

# Building a Framework for Lake Huron

*Think Tank #1*

*Report on Discussions*



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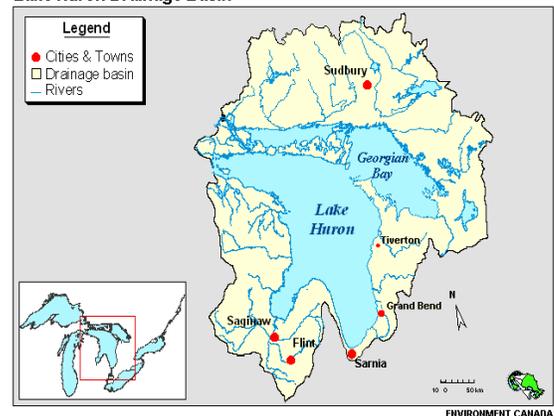
## Preamble

On December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005, 28 people representing various agencies and interests from the Lake Huron watershed met to take the first steps in formulating a basin wide approach to promoting the long-term health of Lake Huron.

Through our discussions, the concept of a Framework for Lake Huron was proposed. The intent of the framework is to:

- Be a community-driven approach;
- Be informed by the best available scientific knowledge;
- Connect or connect with existing initiatives;
- Promote new initiatives; and
- Add value or context to local efforts.

Lake Huron Drainage Basin



The purpose of the workshop was to learn from the experience and advice of community members and government agencies by gathering initial thoughts on what is needed, whether it is practical and to determine whether there is broad-based support for the development of a framework.

The following are the results of these discussions.

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# 1. Introduction

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## Background

Lake Huron is in the middle of the Great Lakes basin with inflows from Lakes Superior and Michigan and an outflow through the St. Clair River to Lake Erie. Lake Huron consists of four major bodies of water: the North Channel, Georgian Bay, Saginaw Bay (U.S side) and Lake Huron proper, and has the longest shoreline and more islands than any other lake in the world. Lake Huron has a diverse ecosystem (coastal wetlands, alvars, savannas, dunes) and contains significant natural and cultural heritage features that should be protected for future generations.

Lake Wide Management Plans (LaMPS) have been developed for four Great Lakes (Ontario, Erie, Michigan and Superior) through a top down approach that was led and implemented by government agencies. Lake Huron is the last of the Great Lakes to undertake a comprehensive planning process and this provides an opportunity to build upon the success of these LaMPS and develop a “Made for Lake Huron” strategy.

Canada and the United States endorsed the Lake Huron Bi-national Partnership in 2002 to coordinate environmental activities in the Lake Huron basin. This Lake Huron Bi-national Partnership is adopting a new approach that will combine the lessons learned from other LaMPS while focussing on priority issues on Lake Huron, such as contaminants, fish and wildlife habitats, and effects of non-native species. The intent of this iterative approach is to track emerging issues, establish priorities and promote appropriate actions in a timely and effective manner.

The Lake Huron Bi-national Partnership Action plan will focus on:

- sustainability
- accountability
- adaptive management
- a conservation ecosystem approach
- pollution reduction and prevention
- public and stakeholder participation
- best available science to inform management decisions
- a clear understanding of ecological impacts; and
- preventing impairment to beneficial uses

## Summary of Major Findings

The goal of the Lake Huron Think Tank was obtain the best advice and support of key groups and individuals with a vested interest in the Lake Huron basin, and to determine the need for a management framework. The following are the major findings:

1. There is support and desire to develop a basin wide approach to ensure the future health of Lake Huron.
2. A basin wide framework (or program) would assist agencies and stakeholders in undertaking and coordinating activities across the watershed through a consensus-based, community-driven approach.

3. A working group of both government and non-government people should be organized to help develop the framework. Once the framework has been developed it should be reviewed by the participants of this think tank workshop.
4. The framework must be flexible and adaptive, and provide direction and options on how communities and individuals can contribute to the future health of Lake Huron.
5. There is a need to focus on the implementation of the framework and not consultation. Extensive public consultation has already been undertaken through initiatives such as the Great Lakes Heritage Coast and this input should be considered as part of public consultation for this initiative.

## 2. Scoping the Framework and Other Approaches

The workshop discussion was complex as everyone brought their own preferences and experiences to the table. There was obvious agreement that the framework would be a foundation for a larger process and would be an integral component to coordinate community-based activities throughout the watershed. The intent of the framework is to identify common interests and put in place actions that best accomplish consistent basin wide goals.

Several metaphors were introduced to visually describe the purpose and scope of the framework.

In the first instance, the framework was described as an umbrella to provide direction and support for government agencies and non-government organizations. The framework would enable members of the Lake Huron community to work individually on common components and to identify specific local activities that are consistent with common principles, goals, targets and priorities for the health of the lake.



