

GEORGIAN BAY  
**FOREVER**



PROTECTING WATER



## 2024 Shoreline Cleanup Report

## About Us

Georgian Bay Forever (GBF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting water quality and restoring the aquatic ecosystem of Georgian Bay. One of our key areas of focus is on the mitigation of plastic pollution, a significant concern for the Great Lakes<sup>1</sup>. Plastic is lightweight and durable, making it a valuable material, but also a persistent pollutant that can harm wildlife, leach chemicals, and impact human health.

Shoreline cleanups are an essential tool in combating plastic pollution. Removing waste beautifies our communities' coastline and leads to a direct reduction in microplastic contamination. A recent study from Norway found intensive cleanups could reduce local microplastic levels by as much as 99% after just one year<sup>2,3</sup>

The distribution and types of trash collected provide valuable insights that help guide future cleanup efforts, prioritize key sites, and inform targeted campaigns to address the most problematic waste. We leverage this knowledge with our consistent presence in the community to educate the public and inform decisions about pollution-prevention policies.

This report outlines the shoreline cleanups completed in 2024, and how this information will inform our future efforts.

### Our Mission:

To protect and enhance Georgian Bay through science, research, education, and action.

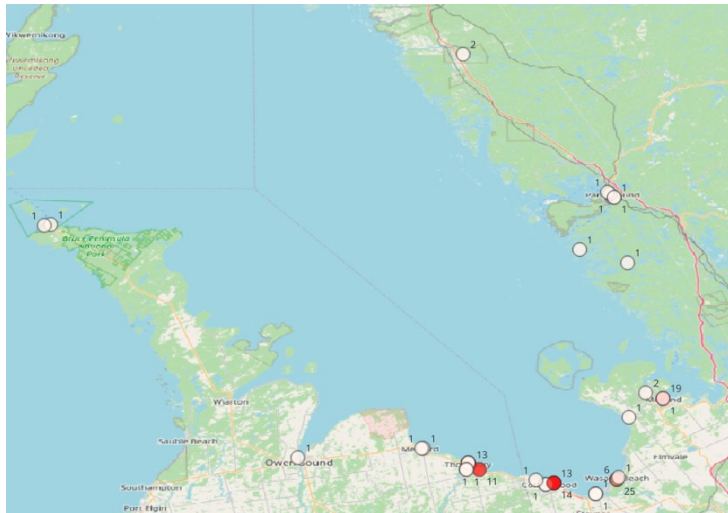
### Our Vision:

Georgian Bay will forever remain healthy and thriving.

## Methodology

We hold as many shoreline cleanups as possible across the region throughout the spring and summer, and we're always excited to have more helping hands. Equipped with gloves, buckets, and grabbers, our staff and volunteers clean every nook and cranny of the shoreline, removing all anthropogenic waste. Our staff then categorize every piece of trash down to the tiniest scrap of foam, creating a detailed record of the weight, type, and quantity of garbage collected at the location before responsibly disposing of them. Finally, we analyze our findings.

We currently focus most of our efforts on higher-traffic urban areas. We host weekly cleanups at Sunset Park in Collingwood, Wasaga Beach, Midland's waterfront, and multiple locations in the Town of Blue Mountains. Our consistent presence at these locations serves as a long-term monitoring program, allowing us to track trends in trash accumulation, educate members of the public regularly, and provide an outlet for them to take action in preserving the bay they call home.



