

Coordinated Wetlands Strategy Development Final Report 2009-10

Project Summary

Under the Lake Huron-Georgian Bay Framework for Community Action (hereafter called “the Framework”), the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve was approached to coordinate the development of a Coordinated Wetlands Conservation Strategy for the Eastern and Northern coast wetlands of Georgian Bay. A steering-committee with Terms of Reference was struck and met formally one one occasion and thereafter by conference call. A follow-up final presentation of the draft Strategy was presented on March 5th at the GBBR Conservation Stakeholders Workshop where comments were received which will be incorporated into the final document.

Our major activities included:

- 1) Hosting a Steering Committee meeting to establish a Terms of Reference and the shell of the proposed strategy
- 2) Meeting with three sub-committees to work on three distinct areas of the strategy
- 3) Participating in the third workshop of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy in Port Huron and further participating in a workshop held in Parry Sound on the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy;
- 4) Consulting with other groups (municipalities, MNR, DFO) on the proposed strategy and its contents.
- 5) Further refining and presenting a draft of the strategy to a workshop audience at the GBBR Conservation Stakeholders workshop.
- 6) Communicating with Greg Mayne of Environment Canada about how the Coordinated Wetlands Strategy might be incorporated into the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy

Project Summary:

Eastern Georgian Bay Coordinated Wetlands Strategy	Terms of Reference created. Stakeholder engagement, awareness and education of wetland conservation challenges A draft report on wetland conservation for eastern and northern Georgian Bay	Complete	Terms of Reference for Strategy established. Key stakeholders engaged through involvement in committee including participation from: MNR, Env. Can., McMaster University, Georgian Bay Land Trust, Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, Georgian Bay Association, and Georgian Bay Forever. Consultations and communications with municipalities and other stakeholders through one-on-one communications and presentations at the Conservation Stakeholders Workshop.
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Project Budget and Finances Template (for Final Report):

Expenses:	In Period X				To Date (cumulative)			
	Projected		Actual		Projected		Actual	
	Cash (\$)	In-Kind (\$)	Cash (\$)	In-Kind (\$)	Cash (\$)	In-Kind (\$)	Cash (\$)	In-Kind (\$)
Human Resource Expenses								
Operating Expenses							5636	
Equipment Purchase and Lease								
Management, professional, technology and other service costs							4364	5000
Others								
Total Expenses							10000	
Income minus Expenses								

Eastern and Northern Georgian Bay Wetlands A Coordinated Conservation Strategy

STRATEGY VISION

We see flourishing, abundant and resilient wetlands and we see residents and communities around the Great Lakes Basin who understand their individual and collective roles in wetland conservation. We see these same individuals and groups, and organizations and government actively striving to ensure the great quality and abundance of wetlands on the Northern and Eastern coast of Georgian Bay are conserved for the benefit of present and future generations.

Purpose of Strategy:

- improve coordination of activities and goals
- improve communications among organizations working on wetlands
- improve communications with agency partners and other NGO's so as to improve wetland conservation
- create a consensus-driven approach to addressing wetland conservation priorities

Study Area:

Severn River to McGregor Bay

Rationale:

There are a lot of wetlands

- recently mapped wetlands indicate approximately 15 000 hectares of wetlands along the shores of Georgian Bay (inland 2 km)

They are in really good condition

- recent studies indicate that the coastal wetlands in the study area are among some of the highest quality wetlands when compared against others throughout the Great Lakes

They are very important

- wetlands in this area provide very important fish habitat for various life stages of most fish species in Georgian Bay and Lake Huron
- wetlands provide essential habitats for most of the species considered to be at risk in the study area
- many are considered to be globally significant ecosystems

The wetlands of this area are best considered as a landscape mosaic as they are very dispersed and numerous but are relatively small in size individually. It is difficult to fully know what the functional role or ecological service provided by this wetland mosaic is for the near shore and off shore fisheries of Georgian Bay and potentially Lake Huron and for biodiversity in general. However, this type of wetland mosaic is rare globally and as such, exists for a reason; just for that it is worth conserving.

Overall Strategy Goal:

Develop and implement appropriate mechanisms to preserve the quantity and quality of wetlands and their ecological services on the east and north Georgian Bay (Port Severn to McGregor Bay) where possible and to generate appropriate means of stewarding wetlands to mitigate impacts where and when they occur.

Strategy Actions:

- 1) Develop and Implement a threat analysis overlaid with an understanding of the specific and most appropriate mechanisms to achieve the highest level of protection for specifically identified wetlands and wetland complexes where they exist.