Another analogy was a "building under construction". The completed building represents the framework. The individual rooms are the issues (water levels, fish and wildlife) and the electrical and plumbing systems represent the connectivity between the issues. The construction workers are the government and non-government partners who are working together to complete the framework. The intention is not to have a static framework but rather to embrace an adaptive approach by allowing new additions or renovations to deal with emerging issues or changes in the ecosystem. The initial design of the foundation and the skeleton of the building represent the stage we are at now, the initial starting point.

The following suggestions should be considered when building a framework:

### What is the framework?

- The framework should be simple and provide a foundation that describes the process, how problems are approached, and the roles and responsibilities of agencies and community groups.
- The framework should result in action-oriented plans that focus on needs and helps to build community buy-in.
- It should be a practical and cost effective guide for establishing watershed-based goals, objectives, priorities and actions to protect and manage the ecosystem.
- It will be watershed (basin) based.
- It should provide guiding principles, priorities, goals, objectives, targets and actions to guide people in the right direction.
- Coordinates consistent approaches throughout the basin on common issues (e.g., protecting coastal wetlands, water quality).
- Be inclusive of government, NGOs and local community groups.
- Takes an adaptive management approach... “learning and adapting while doing”.
- Binds administrative cooperation and encourages stewardship.
- Provides practical tools and potential funding options (if available) for local stewardship activities that are linked to the bigger picture.
- It should articulate barriers/challenges to good decision-making.
- It will emphasize why it makes good economic sense to protect natural capital.
- It should include performance measures (e.g., trophic level).

### What will the framework look like?

- A transparent public document (or program) that defines its purpose, identifies issues and solutions, and explains the ecological and communal benefits derived from each action.
- Considers actions in the context of “use” (sustainable, capacity, assimilation and conservation), and identifies how use can occur in a non-consumptive way.
- The framework should be clear and concise. A more detailed implementation plan may be required to provide “the specifics”.
- May be defined by a geographical scope (e.g., North Channel, Georgian Bay, Lake Huron proper) to address specific issues and compliment other watershed-based activities.

### What will the framework do?

#### ***Identify, Protect and Rehabilitate Values***

- Further the identification, respect and conservation for Lake Huron’s natural features, functions and uses (e.g., globally rare and endemic species).
- Rehabilitate native fish, limit new exotic and invasive introductions, and improve and promote healthy coastal ecosystems and water quality.
- Enhance the basin’s biodiversity in harmony with its social and economical attributes.
- Restore the ecological health of the ecosystem.
- Promote strong environmental ethics and sustainable land use across the entire basin.
- Promote ethics and behavioural habits of resource conservation and sustainability.
- Ensure sustainable land use practices through diligent management and regulation.

#### ***Monitor Health***

- Enhance monitoring programs for stream rehabilitation, protection of water quality and recreation.

- Define the time scale for “sustainability” in terms of the Seven Generations concept of First Nations.

### **Create Awareness**

- Simplify the Lake Huron ecosystem concept, and break down broad concepts into smaller community-based activities (e.g., improve water quality by enhancing minimum standards for septic systems such as increased shoreline setbacks).
- Affect change by raising the profile of issues at the appropriate level of government and by user sector (e.g., boaters, property owners, farmers, etc.).
- Recognize the natural limits and stressors of ecosystems and promote “wise use” of resources.
- Promote self-regulating natural processes.
- Recognize that Lake Huron is subject to future development pressures and that the lake is a dynamic ecosystem and to expect some change.
- Promote the need and purpose of a Bi-national basin wide plan.
- Promote a “watershed-based” perspective that considers all components of the watershed (e.g., habitat, water inflows, fish populations dependent on tributaries).
- Build community awareness by promoting broad-scale public education and understanding of ecological processes, their natural variability, and the various impacts to Lake Huron (e.g., human activities and climate change).
- Encourage educational institutions to incorporate Great Lakes studies into educational curriculum.
- Promote awareness among the non-converted through focus groups, peer pressure and other approaches in order to educate and inform those who have not yet embraced environmental ethics.

*...focus on immediate success to build respect and get buy-in from the public*

*...actions should be proactive instead of reactive*

*...best advice*

### **Promote Partnerships**

- Provide a collective approach for strong integration and a harmonious balance between the environment and resource use.
- Promote and support local community-based actions to link responsibility and ownership of a shared resource.
- Promote a consensus-based vision for the lake.
- Promote non-territorial cross-sector partnerships to create a network of agencies and parties working locally for a basin wide cause.
- Promote a better understanding between resource user groups.
- Engage municipal partners (AMO/ROMA) and involve users of lake and basin resources.
- Build on existing knowledge through the engagement of citizens (e.g., EMAN citizen-based monitoring programs) to build on what we know and encourage long-term partnerships.

