



Columbia Lake: Health Update

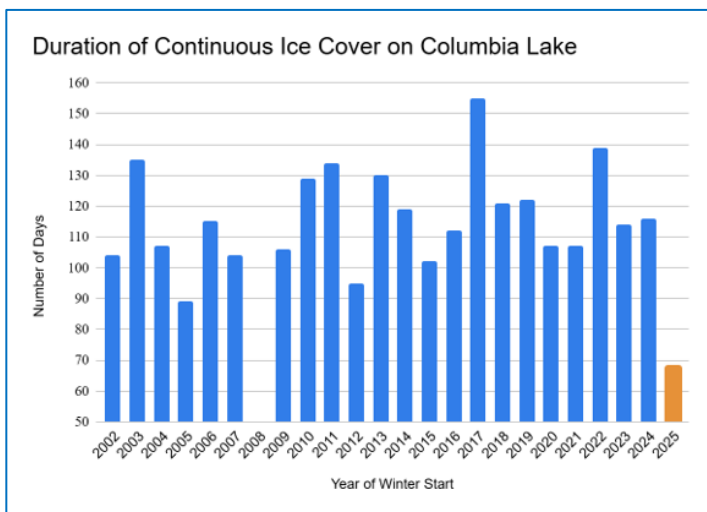
Each year we monitor the quantity and quality of the water in Columbia Lake. We have done this since 2014 to support our goal of protecting Columbia Lake’s ecological health and water supply. The data we collect keeps us all informed about the lake we love! It also provides evidence to inform decisions made by those managing the lake. Here are three stories from our data, from Spring 2025 to now.

1. Near record low water levels, May 2025

Because of a number of climate factors in 2024-2025, the lake achieved near-record low water levels in late May 2025. Our lake depth measurements show that the lake reached a greatest depth of only 5 meters in late May, when it is normally at its deepest, and for almost the entire summer it was less than 5 meters at its deepest spot. The normal range we have recorded for maximum depth at this spot is 5.4-6.7 m. Many of you know already that Columbia Lake is naturally a very shallow lake, with much of it not exceeding 2 m in depth at any time, and this makes the annual spring “top-up” of its water levels very important for its water quality.

2. Fewest recorded days of continuous ice cover for the lake in Winter 2025-2026

As many of you already know, this winter has been an unusual one for Columbia Lake, with the lake freezing briefly in early December but then thawing and remaining ice-free until late December. It then lost its ice in early March.



CLSS has been keeping records of ice-on and ice-off dates for Columbia Lake since 2002. The graph shows the total number of days of continuous ice cover the lake has seen each year.

The days of continuous ice coverage range from just under 90 in 2005 to over 150 in 2017. This winter (2025-2026) we had only 68 days.

This is important because the duration of ice coverage affects the lake’s year-round health significantly.

Data was not recorded in 2008.

Longer ice-on duration prevents the lake from warming up too quickly and creates a winter environment that favors native species and limits the survival of invasive, warm-water species. It also protects the shoreline from erosion by waves, protects fish eggs from wave damage, and reduces nutrient loading of the lake through run-off. Less ice cover can lead to increased algal blooms, lowered water levels through evaporation, and reduced fish survival.

3. Increasing possibility of algal blooms on Columbia Lake?

Our water quality data from 2025 suggest that Columbia Lake has increasing levels of total phosphorus in the water, as well as detectable levels of chlorophyll-a. These parameters help assess the lake's vulnerability to possible algal blooms. (If you want to learn more about these indicators, see CLSS's Water Quality Report 2025.) Columbia Lake's vulnerability is enhanced by its warm water in summer and its shallowness. CLSS is expanding its testing program for levels of total phosphorus and chlorophyll-a.

-----Some of Our Plans for 2026-----

Wings Over the Rockies Festival: Guided Walks at Columbia Lake

On May 4th, 2026, CLSS is joining Colin Cartwright, lifelong resident of the Columbia Valley and local outdoorsman/author, to offer two guided walks that explore Columbia Lake. If you are joining the Wings Over the Rockies Festival this year, we would love to see you on the shores of Columbia Lake. We will explore the Source of the Columbia River Trail in the Village of Canal Flats in the morning and the shores of the lake in Columbia Lake Provincial Park in the afternoon. As we explore these two unique environments, you'll learn about the ecological health and water supply of Columbia Lake, and we will conduct routine water testing at both sites to demonstrate our water quality science program.

Aquatic Invasive Species Control Event 2026: Watch for Details!