This will entail:

- i) Undertaking a complete analysis of the mechanisms available to protect wetlands including the strengths and weaknesses associated with each mechanism
 - ii) Assessing the broad threats to the wetlands to as geographically specific a scale as possible;
 - iii) Overlay the threats with mechanisms to identify which mechanisms would specifically address which wetlands
 - iv) Working with stakeholders to build their capacity to implement the mechanisms and address identified barriers to implementing the mechanisms. Specifically, the need to better engage municipalities in the use of a variety of mechanisms to achieve protection and mitigate impacts has been identified with the concept of developing a municipal liaison position to better achieve this.
- 2) Improve our understanding of the wetlands to assist with their protection and the mitigation of impacts.

This will entail:

- i) Establishing a State of Eastern and Northern Georgian Bay Wetlands – a synopsis of the state of our knowledge about the wetlands in this region and undertake a gap analysis of that knowledge base (this work would be akin to the Environmental Objectives prepared by the Upper Great Lakes Fisheries Management Unit (Arunas Liskauskas);
- ii) Host a Wetlands Science symposium to finalize the State of Wetlands report in i)
- iii) Establish an effective wetland monitoring program to respond to the various natural and anthropogenic changes expected within the study area.

Areas of research that have been identified as being required include:

- establishing the functional role of these wetlands in terms of the ecological services provided by the wetlands to nearshore and offshore ecosystems (fisheries);
 - determine the ability of the wetland mosaic to adapt (on a landscape scale) to different water level regimes;
- 3) Implement effective communication strategies to assist with public outreach, transfer of knowledge and data to decision makers, and coordination of wetland research and implementation of research mechanisms;

This will entail:

- Preparing an a priori understanding of what the current condition of wetland understanding is among the various stakeholder groups
- Preparation of consistent and effective communication materials appropriate to each the goals for each group targeted in the communication plan
- effective development of communications among key partners working on implementing wetlands works in study area through clear establishment and definition of partner roles and responsibilities, frequent (quarterly) meetings, establishment of a web-based communication tools and preparation of consistent communication materials
- improved liaison with municipalities to build capacity of this level of governance to integrate wetland mapping and research into planning and operations within the municipality and potentially assisting with the development of technical guidelines specific to the eastern and northern Georgian Bay Coastal wetland ecosystem
- monitoring of the effectiveness of the communication strategies

NOTE: A draft Communications Strategy is attached.

Draft-Jan. 8 /2010
East and North Georgian Bay Coastal Wetlands
Communication Plan

Purpose:

The purpose of the communication plan is two-fold; it will facilitate the transfer of knowledge on Georgian Bay coastal wetland research and monitoring to stakeholders and target audiences; and it will increase awareness among the target audiences of the need and the actions required to conserve wetlands.

Background:

Wetlands are interspersed throughout the east and north shore of Georgian Bay. These wetlands have not experienced the large scale loss that has occurred in Lake Ontario or Lake Erie however, cottage, marina, boaters and other forms of development are increasingly creating stresses on these wetlands. Climate change and human activities may result in lower water levels which will also result in negative impact on these coastal wetlands.

There are number of organizations conducting wetland related research, monitoring and outreach activities in this region. The East and North Georgian Bay Coastal Wetland Strategy seeks to identify priority actions and coordinate the implementation of these actions to achieve the common goal of wetland protection in our region.

Geographic Scope- the coastal wetlands from Severn River to McGregor Bay.

Timeline: This plan will be implemented over a five year time period (2010-15)

Steering Committee: The Communication Committee consisting of representatives from the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council, Georgian Bay Association, Georgian Bay Land Trust, and Georgian Bay Forever.

Overview:

This communication plan has three sections to address (a) improved coordination of activities between partners; (b) information transfer and support to municipalities, provincial and federal agencies to implement measures to protect wetlands (c) outreach to recreational users, permanent and seasonal residents to increase knowledge of the needs and actions to conserve wetlands.

Key Messages:

- There are over 17,000 hectares of wetlands on the east and north Georgian Bay coast. They are among the highest quality and most diverse in the Great Lakes region.
- These extensive wetlands play an important role in maintaining healthy aquatic communities and water quality in Lake Huron and Georgian Bay.
- Georgian Bay wetlands provide our region with significant economic, cultural and environmental benefits.
- We must take efforts to retain the ecological values of Georgian Bay wetlands.
- All levels of government, including municipal and First Nations, have a key role in the protection Georgian Bay wetlands from the impact of development.

Environmental Benefits:

- Georgian Bay wetlands are an ecological treasure. They are the most biologically productive and diverse ecosystems within our region.
- Wetlands enhance water quality and help maintain water quantity.
- Wetlands provide important habitat for many wildlife species including at-risk species.
- Healthy wetlands support healthy fish populations.

Economic and Cultural Benefits:

- Wetlands provide educational and scientific research opportunities because of their high levels of biodiversity.
- Wetlands offer numerous opportunities for tourism with activities such as fishing, hunting, bird watching, and nature photography.
- Wetlands can provide opportunities to harvest traditional foods such as wild rice.

