

Sandy Thompson – A Passionate Guardian of the Bay



Every now and then, I will admit to feeling a bit melancholy when thinking about some of the threats facing the environmental future of the Bay.

But then I think of Sandy, and I know from the example she sets that there is so much capacity in our Georgian Bay community to ensure the next generations of all species can enjoy this incredibly beautiful place.



Sandy was one of the very first community leaders to strongly recognize that invasive *Phragmites* was a threat to the health of Georgian Bay (**more than five years ago**),

and immediately pulled resources together and started working with Georgian Bay Forever (GBF) to tackle “phrag” in Cognashene. *Phragmites* is an invasive grass from Europe that, if left unchecked on shores and wetlands, can grow into 15-foot mono-culture walls that can be as dense as 200 stems per square metre. This invasive plant chokes out other native plant diversity, and creates a treacherous habitat for many species, including those at risk – dead turtles are found in the middle of patches because they can’t get through the thick stems.

Sandy’s community certainly acknowledges that she came to the rescue:

“Sandy was instrumental in developing a summer student program to cut and destroy phrag in Cognashene and Honey Harbour over several summers. She also promoted cottager involvement by organizing a volunteer program of teams to work en masse to destroy phrag. I would say she is the main reason why Cognashene is almost phrag free.”

Tom Halpenny, president,
Cognashene Cottagers’ Association

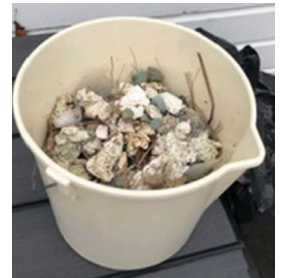
That is so true. The 2020 Cognashene phragbusting numbers show that of the 32 sites in Cognashene, 15 of them are essentially gone (although they will be monitored for a few years to make sure they truly are). The 17 remaining sites are so small that they are well on their way to “being gone.” GBF anticipates that by the end of 2023 none of the 32 sites will be visible. Because of this action early and



consistently, Cognashene was able to stop this invasive species from spreading and becoming something way, WAY harder to manage.

There are numerous other examples of her collaborative efforts to help protect the water. Here are a few examples: leading shoreline clean-ups; being a member of the GBF’s “Say No” to Dock Foam Committee; educating about microfibre pollution; spreading the word about the GBF’s Families for Change program; and writing articles about the GBF’s autonomous underwater vehicle.

Not only does she spread awareness and encourage participation in GBF’s environmental programs, but she also makes them better. Certainly her career experience in helping companies be more sustainable, her work as naturalist at the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, and her love of science (degrees and teaching); not only helps all of us generally, but also adds considerable value to all the organizations that she volunteers to help that work to keep Georgian Bay so incredible. Rolfe Jones, Georgian Bay Association’s current EVP and a long-time Cognashene board member puts it this way,



“Sandy served on the Cognashene Cottagers’ Association (CCA) board for seven years and was a dedicated board member who was passionate about making our part of the Bay a better, more environmentally sustainable place. She helped lead the charge on Phragmites in Cognashene and Honey Harbour and was also a keen advocate to rid our waters of blue dock foam and microfibres. While we will miss having her on the CCA board she will be a welcome addition to GBA’s Aquaculture Committee.”

Thank you Sandy for your many years of committed time and expertise in protecting Georgian Bay and contributing so much to your community. You described yourself as having an endless awe of the beauty and resilience of nature and an interest in continually learning about the species and ecosystems in Georgian Bay and their unique qualities. Not only are you a continuous learner, but you put learning into making positive change for us all. An amazing Guardian of the Bay, and an incredible role model by taking action in your own life for environmental justice at all levels of society; while also working on events and projects that help lift the spirit of the community that you love. 🍓