In partnership with Angler's Atlas, CLSS is planning to host a 10-day community fishing and stewardship event to engage the public in learning about and managing invasive largemouth bass, a very popular trophy fishing species but a prolific predator impacting native fish species. Participants will help collect data, understand the lake's ecosystem, and take part in hands-on conservation while enjoying outdoor recreation. The event directly benefits local residents, recreational anglers, and tourists, while promoting long-term ecological health and stewardship of Columbia Lake.

If you don't fish, perhaps this is your year to learn!



Inventory of Docks & Buoys on Columbia Lake in 2026

RDEK conducted an inventory of buoys on Lake Windermere in 2025. For more information, see <https://engage.rdek.bc.ca/buoy>. Importantly, RDEK has indicated that they are planning an inventory on Columbia Lake in 2026 and CLSS will continue to encourage RDEK to do this, as well as an inventory on docks.

In the meantime, inventories of docks and buoys on Columbia Lake were taken by both Wildsight Invermere and CLSS in 2025. Inventory will be taken again in 2026.

Since regulations governing docks and buoys on Columbia Lake can be unclear—with regulations at federal, provincial, regional, and municipal levels—CLSS has produced a brochure which outlines those regulations clearly and in one place. The information is available online at <https://columbialakess.com/documents/docks-buoys-regulations/>

We are updating this brochure for a 2026 edition currently. We will let everyone know when it is available.

Water Quality Program 2026: Boat Volunteers Always Needed

Each year, we measure various indicators of water quality throughout the summer, at different locations on the lake. In 2025, we were able to get out on the lake about twelve times, between early May and mid-September, and we are hugely grateful to our boat volunteers for donating their time and their boats to take us out.

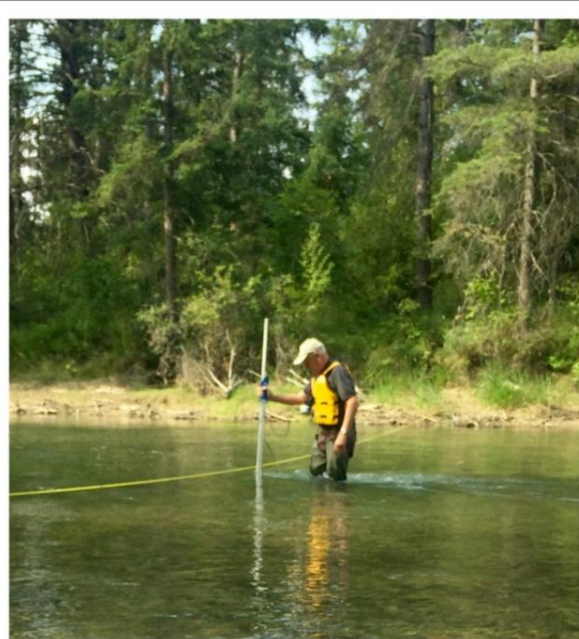


If you have a boat, please consider volunteering to take us out in 2026. We can't do it without you!

If you are interested in helping us, as a boat owner and/or as a person interested in doing a little 'citizen science' please email info@columbialakess.ca

Water Quantity Program 2026: Goodbye and Many Thanks to Bill Thompson

Many of you know Bill Thompson, a long-time member of the CLSS Board of Directors and director of the water quantity program. CLSS is now wishing Bill a very fond farewell, as he has opted to resign from both positions. Bill was one of the three founding members of CLSS in 2014. He designed and has almost singlehandedly carried out the CLSS water quantity program since then. Because of Bill's extensive knowledge and dedication, we now have a substantial database of the seasonal changes in water depth and water temperature in Columbia Lake. We have also developed an understanding of the various components of water balance in Columbia Lake.



Bill Thompson volunteering with CLSS, at the Columere marina and in the Columbia River

Although Bill is resigning from his formal positions, he is still very involved with CLSS and we will rely on his knowledge going forward. Monitoring the quantity of water in Columbia Lake is important because the depth of water in a lake has a significant impact on the water quality. One of our newest Board members is currently learning all about the program and is looking forward to continuing CLSS's work in this area.

The board of CLSS thanks Bill for his many, many hours of slogging through cold water and compiling data. CLSS would not be what it is today without him.

If you would like to know more about what we do, you can find the following reports online.

Annual Report 2025: <https://columbialakess.com/2025-annual-report/>

Water Quantity Report 2025: <https://columbialakess.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2024-255-water-quantity-report-final-of-jan-26-2026.pdf>

Water Quality Report 2025: <https://columbialakess.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2025-quality-report.pdf>

Ways to Help CLSS

1. Become a Member

Being a member of CLSS is a simple but really important thing you can do to help us continue our work. Members are invaluable in helping us to get funding.

