas emissions for their operations and community. As part of their next steps, they will be working to set an emissions reduction target and developing an action plan to reach it.

*“The bottom-up approach to setting emission reduction targets is integral to the success of ICECAP. By engaging the knowledge and information keepers, and the decision makers, it’s created targets that are realistic and feasible.”*

**–Forrest Pengra, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Seguin Township**

Many ICECAP members have drafted Corporate Climate Action Plans that will soon be brought forward to Council for adoption. Community Climate Action Plans are also in development and will soon undergo an extensive review process. With planning expected to finish shortly, ICECAP is beginning to implement the actions contained in these plans. Volunteer climate action groups organized by GBB are supporting these efforts and have started to implement some of these actions.





# Our Team

## Directors

Peter Ashmore  
Ron Chase  
Peter Koetsier  
Barb Wohleber

Marilyn Capreol  
Glen Barnden  
Jessica Fargher  
Jack Tynan

Ian Scott  
Dan Reeves  
Rebecca Johnson  
Daniel Hoornweg

## Staff

---

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Executive Director

Greg Mason, MES  
Director of Operations

David Bywater, B.Env.Sc  
Director of Lands and Waters Programs

Laura Peddie, BA  
Organizational Manager

Kyla Judge, BA  
Cultural Programs Manager

Delaina Arnold, BERS  
Education Program Manager

Katrina Krievins, MS  
Aquatic Conservation Programs Coordinator

Tianna Burke, MSc  
Conservation Biologist

Ruth Beattie, BA  
Bookkeeper

Sherrill Judge  
Maawaanji'iwe Manager

Dawson Bloor  
Indigenous Youth Assistant

Sam Cunningham, MWS  
Climate and Sustainability Technical Lead

Jenna Kentel, MSc  
Lands and Wildlife Technician

Angel Wickamakis  
Conservation and Cultural Programs  
Assistant

Taylor Judge, BA  
Anishinaabek Youth Intern

Emily Holdsworth, BSc  
GIS Technician Intern

Olivia Fines, BSc  
Communications Assistant Coordinator

Angela Vander Eyken,  
BBRM  
Landscape and Wildlife Technician

Aliena Hoskins, BES  
Education Assistant

Melizza  
Claydentabobondung, BA  
Sustainable Tourism Coordinator

Heather Van Den  
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Lands and Wildlife Technician

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Conservation Communications and Outreach  
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Allison Covert, MES  
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Erika Kramer, BA  
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Erika Kolli, BES  
Aquatic Conservation Programs Technician

Oscar Crafts  
Indigenous Educator

Gracie Crafts, BSc  
Species at Risk Field Technician

Sydney Haak  
Species at Risk Field Technician

Rachel Morrison  
Fieldwork and Outreach Assistant

Izaiah Hill  
Fieldwork and Outreach Assistant

Serena Brown  
Species at Risk Field Technician

Dan Engleking, BSc  
Gardens Coordinator

Emily Caruana  
Natural Heritage Guide

Eden Graves  
Species at Risk Field Technician



# FINANCIAL REPORT

<b>Revenue</b>	2023	2022
Government Grants	\$1,555,670	\$957,116
Foundation & Other Program Contributions	\$485,920	\$199,863
Service Provision	\$538,062	\$281,320
Donations & Fundraising	\$206,888	\$209,549
Interest	<u>\$17,091</u>	<u>\$2,153</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,803,631</b>	<b>\$1,650,001</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	2023	2022
Conservation	\$1,354,291	\$793,827
Community & Culture	\$564,288	\$330,761
Education	\$338,573	\$198,457
Fundraising	\$66,456	\$40,570
Administration	<u>\$172,948</u>	<u>\$111,265</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,496,556</b>	<b>\$1,474,879</b>
<b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>\$307,075</b>	<b>\$175,122</b>
<b>Assets</b>	2023	2022
Cash	\$555,054	\$506,424
Accounts Receivable	\$616,429	\$482,372
Prepaid expenses	\$11,645	\$12,122
Short-Term Investments	\$152,923	\$12,024
Capital Assets	<u>\$41,360</u>	<u>\$21,867</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,377,411</b>	<b>\$1,034,809</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>	2023	2022
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$190,869	\$154,134
Deferred contributions	<u>\$317,236</u>	<u>\$318,269</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$508,105</b>	<b>\$472,403</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	2023	2022
Net assets internally restricted	\$68,531	\$28,081
Unrestricted net assets	<u>\$800,775</u>	<u>\$534,325</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$869,306</b>	<b>\$472,403</b>
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$1,377,411</b>	<b>\$1,034,809</b>



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## Grantors & Foundations

Colleges & Institutes Canada  
District of Muskoka  
Echo Foundation  
Employment and Social Development Canada  
Environment and Climate Change Canada  
Environmental Careers Organization of Canada  
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# Thank you, Miigwech!

We are deeply grateful for the financial support which makes our work possible and helps us expand our impact across eastern Georgian Bay! Please reach out to us if you would like to learn more about the work we do or if you have questions.

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[info@georgianbaybiosphere.ca](mailto:info@georgianbaybiosphere.ca)

P.O. BOX 662.  
Parry Sound, ON  
CANADA P2A 2Z1

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