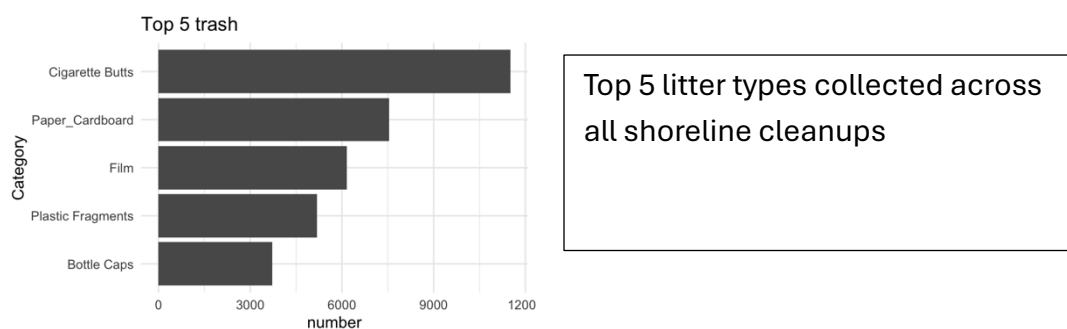
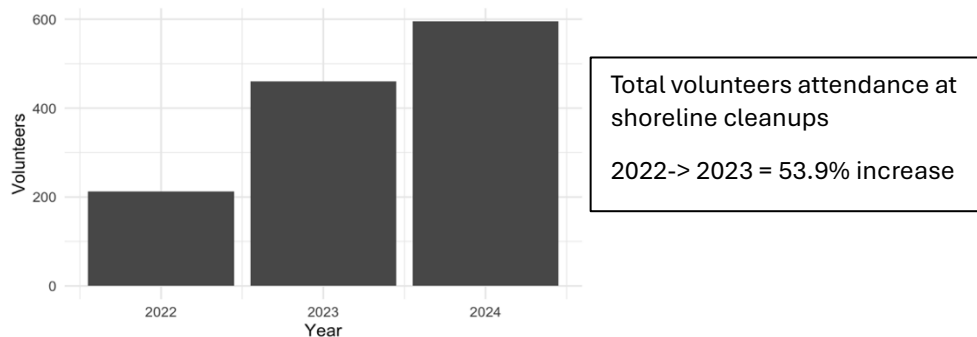
## Year in Review

Summer 2024 marked another successful season of shoreline litter collection along Georgian Bay. We completed 67 cleanups and grew our volunteer base by 29% compared to last year's turnout. This growth is a testament to the enthusiasm of the community to keep Georgian Bay beautiful. In total, we successfully removed 429 kg of trash from entering Georgian Bay!

In 2021, an estimated 4594 kt of plastics were permanently disposed of by Canadians<sup>4</sup>. Given less than 10% of this is recycled, it is unsurprising that four of the top five items found during our shoreline cleanups are types of plastic waste. Plastics account for 71% of all the waste we collect, which closely tracks cleanup efforts by other groups throughout the great lakes<sup>5</sup>.

Shoreline cleanups are just one small part of preserving Georgian bay. We will continue to work with municipalities, community members, businesses, and other stakeholders to increase our impact across the region.

Year	# of cleanups conducted	Kgs of garbage collected
2022	48	409
2023	66	552
2024	67	429



## Collingwood

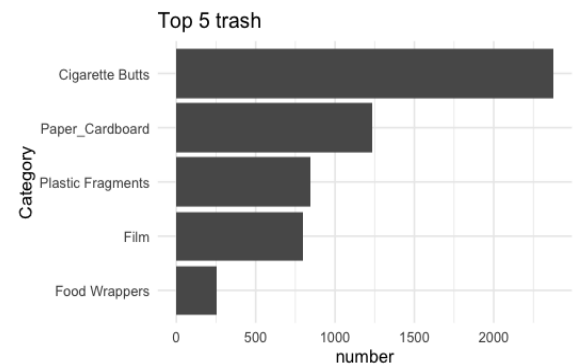
Sunset Park is one of our most consistent and well-attended locations across the region, and this year, we collected less trash by weight there than ever. Regardless of the cause, this is a positive sign, but it raises some interesting questions about how we interpret the data we collect from our shoreline cleanups.

We evaluated whether returning too frequently to the same locations might lead to inefficiencies—spending time in areas that are already clean. Our analysis, however, showed no indication of this. Litter levels remained consistent regardless of the time since the last cleanup, pointing to how quickly trash reaccumulates in these areas.

At the same time, we recognize that some areas may still be underserved. With so many communities needing support, we prioritize broad coverage and consistent presence while maximizing the amount of litter removed across the region. However, cleanups are only one aspect of reducing trash. Through education and partnerships with municipalities and local groups, we're also strive to prevent litter from entering the environment in the first place.