If you received this newsletter directly, you are already a lifetime member of CLSS. If you are not currently a member, a new lifetime membership of CLSS will cost \$10. Please email info@columbialakess.ca

2. Volunteer

As always, we are extremely grateful to those who volunteer to take us out in their boats to do our sampling on the lake. It would be almost impossible without you. However, you can help without a boat! Opportunities to help are varied and everyone can do something: participating in knapweed-pulls, assisting in our water sampling outings as citizen scientists, helping us with our website or writing articles, and participating in fundraisers. You could also consider volunteering on CLSS Board of Directors. Fresh ideas and perspectives are always welcome. Please contact us at info@columbialakess.ca if you would like to help.

3. Make a Donation

We are a non-profit organization that survives and thrives thanks to donations from community members and grants from various agencies (see our website for a list of our grantors <https://columbialakess.com/>). Unfortunately, grant writing requires extensive work and, even with that work, grants cannot be relied upon entirely. Our ability to function optimally depends very much on at least some predictable funding. That's where our **ENDOWMENT FUND** come in.

Endowment Fund

Have you heard of our endowment fund at the Columbia Valley Community Foundation (CVCF)? To check it out, go to <https://valleyfoundation.ca/columbia-valley-community-foundation-funds/>. Scroll down to the heading "Environment" and you will see the Columbia Lake Stewardship Society Endowment Fund. In addition to an annual donation, there is an option to provide a **LEGACY DONATION** in your will to the CLSS endowment fund.

Any donation you make to our endowment fund will have a lasting impact on our work by providing us with predictable funding. As the fund grows, CLSS will benefit annually with a growing financial return to support our activities and to help protect Columbia Lake into the future for our children and grandchildren. Any gift will be receipted immediately by the CVCF.

Direct Donation

You can also donate directly to the Columbia Lake Stewardship Society via our website at columbialakess.com. Click on the **Donate Now** button. Your official tax receipt will be issued immediately.

If you prefer to write a cheque and receive a tax slip from our treasurer, mail it to: *Columbia Lake Stewardship Society, 4441 Cedar Bay, Fairmont Hot Springs, BC, V0B 1L2*

Talking of Invasive Species, If You Are Fishing on Columbia Lake Don't Throw Bass Back!

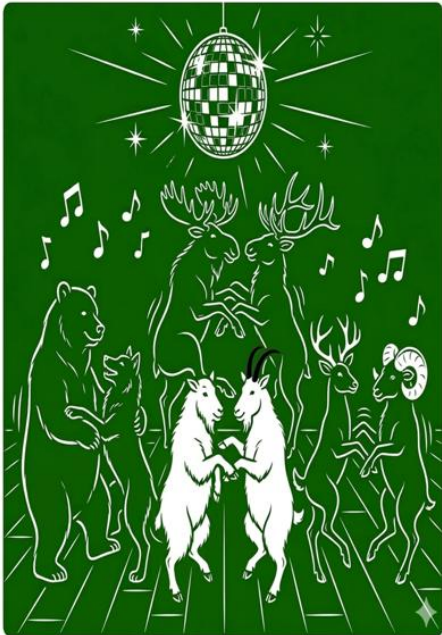


Last year, fishing regulation changes published for 2025-2027 included implementation of an unlimited bass quota on Columbia Lake and the Columbia River. So please don't throw bass back. Columbia Lake does not need them. They are aggressive predators which eat almost anything and everything, competing out native species of fish and impacting populations of other vulnerable native species like Western Painted turtles.

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/sports-recreation-arts-and-culture/outdoor-recreation/fishing-and-hunting/freshwater-fishing/fishing_synopsis.pdf

Other Upcoming Events Near Columbia Lake

CANAL FLATS WILDERNESS CLUB ANNUAL BANQUET AND DANCE



The Canal Flats Wilderness Club (CFWC) is pleased to host its annual banquet and dance. Join us for a steak barbeque, cash bar, DJ, dancing, rifle raffle, ring raffle, silent auction 50/50 and more.

All proceeds will assist in funding newly legislated upgrades to our firing range and CFWC conservation projects.


WHEN:
Saturday April 18, 2026

WHERE:
Canal Flats Events Centre, 4957 Burns Ave, Canal Flats, BC.

TIME:
Doors open at 5pm for the dinner and dance; 8:00pm for Dance Only.

TICKETS:
Scan the QR Code to purchase your tickets online, or contact Louise Walters at 250-341-8657.

PRICE:
Adult Dinner and Dance: \$55.00
Adult – Dance only: \$30.00
Youth Dinner and Dance: \$25.00



The Canal Flats Wilderness Club (CFWC) is an established Columbia Valley conservation group founded in 1982 who's principle purpose is to ensure the sustainable long-term management of East Kootenay Fish, Wildlife, and Outdoor resources.