

# Lake Simcoe conservation matters



## On Thin Ice

Idyllic winter days are made for outdoor skating. Whether it be in your backyard or a municipally maintained outdoor rink, skating is a great way to infuse some fun, fitness, and fresh air into these sub-zero days all while staying safe and physically distanced.

However, not every place with potential to be an outdoor rink should be an outdoor rink. Stormwater ponds are particularly dangerous. Not only are these ponds municipal infrastructure and not meant for recreation, but they are highly unsafe for recreation as well.

## Understanding Stormwater Management

To understand why it's risky to skate on stormwater ponds, it's important to understand the purpose of these water reservoirs.

Stormwater management was developed in the 1980s as a way to control excess water from rainfall, melted snow or water runoff until it could be released slowly to prevent flooding.

By the 1990s, the water quality of stormwater was an additional concern, leading to the evolution of the wet stormwater pond to remove pollutants along with providing flood control.

Most recently, green infrastructure, including low-impact development, has become the focus of stormwater management. The focus with green infrastructure is to treat stormwater at the source and promote water infiltrating into the ground. In fact, we're part of ground-breaking research to improve stormwater management, save money, and address the impacts of urbanization and climate change!

## Stormwater Ponds Aren't for Recreation

Much like how the practice of stormwater management is constantly evolving and moving, so is the actual water in stormwater ponds. Remember: these ponds are designed to continuously collect stormwater runoff from your neighbourhoods. Because water is always flowing in and out of the ponds all year round, the ice is never safe enough to reliably support your weight.

Even in the depths of winter, in the most frigid temperatures, stormwater ponds may have open water around the water outlets and edges of the ponds.

What's more, temperature changes will cause major variations in the thickness of the ice and air pockets and contaminants like salt make the ice even weaker. Adding to these dangers is the fact that stormwater ponds can be deceptively deep and there's often no rescue equipment nearby.

So, let's recap. Here's why you shouldn't skate on stormwater ponds:

- Stormwater ponds are municipal infrastructure. The pond itself as well as the surroundings are not maintained for public use and as such, are not safe.
- Stormwater ponds have constantly flowing water. This means that the pond won't reliably freeze in the winter, making the ice unstable.
- Stormwater pond ice contains air pockets and contaminants that weaken ice. Even in the coldest of weather, the ice can still be incredibly unsafe.

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As if these reasons to skip skating at stormwater ponds aren't convincing enough, here's another: there are other, much safer places to skate this winter!

## Other Places to Lace Up

There are many other places you can safely skate outdoors. Skating trails are a wonderful way to explore your local winter wonderland! If you have the space, you can also create your own backyard ice rink!

## Skating Rinks in the Lake Simcoe Region

While the pandemic necessitates the existence of on-going restrictions, many municipally run outdoor ice rinks are ready to welcome you this winter. Lake Simcoe region spans Durham and York Region, Simcoe County, and the

cities of Barrie Orillia and Kawartha Lakes, and all of those municipalities have their own skating facilities.

Finding an outdoor rink is as easy as typing "skating rinks near me" into your search engine browser.

## Skating Trails

Skating trails are a thrilling way to combine fun, fitness and unforgettably scenic views. Make a day of it with family and friends!

Looking for a recommendation? The 250 metre-long Richmond Green Skate Trail in Richmond Hill is one of our region's most popular!

## Build Your Own Backyard Rink

Building your own skating rink takes a little time, patience, and some cooperation from Mother Nature, but when it all comes together, it provides a memorable bonding experience for your family.

There are tons of handy online do-it-yourself videos for people looking to build their own backyard rinks, so a quick search should have you set!

## Skate Safely This Season

Climate change is already increasing the rate of winter drowning deaths worldwide, with children under the age of 9 accounting for 44% of fatalities according to a study published in the journal PLOS One. Combine this worrying trend with the already unstable nature of stormwater pond ice and it's a recipe for disaster.

Stay safe this winter, and steer clear of stormwater ponds! For more information on stormwater management, visit: [www.lsrca.on.ca/watershed-health/stormwater](http://www.lsrca.on.ca/watershed-health/stormwater)

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