## Town of Blue Mountains

	Year	Total Volunteers	Total Kgs	Cleanups
1	2022	40	52.1	9
2	2023	56	58.6	20
3	2024	99	96.0	22



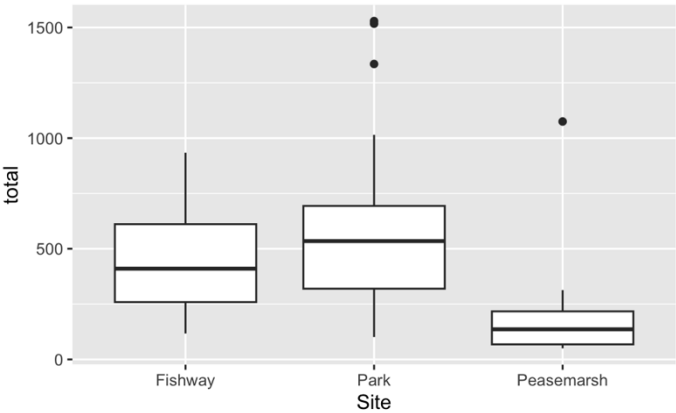
Top 5 most commonly collected trash within Town of Blue Mountains

Little River Beach Park, The Fishway, and Peasemarth are all publicly accessible green spaces within close proximity to one another. However, their use by the public varies greatly. The Fishway and Little River Beach Park are both near urban development, located within the town of Thornbury, and are heavily used by locals and tourists alike. Peasemarth is a conservation area less than 3 km east of the town. These locations have offered us an

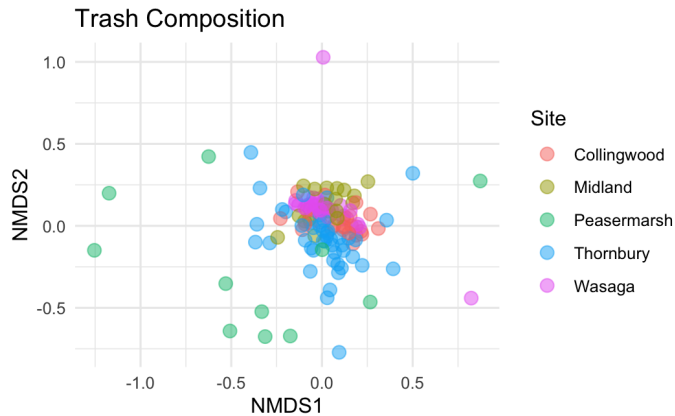
interesting case study to compare how the public use of space affects the type and amount of litter found.

At Little River Beach Park, we see a similar trash composition to other municipal parks, such as Sunset Park in Collingwood, which are dominated by cigarette butts and paper litter. The Fishway has an abundance of anglers along the river's shores; as a result, we find more fishing weights, lines, and lures than in any other location along the bay. Finally, Peasemarsch contains very little trash compared to nearby areas (Little River Beach Park and The Fishway) or other beach (Wasaga) locations.

In 2024, we suspended cleanup activity at the Peasemarsch location due to historically low litter collection. However, it is unclear whether this lack of litter is due simply to fewer people using the area or its status as a conservation area. Such a designation may impact an individual's behaviour and reduce their likeliness to litter. It may be worth investigating to learn strategies that could be applied to all areas.



Litter collected per shoreline cleanup at The Fishway, Little River Beach Park and Peasemarsch conservation area in 2024.



NMDS analysis of trash composition collected at shoreline cleanups across sites surrounding Georgian Bay. Axis are unitless. Proximity of points indicate the Similarity of types of trash collected. Note that Peasemarsch differs significantly from all other locations in terms of the types of trash that were present during cleanups. Thornbury includes trash from both the Fishway and Little River Beach Park

In addition to our shoreline cleanups, GBF was also successful with the large monofilament receptacle program as well in 2024. With the help of volunteers and staff, we were able to collect over 16,000m of would be discarded monofilament fishing line from the receptacles placed in and around the Town of Blue Mountains. In 2023, our total for all of the Georgian Bay area was approximately 38,000m, making this years 16,000m from TBM a significant accomplishment.

## Midland

This site was identified in 2023 as a problem area, with the amount of cigarette butts being of particular concern. In response, we nearly doubled the number of shoreline cleanups at this location in 2024. This year, Midland was the only location where cigarette butts were not our most common type of trash. We collected an extraordinary amount of small foam pieces; however, these findings were isolated to a very short window of time, leading us to believe that it was likely the result of an isolated event rather than a broader representation of what is expected from this location in the future.

