

Clythe Creek Subwatershed Study Update

Phase 1 engagement summary

The Clythe Creek subwatershed study update is a multi-year study that was initiated in Spring 2022 with a target completion date of December 2025. This document is a summary of what the City did and what was heard during the Phase 1 engagement. This was the first of three phases of engagement planned as follows:

- Phase 1: Project launch and subwatershed context (Oct.- Nov. 2023)
- Phase 2: Characterization of the subwatershed (Mar. 2025)
- Phase 3: Impact assessment and management planning (Nov.- Dec. 2025)

Background

The Clythe Creek subwatershed is 2,450 hectares in size with about half of the subwatershed area located in Guelph's east side, and the other half located in the adjacent Guelph/Eramosa Township in Wellington County.

The original subwatershed study was completed in 1998. Since that time, many changes have occurred in Guelph's east end, and many more are planned (such as the York Road Reconstruction Project and development of the Guelph Innovation District lands).

In this study, multiple years of data collection will be used to provide an updated understanding of the subwatershed's natural heritage system and water resource system to characterize existing conditions and evaluate anticipated land use and future climate conditions. These findings will inform recommendations related to sustainable land use planning, protection of drinking water sources, municipal infrastructure priorities related to stormwater management and sustaining the natural heritage system and water resource system.

What we did

Preliminary engagement was undertaken with the following parties prior to October 2023 to advise them that the study was underway and to seek their initial input:

- the City's Natural Heritage Advisory Committee (NHAC)
- Indigenous Nations and Peoples (including Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Métis Nation of Ontario)
- the City's study partners (including the Grand River Conservation Authority, Wellington County, and Guelph/Eramosa Township)
- Guelph City Council

A study-specific Technical Advisory Group was also formed early in the study process and asked to review and provide input to the multi-year Technical Work Plan for the study.

Engagement with key interest holders and the community-at-large took place between October 23 and November 10, 2023 during the formal Phase 1 engagement period, which took place after the Technical Work Plan for the study was finalized and the background review was completed.

The objectives of the Phase 1 engagement were to: (a) inform identified interest holders and the community about the rationale for the study, the work completed to date, and the anticipated outcomes and value of the study findings, and (b) provide an opportunity for those engaged to share any relevant knowledge or perspectives and ask any questions about the study.

A “Have Your Say” page was created on the City’s website that included:

- high level information about the study and a study area map
- a tool for questions or comments
- background information providing an overview of the study, work done to date and anticipated outcomes, as well as a list of related studies/projects in Guelph
- a recording of the Phase 1 engagement presentation (from October 26, 2023)

The Phase 1 engagement was advertised through:

- the City’s study web page
- the City’s engagement headquarters (EHQ) newsletters
- a public notice and media release
- social media posts on the City’s X and Facebook pages, including photos and short video clips from field work on public lands in the study area
- targeted emails sent to identified interest holders, as well as individuals and/or organizations with a confirmed interest in the study or study area

In addition to providing feedback through the Have Your Say page, identified interest holders and the community were invited to participate in virtual engagement sessions held on October 26 and November 2, 2023.

At both virtual sessions, a presentation was made by members of the multi-disciplinary consulting team with expertise in groundwater, surface water, stream/fluvial dynamics, aquatic biology and terrestrial ecology. This panel of experts was also available to answer questions during the sessions.

What we heard

Between October 23 and November 10, 2023, there were 154 visits to the study Have Your Say page with 44 of those visitors viewing/downloading the study backgrounder and 30 visitors viewing multiple project pages including the presentation and/or the posted video. A total of 15 people participated in the virtual interest holder and community information sessions.

No comments or questions were posted on the Have Your Say page, however participants at the virtual engagement sessions provided a range of questions. Questions included the following inquiries (with responses from the City and study team provided in brackets):

