

SUMMARY



Forest cover remains low across the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority area. Although forest cover has shown little to no change from previous report cards, the thousands of trees planted every year indicate that watershed residents understand and value the benefits of trees and forests.

Wetland cover is very low. As most wetlands on our landscape are wet woodlands, or swamps, conservation of these areas is key from an ecological perspective, and for maintaining water quality and natural water storage. Additional water storage features will help to reduce soil erosion and mitigate the risk of flooding.

We evaluated chloride in surface water for the first time in this report card, and results exhibited good conditions. Almost all subwatersheds met the recreational guideline for E. coli, but many did not meet the objective for total phosphorus. Low forest and wetland cover, combined with predominantly clay soils and intensive rural and urban land uses, contribute to water quality conditions that need improvement.

Most, but not all, groundwater samples at monitoring wells met the drinking water standard for nitrate and the guideline for chloride. Water quality in private wells may differ from monitoring wells, and landowners with private wells should regularly test their drinking water.

We are aware A grades may not be feasible due to both natural conditions of the watershed (e.g., soil and topography) and land use pressures. The agricultural productivity of this region means this area is important for global food production. There is also a need for residential development. It is important to continue to employ best practices for agriculture and urbanizing areas.

Improvements have been seen for some indicators since the start of monitoring in 2002. We can continue to work toward improvement by the next Watershed Report Card in five years' time.

Monitoring allows us to evaluate current environmental conditions, detect changes to ecosystem health, and decide how best to proceed. Working together to improve watershed health will in turn support human, economic, and ecological health.