



Looking to discover a local freshwater soundscape?

Explore this event guide and consider hosting your own **Freshwater listening challenge** to explore freshwater ecosystems through sound.

- Recommended event duration: 20-60 minutes
- Suitable for: Families, schools, community groups
- Group size: 2-30+ participants
- Main activity: Listening to and recording natural sounds in wetland environments
- Cost: Free

Freshwater Listening Challenge

Freshwater ecosystems are full of sound. Even when wildlife isn't visible, birds, frogs, insects, mammals, and moving water can reveal a great deal about the health and biodiversity of an area.

This activity invites participants to slow down, listen, and connect with nature by identifying the sounds of local wildlife. It pairs well with the **Freshwater Reflection & Nature Journaling Guide** and is accessible for participants with visual impairments. The activity can be completed from a boardwalk, shoreline, dock, riverside trail, viewing platform, or accessible park.

Listening carefully helps participants recognize local biodiversity, seasonal changes, and the importance of healthy freshwater habitats.

1. Select your site

- Choose a publicly accessible wetland, pond, riverbank, or shoreline. Quiet locations such as viewing platforms, docks, or trail edges work best.

2. Conduct a hazard assessment

- Visit the site in advance to identify potential hazards such as unstable shorelines, fast-moving water, wildlife activity, and access limitations. Select a safe, stationary listening location.

○ Hazard Assessment.pdf

3. Conduct a quick species list

- Before heading to your chosen water body, have a look in a field guide or on the internet to identify what sort of animals and species live in the region. This will help when listening for animal sounds.

4. Find a listening spot

- Pick a location near the chosen water body and have participants sit or stand quietly for 2-5 minutes without talking. Encourage stillness so natural sounds can be heard more clearly

5. Listen for Freshwater Species

- These animals are commonly associated with healthy freshwater habitats and are sometimes easier to hear than they are to see.
 - 🐸 **Frogs** – Wetlands, ponds, marshes, and slow-moving waters (*often heard during spring and early summer breeding season*).
 - 🦆 **Waterfowl** – Lakes, ponds, rivers, and marshes.
 - 🐦 **Red-winged Blackbirds** – Marshes and cattail wetlands.
 - 🐦 **Common Loons** – Lakes across much of Canada, especially northern and boreal regions.
 - 🐦 **Belted Kingfishers** – Rivers, streams, and lakes with fish.
 - 🦋 **Dragonflies & Damselflies** – Wetlands, ponds, lakeshores, and slow-moving rivers (*their aquatic larvae depend on freshwater habitats*).
 - 🐿 **Beavers** – Forested lakes, ponds, wetlands, and slow-moving rivers.
 - Or other freshwater sounds
- These are just a few examples of freshwater-associated species you may hear or observe. Their presence can help you learn about the habitats that support freshwater biodiversity.

5. Optional Sound Recording

- To contribute to citizen science, participants can record a short audio clip of the freshwater soundscape and use apps such as [Merlin Bird ID](#) to identify bird calls or [iNaturalist](#) to record and identify wildlife observations.

6. Reflection

- Discuss:
 - How many different sounds did you hear?
 - What sounds were easiest to identify?
 - Did the soundscape change over time?
 - What might certain sounds tell us about habitat health?

Basic Equipment Checklist

- Smartphone for recording (optional)
- Merlin Bird ID and iNaturalist apps (optional)
- Field notebook
- Comfortable clothing & location

Outcomes

Participants will:

- Identify 2–5 freshwater species by sound or observation.
- Record 2-5 freshwater species and upload to a citizen science platform
- Learn how wildlife sounds can help us understand freshwater ecosystems.
- Build a stronger connection to their local freshwater environment through careful observation.

If you complete this activity, we'd love to hear from you! Share your experience with Living Lakes Canada at waterconnections@livinglakescanada.ca.

Please include the location, number of participants, results (e.g., species or sounds identified), and any photos or feedback. Your submissions help us measure the impact of these activities, strengthen future funding applications, and continue developing free freshwater resources for communities across Canada.

Safety & operations

Before you begin:

- Tailor this template appropriately to facilitate your safety meeting
 -  Tailgate Safety Meeting .pdf
- Stay in safe, designated viewing areas
- Review site hazards and event boundaries
- Emphasize quiet participation during listening periods

Key safety rules

- Do not enter deep or fast-moving water
- Respect wildlife and sensitive habitats
- Be cautious near steep, slippery, or unstable shoreline areas
- Stay on designated pathways where possible
- Children must be directly supervised at all times

Disclaimer

This guide is intended to support community-led educational and stewardship activities for informational purposes only. Organizers are responsible for assessing the site conditions, participant safety, and any permits or permissions that may be required. Participation is voluntary and at the participant's own risk.

We recommend connecting with Living Lakes Canada or a local stewardship organization for additional guidance and support.