- Is the Province, current owner of the Ontario Reformatory lands, aware of this study and will the sale of these lands have any impact on this study? (Yes, the Province is aware of this study and has provided access to the Ontario Reformatory lands for data collection, and no, the sale of Provincially-owned lands will not influence study recommendations)
- Has a bathymetric survey of the large ponds on the Ontario Reformatory lands been done and if so, why? (Yes, bathymetric surveys of the large ponds were completed in 2023 to understand the water elevations and depths within the ponds, and how the ponds contribute to Clythe Creek and the Eramosa River)
- Will Phase 4 of the York Road Reconstruction Project (Victoria Road South, east to city limit) begin before the study is complete? (Yes, Phase 4 of the York Road Reconstruction Project is anticipated to start Summer 2025, just before the Clythe Creek Subwatershed Study is completed in Winter 2025)
- Will this study consider whether portions of Clythe Creek should be moved/realigned? (Yes)
- Does Clythe Creek still provide coldwater fish habitat? What fish species have been documented? (Preliminary findings suggest that some segments of coldwater habitat persist. A list of fish species documented in the field will be shared in the Characterization Report)
- What kinds of turtles and plants have been documented in the Ontario Reformatory lands? (Snapping Turtle and Midland Painted Turtle occur in the area. Species lists of all flora and fauna documented in the field will be shared in the Characterization Report)
- How will the weather extremes such as drought and flooding anticipated with climate change be considered? (Modelling of future land use scenarios will include climate adjusted precipitation patterns that reflect extremes anticipated with climate change)
- How is the study considering the half of the subwatershed, including the headwaters, outside City limits in Wellington County? (The study will consider the entire watershed, particularly with respect to groundwater and surface water, however terrestrial field work will not be undertaken outside City limits.)

Outside City limits, the team will rely on the most current desktop imagery and analysis and existing background information.)

- Is there a City-wide environmental monitoring program and will monitoring completed for this study be continued after this study is done? (The City of Guelph has a network of long-term groundwater and surface water monitoring stations, including a few in the study area. A City-wide environmental monitoring program is identified as a priority action in the City's Natural Heritage Action Plan. Recommendations for long-term monitoring in the subwatershed will be made through this study.)

There were also several questions about when study results and recommendations would be available to the public, which are answered in the Next Steps section below.

What we are doing

Over 2024 and 2025 the City and the study team will continue to gather and analyze data, including considering information and incorporating updates from other ongoing studies in Guelph's east end, where appropriate.

Outcomes of this study are expected to include:

- recommendations for managing groundwater to sustain drinking water supplies and natural heritage features
- updated floodplain mapping for the Clythe Creek and its tributaries (in the City)
- updated Natural Heritage System mapping (in the City)
- recommendations for stormwater management in the context of anticipated development and climate change
- identification of stewardship partnerships to enhance the management and restoration of the subwatershed
- a monitoring framework for tracking changes in the natural heritage system and water resource system over time

What we are not doing

This study may recommend but will not include specific plans or designs for re-aligning Clythe Creek. This study will also not include any recommendations related to the cultural heritage status or future sale of the Ontario Reformatory lands.

The City recognizes that about half of the Clythe Creek subwatershed is located outside of Guelph in the adjacent Guelph/Eramosa Township and Wellington County. This study will consider and analyze the entire subwatershed based on the best available data. However, recommendations directed towards the lands in Guelph/Eramosa Township and Wellington County will not be put forward without the engagement, review and support of those municipalities.

Next steps

As in Phase 1, engagement is to be undertaken with the study-specific Technical Advisory Group, the City's NHAC, Indigenous Nations and Peoples (including Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Métis Nation of Ontario), and the City's study partners (including the Grand River Conservation Authority, Wellington County and Guelph/Eramosa Township) at various points over 2024 and 2025. Engagement with Guelph City Council, other interest holders and the community-at-large will occur within more focused periods, as outlined below.

Phase 2 (subwatershed characterization) engagement is planned for spring 2025 and will focus on (a) sharing the findings of the characterization of the subwatershed under existing conditions and (b) getting input on potential environmental management actions that could help sustain and/or enhance the groundwater, surface water, and natural heritage features in the subwatershed under current conditions and in the future.

Phase 3 (subwatershed impact assessment and management) engagement is planned for winter 2025 and will focus on (a) sharing the outcomes of the impact assessment (i.e., modelling the response of the groundwater, surface water, and natural heritage features in the watershed to anticipated land use changes) and (b) getting feedback on the recommendations for managing those impacts in the context of climate change.

Please continue to check the project Have Your Say page for study updates:
<https://www.haveyoursay.guelph.ca/clythe-creek>

Comments or questions about the Clythe Creek Subwatershed Study Update can be posted to the Have Your Say page at any time prior to the end of this study, or can be directed to:

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