## **What information or data is needed to help prepare the framework?**

### **Background Information**

- Gather, synthesize and assess existing and new information.
- Create a database to house data from the entire basin (physical, chemical, biological, cultural, impacts) to be shared with all users.
- Use database to identify the most significant threats and develop measurable implementation approaches.
- Identify staffing resources and funding needs and identify potential support sources.
- Identify other resources to be leveraged from stewardship activities (money and volunteers), research projects (money, scientific talent), and monitoring programs (money, tools and talent).

## Approach

- Analyze best management practices (what is or isn't working).
- Involve other partners in order to identify and consider their needs, objectives and challenges.
- Consider existing community programs and approaches to be supported by the framework and identify gaps to be filled.
- Undertake a review of other similar basin wide approaches.
- Prepare an information package ("State of the Lake Report") that explores community group and agency issues and identifies shared interests, objectives, recommendations, etc.
- Understand the audience and the implementers in order to focus and allocate energy and resources in the right places.

## What other similar approaches should we consider?

The following are examples of other approaches that we need to research and consider:

1. *Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries* – a non-restrictive approach to fish community and environmental objectives.
2. *Tourism Industry Association* – includes an agreement/obligation to follow guiding principles and identifies actions and responsibilities of what people will do (e.g., municipalities).
3. *Great Lakes and other local groups with issue specific agendas* – (e.g., Fisheries Commission).
4. *Biosphere Reserves* – government led but at the grassroots level (e.g., Niagara Escarpment).
5. *Environmental Farm Plan* – a voluntary environmental management plan for individual farms which have been integrated into the agriculture framework on a national level.
6. *New York State Programs* – (e.g., upstream watershed funding to protect water quality).
7. *Industry Canada, Community Futures Development Corporations* – a non-prescriptive economic development program which provides local dollars and recruits local boards of directors.
8. *Grand River Strategy* – a good parallel action plan because of similar diversity and land uses.
9. *Ontario MNR Annex Advisory Committee*.
10. *SOLEC* and *State of the Great Lakes* reports.
11. *Lake Wide Management Plans (LaMPS)* – for four Great Lakes (Ontario, Erie, Michigan and Superior).

*It is better to build upon existing good examples, rather than reinvent the new wheel.*

*...best advice*

## What are the principles that must be considered in the design and implementation of the framework?

The principles to be applied are similar to those in place for many other programs. There was consensus on the following list of 6 priority principles and recognition that other principles would have to be considered:

1. Ecosystem-based approach;
2. Adaptive management;
3. Science-based;
4. Inclusive, engaging and easily understood;
5. Consensus-based; and
6. Integration with other planning and decision making processes.

## Who will use it and what is the scope?

All participants agreed that a framework has the potential to benefit the mandate and activities of governments (e.g., First Nations, federal, provincial, municipal and associated agencies), non-government organizations (e.g., community, environmental and recreational), property owners and resource users

The scope of the framework should be defined by geographical area, timeframe (e.g., seven generations) and by functional division (e.g., water level, fish habitat, tributaries, etc). While there was consensus that the geographic scope should be watershed based, it was recognized that the timeframe and functional divisions would require additional discussion in order to be inclusive of all interests.

## 3. Next Steps – A Process to Prepare the Framework

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Five major steps were identified to help move this initiative forward:

1. *Identify a Champion* – to act as a catalyst and to take the lead. The catalyst could include a single agency such as Environment Canada or a group of interested agencies.
2. *Establish a Working Group* – to meet and discuss the focus and content of the framework.
3. *Develop a Straw-dog Framework* – to confirm issues, scope, vision, targets and roles and responsibilities.
4. *Seek Consensus* – from government and non-government organizations on framework.
5. *Engage Partnerships to Implement* – identify who, where and how the program will be implemented.

### Step ONE – Identify a Champion to Act as a Catalyst and Lead the Program

- Environment Canada has already taken the lead by hosting this workshop and should continue to establish a work plan and obtain corporate and financial support to initiate in April 2006.

### Step TWO – Establish a Working Group

- Organize a Working Group to coordinate the process and prepare a draft framework.
- The Working Group should consist of an equal mix of government and non-government agencies and organizations, and does not need to represent all stakeholders at this stage.
- Possible representatives include EC, MNR, MOE, OMAFRA, Conservation Authorities and NGO's.
- The composition of the Working Group should include a range of skill sets (e.g., planners, biologists, community workers) balanced with representation from different perspectives. It is essential to have all interests involved.
- The Working Group should be comprised of leaders or champions that are well respected and representative of many issues and groups to build community-awareness and help get the process off the ground.

*The process of developing the framework is more valuable than the actual product*  
...best advice

- The Working Group should consider the establishment of sub-groups to accomplish specific tasks based on themes (e.g., water level, water quality, wetlands, and fish, or geographic area).

