

PROJECT TITLE: Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative

RECIPIENT: Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA)

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: The purpose of the Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative (HHWI) is to build capacity with partners and the community to protect, enhance and create wetlands in Huron and Middlesex Counties. The wetlands improve water quality and quantity of surface water which flow into the Bayfield and Ausable Rivers and outlets to Lake Huron. As well, the HHWI provides outreach, planting events, and education to youth, landowners and the community on the benefits of wetlands and improving water quality. The Healthy Headwaters Wetlands would like to continue to restore five or more acres of wetland and riparian habitat in each Huron and Middlesex Counties.

PROJECT PARTNERS: Environment Canada, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation, Huron Stewardship Council, Maitland Valley Conservation Authority, Middlesex Stewardship Council, St. Clair Region Conservation Authority, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Huron Clean Water Project, and various landowners.

PROJECT LENGTH: 36 months

PROJECT SUMMARY: The Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative is a collaboration of conservation partners (Huron Stewardship Council, Middlesex Stewardship Council, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority), who seek to improve water quality and quantity within Huron County and Middlesex County. The wetland program assists landowners in restoring land back to natural wetland habitat and vegetative buffers, as well as provides education opportunities for youth and communities. During site visits, the conservation partners and conservation authority staff assist landowners with surveys, wetland design, and implementation of wetlands. The partners are building capacity while working with new contractors constructing the wetlands. Promotion of wetlands is achieved through outreach activities (e.g., site visits, community planting events, education programs for students, media releases).

The wetland restoration improves water quality (and drinking water) by storing water on the landscape, allowing plants to filter the nutrients and chemicals from water runoff flowing to our rivers and lakes and providing a slow release of water through the ground to replenish groundwater. The wetlands provide water storage, reducing the flooding and soil erosion during heavy surface flows, resulting in less sedimentation in our rivers and lakes.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- The HHWI has successfully restored 44 wetlands since 2008, enhancing over 189 hectares (467 acres) of wetland and riparian buffer habitat in Huron and Middlesex Counties
- In 2012, four wetlands were created, restoring 11.6 hectares (28.8 acres)
- One wetland was a 10.9 ha wetland swamp restored to original function
- 26,130 trees were planted, (14,000 trees at the Quinn wetland site that was restored in 2011)
- Provided information and wetland brochures to each landowner during site visits;
- Held one community planting event with 38 Exeter cubs and beavers planting 360 wetland plants at a landowner's wetland created in 2011

- Held two public tours, one in Bayfield Watershed and included St. Joseph School Wetland (30 people) and a Southwest Tree Planting Partners Tour, including Quinn Wetland (40 people)
- Created 'A Reference Guide for Coordinating a Wetland Restoration Program' Draft to build capacity within the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority and with partners

NEXT STEPS:

- Continue to meet one-on-one with landowners to conduct site assessments and surveys
- Provide wetland designs and mapping
- Apply for permits
- Find funding for landowners to implement wetland restoration on their properties
- Assist landowners in implementing riparian buffers and fencing livestock out of creeks and rivers
- Write tenders, send tenders out to contractors, hire contractors
- Oversee contractors restoring wetland projects
- Provide native wetland seed, plants and shrubs and oversee planting events and
- Monitor wetlands during spring snowmelt and heavy rain events, during summer dry conditions and evaluation of wetland berms
- Mail letters to landowners to promote the program
- Provide media releases to community papers to provide awareness of wetland restoration
- Wetland education programs and planting events for youth and communities

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Landowner cooperation is essential; most landowners prefer the one-on-one approach
- Funding is necessary for landowners to implement wetland creation or riparian areas on their land
- Completion of wetland creation can sometimes be delayed due to heavy precipitation, harvesting crops, or contractors schedules
- Typically, the interested landowners are not solely reliant on farm income and have farm land that they rent out and can retire some areas
- Landowners and contractors will talk to others about their projects
- Landowners are happy to provide flood updates and send photos of their wetlands after rain events, which keeps them involved in monitoring their wetland
- Sometimes it takes a few years of wetland awareness through letters and media releases before landowners contact us for a site visit

POTENTIAL FOLLOW-UP PROJECTS:

- Continue to work with interested landowners in protecting, enhancing and constructing wetlands
- Continue to work with partners and new contractors and build capacity in wetland restoration
- Continue to educate and provide wetland awareness to public, including community planting events
- Evaluate different innovative wetland restoration techniques, such as the floating wetlands to increase plants and filtration of water

Project Photos:

- a) Iredale Wetland creation at edge of field that typically floods, shortly after construction (April 2012)



- b) Iredale Wetland creation at edge of field that typically floods (August 2012)



- c) Iredale Wetland, Exeter cubs and scouts community planting (September 2012)



d) Wetland planting (September 2011) at Quinn Wetland



e) Quinn Wetland restoration (November 2011)



f) Planting 14,000 trees at Quinn Wetland (June 2012)

