



## President's Letter

2024 was another fantastic year for BRLA thanks to our members, corporate partners, and especially our volunteers. We have an opportunity to make 2025 even better. I hope you enjoy this recap of our many accomplishments this year and that you will support our efforts in 2025 and beyond.

## 2024 Highlights

### **Lake Safety**

- We have over 120 shoal markers around the lake – all coordinated by Andrew Inderwick and supported by Steve McGee of Portland based Cooligan Carpentry.

### **Community**

- Kids Day Camp on Cow Island was a huge success (again!) thanks to our camp director Jennifer Harper. With the help of the Canadian Federal Government, we were able to hire a summer student, Alex Francis, to help with the camp and other BRLA activities. Alex was a huge assist, especially after Jennifer broke her foot a few weeks before camp started! Our camp staff and grew from 11 in 2023 to 24 in 2024. These past 2 summers, we hosted more than 300 campers over 6 weeks. The last week of 2024 we saw 67 children attend camp! We are planning some significant infrastructure upgrades for our campers in 2026 including running water, flush toilets, a septic system and solar power – more on that later.
- In addition, we held three Family Movie Nights and one Teen Dance Night on Cow Island – all were well attended and coordinated by Jennifer Harper!
- Our fireworks were a big success again – coordinated by Mary Ann Calzonetti. She was supported by numerous volunteers for set up and clean up along with a volunteer team of Pyrotechnic experts led by Mike Fraser. Thank you to Len's Cove for committing to a 3-year sponsorship of this event.
- We held a 2-day Sailing Regatta which had great turnout, also coordinated by Mary Ann Calzonetti. The event included laser and keel boat racing sponsored by Rideau Ferry Store. Bill Fuller won the laser competition while the team of Justin Norton, Alex Francis and Bill Fuller won the keel boat races.
- Summer Sounds saw its largest turnout ever after a splendid job organizing the event by Courtney McCarney. Many thanks to sponsor Perth Brewery. Frederick McKinlay was the grand prize winner of the members' raffle -- a BBQ donated by Smiths Falls Home Hardware! In 2025 we hope to have a shuttle service from Portland to and from Cow Island to help people attend Summer Sounds.
- Cow Island is a treasure, and two volunteers Rod and Brenda Howes are the people who take care of it for us. They were able to attract over a dozen volunteers early in the year for cleanup.

### **Environment**

- We worked closely with Watersheds Canada to implement their Natural Edge Project that supports planting of native plants near the shoreline to reduce erosion and pollution run-off. We have 6 members implementing the program this year who are all very excited about their waterfront plans.
- We are working with the Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation (RLEF) and Dr. David Philipp (Professor at University of Illinois and resident on Opinicon Lake) to expand his highly successful Bass Spawning Sanctuary sanctuaries that were implemented on Opinicon and Charleston Lakes. In conjunction with the **Coalition for Innovative Fisheries Conservation** we plan to expand this program to Big and Lower Rideau Lakes in 2026. To help bass nest more successfully and improve long-term fishing for everyone, the sanctuaries are closed to ALL fishing from the start of spring until 2 weeks after bass season opens. There are a lot of government processes to work through, so we won't see the sanctuaries until 2026. For more information on Bass Spawning



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Sanctuaries, visit this link <https://arcg.is/9j89b0>. Please note that it works best on a PC or Tablet, not so well on a smartphone.

- As part of our partnership with RLEF, we will implement trout telemetry studies with Dr. Philipp and Dr. Cooke (Carleton University), like the bass studies completed a few years ago.
- Our Water Rangers water testing program continued this year coordinated by Tom Kohler.
- In a recent edition of Driftwords, it stated that BRLA contributed \$10,000 to the Rideau Waterways Land Trust for the acquisition of Long Island. That was incorrect – RLEF made the donation.

### Government Relations

- BRLA worked closely with the Mayor of Rideau Lakes Township and the Reeves of Tay Valley and Drummond North Elmsley who issued a letter to all Bass Tournament organizers asking them to not fish near docks, manage engine noise and wakes, and be respectful of our residents. Parks Canada is also going to tighten the wording in their special occasion permits for fishing tournaments asking organizers not to fish near docks. Those changes should be in place for the 2025 fishing season.
- Along with Upper Rideau Lake and several other lake associations, BRLA petitioned Westport to remove from consideration any Wastewater Treatment Plants that would dump treated effluent into Upper Rideau Lake. Westport council agreed to remove those types of plants from consideration.