Threats to Coastal Wetlands

- Development – recreational, commercial and residential
- Sustained low/high water levels
- Infilling, blasting, dredging
- Climate change
- Invasive species
- Contaminants

Barriers to Wetland Conservation:

- Lack of interest or understanding of importance of wetlands to aquatic ecosystems.
- Increased development pressures, e.g. road access to coast, dredging for boat access, etc.
- Concerns regarding loss of property rights, i.e. right to fill a wetland on private property.
- Economic constraints that limit research, monitoring and/or acquisition of wetlands.

- Lack of knowledge, e.g. impact of invasive species, climate change, etc.
- Lack of concern among some organizations regarding the threats to Georgian Bay’s coastal wetlands.

Communication Strategies

A. Improved Coordination Of Activities Between Partners

Objectives:

- Improve the coordination of activities, information transfer and strategic planning between agencies engaged in wetland conservation in the region.
- Strengthen wetland conservation and protection through the ongoing review of relevant policies.
- Increase knowledge among stakeholders of the tools available to support wetland protection.
- Foster the stewardship of wetlands by organizations.

Key Partners:

Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve
 Georgian Bay Land Trust
 Georgian Bay Forever
 Georgian Bay Association
 Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council
 Nature Conservancy of Canada -Huron Region
 McMaster University
 Laurentian University

Parry Sound Ministry of Natural Resources
 Sudbury District Ministry of Natural Resources
 Parks Canada- Georgian Bay Islands National Park
 Ontario Parks- Central Zone
 Lake Huron Bi-national Partnership- Canadian Working Group

Recommendations:

Face to Face Communication

- i. The communication committee will host semi-annual meetings or teleconferences to: review on-going projects; assess needs and develop strategies, and coordinate funding applications.
- ii. A regional technical committee will be established to: review project proposals; coordinate wetland evaluation projects and promote standard techniques; develop a framework to measure and report on conservation efforts; develop a framework to analyse threats; review and comment on legislation/policies affecting wetlands. This committee will report at the semi-annual meeting.

Web based Communications

- iii. Posting of relevant research and monitoring information on a secure web site.

- iv. Record areas where best management practices were practiced or not practiced by municipalities and developers. Negative examples are used to refine outreach strategy. Positive examples are promoted at presentations and through the media.

Development and Distribution of Communication Material

- v. Produce a “State of Our Wetlands” report every two years for distribution to all stakeholders and target audiences.

B. Information Transfer And Support To Municipalities, Provincial And Federal Agencies.

Objectives:

- Cultivate the transfer of scientific knowledge on Georgian Bay coastal wetlands to the target audience.
- Inform local governments and developers of the wetland conservation work being undertaken and best practices to protect wetlands. Strengthen their capacity to conserve wetlands and adhere to relevant provincial and federal laws and policies.
- Create broad-based awareness of the essential ecological services that wetlands provide.
- Foster the stewardship of wetlands by organizations.

Target Audiences:

Local Governments

- Municipal staff and councillors within the region including District of Muskoka (Township of Georgian Bay); Municipalities of Killarney and French River; Townships of Seguin, Georgian Bay, the Archipelago, McDougall, and Carling.
- First Nation’s band council within the region including Wahta, Moose Deer Point, Wasauksing, Shawanaga, Henvey Inlet, Magnetewan, Point Grondine, and Whitefish.

Provincial/Federal Agencies

- Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- International Joint Commission
- Southern Region Ministry of Natural Resources
- Local Members of Provincial and Federal Government
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Ontario Ministry of Environment

Secondary Audience

- Developers in region.

Recommendations:**Local Government**Face to Face Communication

- i. Establish a government liaison/resource position. Survey key municipal and First Nation staff to determine preferred methods of engagement; identify their priority wetlands for evaluation, and other needs/concerns. Provide a summary to the Communication Committee and Technical Committee.
- ii. Offer information workshops tailored to each audience based on results of survey. The presentations will include information from research/monitoring projects in the region and identify best management practices.
- iii. Provide support to local governments to develop policies and regulations and undertake other actions to conserve wetlands.

Development and Distribution of Communication Material

- iv. Provide an annual briefing on the wetland conservation work being undertaken.
- v. Produce an information package on best practices to protect wetlands.
- vi. Promote positive examples of municipalities engaged in wetland protection through partners' web sites and media.

Provincial/Federal AgenciesFace to Face Communication

- i. Offer biennial informational tours of select wetlands ranging from heavily impacted to intact. Tours will highlight research and monitoring work.

C. Outreach To Recreational Users, Permanent And Seasonal Residents**Objectives:**

- Create broad-based awareness of the ecological values of Georgian Bay wetlands.
- Increase knowledge among target audience members of the tools available to support wetland protection.
- Foster the stewardship of wetlands by organizations and individuals.