In 2024, the number of cigarette butts collected at this site was significantly lower than in 2023, dropping from 969 to 158, a reduction of nearly 83%. This brings the total much more in line with what we typically observe at our other locations, where cigarette litter tends to be relatively low. We believe this reduction reflects a positive shift in behaviour. One contributing factor may be increased public awareness about the environmental impacts of cigarette waste, including the release of toxic chemicals and microplastics. This awareness could be the result of [insert any outreach campaign, signage, or community engagement efforts here]. Additionally, efforts to improve access to proper disposal options such as the installation of more Unsmoke cigarette receptacles in key areas, may have made it easier for smokers to dispose of their cigarette butts responsibly.

This is the beginning of a great success story, and we will continue to monitor this location and provide updates in the future. It is a testament to the importance of public education and appropriate infrastructure in tackling shoreline litter.

## Wasaga

This year, Wasaga Beach was the site of our most attended cleanup to date, with 136 volunteers joining us on Earth Day to kick off the season's first cleanup, where we removed 155.5kgs of trash from the beach.

As a popular tourist destination, we see more straws, utensils, and food wrappers along the beach than in any other location. Many restaurants and shops cater to those spending the day in the sun and water. While ultimately, individuals are responsible for the litter strewn across the beach, these businesses have a tremendous opportunity to reduce that impact by providing plastic-free alternatives to everyday items, and accessible receptacles for waste disposal.

Wasaga Beach got nearly 2 million visitors throughout the 2023 season<sup>6</sup> – a number that continues to grow yearly. More people do mean more garbage, but it also means more volunteers to help clean it up.

Wasaga Beach is our only location where we see a positive correlation between the number of volunteers who attend a cleanup, and the amount of litter collected. This is likely due to both the larger area and the higher volume of litter compared to other sites. In this context, each additional volunteer at Wasaga cleanups increases our collected trash by an estimated 1.1 kg

## 2025 and Beyond

Building on our success from last year, GBF is poised to expand its impact. Our cleanups accounted for significant amounts of litter removed from our shorelines, we educated hundreds of people about the dangers of plastic waste and provided valuable data on pollution trends to local municipalities. This season, we aim to increase the number of cleanups across the region and expand into a broader range of locations, involving more communities while continuing to target high-impact areas strategically.

All upcoming events and shoreline cleanups are on our website, GBF.org or social media. If you or those in your community are interested in hosting a shoreline cleanup in



your area, please contact us for details on how we can help to facilitate it and work together to keep Georgian Bay healthy and beautiful forever.

We have also partnered with the innovative new app LitterLotto launching for the first time in North America. This app encourages people to do the right thing by offering those who participate the opportunity to win cash for binning their trash.

## Acknowledgments

We at GBF would not be able to do our work without the help of our hard-working summer students, dedicated volunteers, and generous donors. We recognized the time, effort, and funds these individuals and organizations contributed to achieve our shared goals. For their continued effort and support, we extend our heartfelt gratitude.

Canada Summer Jobs

Town of Blue Mountains

Town of Collingwood

Hodgsons Family Foundation

Catherine and Maxwell Meghan Foundation

FK Morrow

Bruce Power

RBC

Ontario Parks

## References

1. Kidd, K., Rooney, R., Rochman, C., & Hataley, E. (2024). [Final report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics: Monitoring, ecological risk assessment, and management of microplastics in the Laurentian Great Lakes. International Joint Commission.](#)

2. Moore, T. (2023, September 16). [Why beach cleans matter as new research gives scientists hope for polluted oceans](#). Sky News
3. Bødtker, G., Haave, M., Velle, G., Andersen, G. L., Gomiero, A., Gaasø, R., Bruvik, K., & Bastesen, E. (2023). [Hvordan plast og rydding av plast påvirker økosystemet på Lisle Lyngøy](#). NORCE Rapport 6-2023. ISBN 978-82-8408-289-9.
4. Statistics Canada. (2025, March 12). [Physical flow account for plastic material, 2021](#). The Daily.
5. Reda, O. (2024). [Adopt-a-Beach: 20 years of Great Lakes litter data](#). Alliance for the Great Lakes.
6. Town of Wasaga Beach. (2024, July 10). [Wasaga Beach celebrates summer by launching bold new destination management plan and tourism website](#).