### Partners/Members/Communication

- We grew our corporate partners from 27 in 2023 to 38 in 2024 thanks to some great work by Brian Jokat. We also introduced new partner discounts for our members. We plan to have offers in place by May 2025 for next season.
- We grew our members from 325 in 2023 to 390 in 2024 and introduced digital membership cards to be used to redeem corporate partner discounts. These will be in place by May 2025 for next season.
- Our “Refer a Friend” plan was a spectacular flop as only 5 members successfully added new members.
- Mary Pochobradsky did a phenomenal job driving the implementation of our new web site and logo as well as improving communication with our members through Driftwords and social media.
- Mary also introduced some new merchandise items for BRLA including quarter zip sweat tops and BRLA baseball hats which can be found on our web site under the Membership Tab.

### 2025 and Beyond – We need your help

#### Loon Tracking

- We can enter a program that tracks the loon population in our lake IF WE CAN GET ENOUGH VOLUNTEERS TO COLLECT DATA AND MANAGE THE PROGRAM. We will need a team lead and 5 or 6 volunteers who would gather data for 2 or 3 hours two or three times during the summer. If that proves successful, we could start deploying loon nesting rafts in 2026. If we do not get enough volunteers, we will not move forward with this program. This is being successfully deployed in Charleston Lake and they can provide lots of helpful tips. Here is the web site for tracking loons in Ontario <https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/canadian-lakes-loon-survey> . If you are interested in being the team lead or a volunteer, please contact me at [hansen.downer@gmail.com](mailto:hansen.downer@gmail.com)

#### Volunteer Opportunities

- Two of our board members reach the 6-year limit and will not be able to continue after July 2025. Charles Buckingham (Treasurer) and Peter Merkley (Secretary) have provided invaluable service over the years. My sincere thanks to both Charles and Peter for their stellar contributions over the past 5 years.



## Big Rideau Lake Association

- We have a significant number of opportunities for volunteers both at the board level and within our priority programs. We can have 12 directors on the BRLA Board and we currently have 8 so we want to add a few incremental directors to spread the work around. The following outlines key opportunities. If you or someone you know might be a candidate or if you would like more information, please contact me at [hansen.downer@gmail.com](mailto:hansen.downer@gmail.com).

### Board Roles

- Board Director, Treasurer: Oversee Budget, audit, taxes and general financial health of BRLA.
  - Need history of accounting, financial or business acumen, vital to our continued success.
  - Somewhere within our 390 members, there must be someone with an accounting background who is willing to fill this role – it is vital to our continued success
- Board Director: Environment – Advocate for the environment and oversee 4 key programs.
  - A top priority for members, looking for a passionate individual with some relevant expertise.

### Non-Board Roles

- Team Lead: Natural Edge Projects working with Watersheds Canada (under Director)
  - Plus 4 or 5 people to help with Natural Edge Planting
- Team Lead – Loon Monitoring part of a region wide study of loons (under Director)
  - Plus 5 or 6 people to track loons

### Cow Island Vision 2026

- BRLA has made minimal investments in Cow Island since 1960 and therefore, we plan to launch our **biggest ever capital campaign** very soon. The focus is improving the infrastructure for our 300+ children attending day camp in July and August while also expanding use for all members. Cow Island currently has no running water, no flush toilets, no septic system, and no electricity except for a gas-powered generator. The proposed plan will include: a water and plumbing system with 2 indoor toilets, a solar power system, construction to strengthen the clubhouse roof for the solar panels, additional lights and power outlets in the clubhouse, engineering services for building permits, building permits and 2 new docks. The costs are significant - approximately \$225,000 to \$250,000 including contingencies. We plan to begin construction in the spring of 2026.
- We are developing a plan to canvas current and future corporate partners to help and will re-apply for a Trillium grant (with plan to overcome previous issues). Once most of the funds are identified and committed, we will be reaching out to you, our members, for individual donations to help us reach our goal. For those of you who have children or grandchildren attending the camp, just think of the improvement for them after these upgrades. If we are successful, the upgrades should be in place for the 2026 summer camp.

Thanks to all our members and volunteers for a great 2024. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

I'll connect again in the spring of 2025,

*Hansen Downer*

President Big Rideau Lake Association