Target Audiences:

- Seasonal and permanent residents of the municipalities listed in section B
- Recreational users including boaters, outfitters, hunters and anglers.
- First Nation residents from communities listed in section B

Face to Face Communication

- i. Encourage all key partners presently conducting environmental outreach in the region to offer information on wetlands as a component of existing programming.
- ii. Establish a seasonal wetland conservation education position to conduct wetland information workshops (two seasonal contracts over five year period). The workshops will share information from research programs, identify best practices and include information on wetland related invasive and at-risk species.
- iii. Partners host an wetland focused one day conference to communicate findings from research and monitoring programs. Target of two events over five years.
- iv. Engage a “celebrity spokesperson” to help raise the profile of wetland conservation activities and needs.
**maintain statistics on outreach activities to monitor which target audience groups are attending presentations and which may require focused attention.*

Development and Distribution of Communication Material

- v. Provide 2-4 press releases per year through regional media organizations and partners’ network highlighting wetland conservation work and key messages.
- vi. Distribute via partners existing relevant communication materials.
- vii. Produce a factsheet outlining conservation tools available to property owners, including land donations, conservation easements, etc.
- viii. Install interpretive signage at one readily accessed wetland.

Participate in Research and Monitoring

- ix. Create opportunities for individuals and organizations to volunteer with on-going research and monitoring.
- x. Provide training to interested individuals and organizations to conduct monitoring programs.

Evaluation:

- Conduct a survey within the first year of the strategy to establish a baseline of knowledge and attitudes towards wetland conservation. This survey should be repeated in 5-6 years to assist in measuring the effectiveness of the outreach efforts.
- The communication committee will provide a yearly progress report based upon:
 - Written feedback provided by participating local governments.
 - Written survey completed by workshop participants.
 - Monitoring media coverage.
 - Feedback received from program partners.

- Meeting targets set out in annual work plans.

Roll-out of Plan:

Action	Target Audience	Responsibility	Timeframe	Estimated Cost
Survey to establish a baseline of the current level of knowledge of wetlands.	C	Communication Committee	Completion by Summer 2011	15-20K
Establish technical committee	A and B	Communication Committee	April 2010	Minimal support costs to conduct meetings/teleconferences ~1K/year
Host meetings/teleconferences	A	Communication Committee	Semi-annual	Minimal support costs to conduct meetings/teleconferences ~1K/year
Maintain secure website	A	Communication Committee	On-going	Minimal if hosted by existing site ~\$200
Record examples of best management practices	B- Local government and developers	Communication and Technical Committee	On-going	Minimal
Establish a government liaison/resource position: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer information workshops/best practices support. Promote positive examples wetland conservation. 	B- Local government and developers	Communication Committee-contract to be administered through partner organization	180 days over five years	14-16K/year
Guided tour of select wetlands	B- Provincial and federal representatives	Communication and Technical Committee	Twice over five years	~1K/tour
Produce a “State of the Wetland” report for printing and electronic distribution	All	Communication and Technical Committee	Spring 2011 Spring 2013	3K/production
Establish the wetland conservation education position	C	Communication Committee-contract to be administered through partner organization	Two 24 week contracts over five years	30-32K/year
Host wetland conference	All	Communication and Technical Committee	Twice over five years	2.5K/conference
Engage a “celebrity spokesperson”	B and C	Communication Committee	By 2015	Minimal
Offer regular press releases to regional	B and C	Communication Committee	2-4 per year	Minimal

media		Wetland Conservation Educator Government liaison/resource person		
Distribute existing communication materials from partners	All	Communication Committee	On-going	minimal
Produce a factsheet on conservation tools for property owners	C	Wetland Conservation Educator	Dependent upon timing of initial contract	1.5K
Install interpretive sign	C	Wetland Conservation Educator	Dependent upon timing of initial contract	3-5K
Coordinate research and monitoring volunteers	B- Local government and C	Communication Committee Wetland Conservation Educator Government liaison/resource person	On-going	minimal
Training to individuals/organizations to conduct monitoring programs	B- Local government and C	Communication Committee Wetland Conservation Educator Government liaison/resource person	On-going	~2-3K/year

Funding Opportunities:

Canada Ontario Agreement Fund- deadline ~ mid December

Eco-Action- deadline Nov. 1st

Environment Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk- deadline Nov. 6th

MNR Species at Risk Stewardship Program-deadline ~mid November

Invasive Alien Species Partnership- deadline mid December.

TD/Friends of Environment-requires charitable status, applications 3 months prior to start

2010 RBC Blue Water Project Leadership Grants (due in March 2010) Applications for Community Action Grants are accepted year-round.

Shell Environment Fund Canada - under \$500 no deadline, amounts up to \$5.000 Feb. 29 and Sept. 30th

Ontario Trillium Foundation- Mar. 1, Jul. 1 and Nov.1