### **Step THREE – Prepare a Draft Framework**

- The Working Group will be responsible for the preparation of the draft and final framework.
- Consider the use of a “writer” to work with the Working Group to prepare the draft framework. The Working Group would review the draft framework, provide focus, recommend strategies and content, and seek consensus on a final product with other stakeholders (perhaps with the Think Tank #1).
- Identify and list the significant issues and impacts and set priorities, implementation activities and tools, and establish bench marks.
- Consider preparing the framework in stages – don’t try to do everything at once. One suggestion was to pick one issue to tackle first (e.g., water, “the sustenance of life”) and determine who will be involved and how it will be completed.
- Compile information gathered from public consultation initiatives to date to enable the planning process to be productive, non-repetitive and forward thinking.

### **Step FOUR – Seek Consensus on Framework**

- Prepare a Communications/Public Involvement Strategy to ensure successful engagement of public and partnerships.
- Make the draft framework available to a wider group and make revisions based on feedback before finalizing the approach.
- Consider a series of workshops to engage the broader public, but be careful of too much public involvement due to the lessons learned from the Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative. There is a need to get common sense actions in place, rather than delay for more consultation.
- Promote community involvement in the decision-making process to build awareness and buy-in.
- Engage and interact with the local community – involve all stakeholders through a survey or workshops, to identify areas of interest, concerns and solutions. Results should be synthesized into a task list for implementation.
- Build community consensus by facilitating workshops to involve various communities in the process to: collect and confirm information; set a vision; and seek feedback.
- Implementation should be the main focus of this phase and promoted through broad consultation.
- Reconvene a “Think Tank” session at the end of this process (mid-October) to discuss next steps (e.g., at the Lake Huron Symposium October, 2006).

*...avoid over-consultation by incorporating an adaptive approach.  
 ... engage the public with options (targets) before approaching communities, and follow through with results  
 ...best advice*

### **Step FIVE – Engage Partners to Implement Framework**

- Develop a Marketing Strategy that focuses on the challenges of sustainable use and to educate the non-converted.
- Engage specific partners and consider pilot projects that have achievable short term tasks.

## What is the potential timeline?

January 2006	Release draft report to members of Think Tank
February 2006	Environment Canada prepares and submits funding proposal for approval
April 2006	Initiate Steps 2 and 3
October 2006	Consider attending the Lake Huron symposium for incorporating an international aspect and obtaining feedback on Draft Framework
April 2007	Consider a request for funding and support during the COA funding re-negotiations

## 4. A Summary of Best Advice for Success

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The following provides a summary of the best advice to help ensure the success of this initiative:

### Preparing the Framework

- Record and acknowledge all issues to get “broad support”. Everyone must find a “touchstone” in the framework to make it applicable to their mandate and associated activities.
- Establish themes.
- The issues to be addressed are quite complex and it is important that we focus on common issues, as a starting point, and recognize their connectivity to the broader perspective.
- Focus objectives on local issues and the identified target audience.
- It is important to clearly define and understand the roles and responsibilities of each level of government and community groups.
- Need to involve corporate decision-makers in the process in order to obtain corporate buy-in.
- Agency mandates should be incorporated into the framework.
- Consider the linkages to international partners.
- While we must plan for the long-term, we must also identify and implement short-term actions to achieve some immediate success. We may have to consider tackling low priority issues right away to get the momentum started.
- Targets and objectives must be prioritized and all actions must be sufficient and measurable.
- Provide many options to obtain buy-in from all potential participants and promote long-term behavioural changes.
- Encourage all participants to be responsible for their actions – follow through and do it!
- Provide a reporting structure.
- When designing the framework we must maintain an open planning process and promote momentum to develop synergy and success.
- Everyone must always remain open-minded about conflicting interests and changing environments.
- Continue to monitor and collect new information.

*“We keep telling people how important the lakes are, but we need to understand what is going on and identify smaller actions we can do to get the momentum moving...”*

*...the biggest challenge is getting the program up and running and changing attitudes...”*

### Increasing Awareness through Communication and Promoting Partnerships

- Provide opportunities to build the capacity of community groups and individuals.
- Be careful not to build expectations.
- Explain the importance of protecting the Great Lakes basin and relay the urgency for action.
- Maintain open lines of communication for collaboration and capacity building.

- Build long-term relationships.
- Include all stakeholders (e.g., organizations, experts and disciplines) that are interested in participating in the process and identify ways to engage the non-converted.
- Build on existing community approaches/programs to increase rate of adoption at that level
- Use scientific-based information and appropriate, but simple (Grade 8), terminology in communications to promote behavioural changes.
- Provide integration and accessibility to data.
- Provide useful tools that are locally accessible and meaningful to address local issues at the ground level such as best management practices, regulations, management options, monitoring programs, stewardship opportunities, education and communication packages, and implementation actions (e.g., summer student program, septic system inspection, air quality monitoring).

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