

Report of the 2009 Lake Huron-Georgian Bay Environmental Youth Summit

*Engaging youth in community action for a sustainable
Lake Huron-Georgian Bay Watershed*

Sponsored by: Environment Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, and Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, Huron Business Development Centre, Huron County Planning Department

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Introduction

Federal and provincial agencies working on the Lake Huron Framework for Community Action have held three Lake Huron-Georgian Bay Ecosystem Youth Summits. The summits took place in Tobermory in 2007 and Parry Sound in 2008. In 2009, the Youth Summit occurred south of Goderich, near Bayfield, on the weekend of September 25 to 27. The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, Huron Business Development Centre and the Huron County Planning Department assisted in planning and hosting the 2009 Youth Summit.

The purpose of this report is to review the youth summit program and offer some recommendations for future events. Further this report will highlight key areas of organization and provide a template timeline for a generic youth summit process.

Background

The purpose of the Youth Summit is to foster a community-based approach to restoring and protecting the lands and waters of the Lake Huron-Georgian Bay watershed through education, awareness and community action. Participating students who attend the Summit return to their home communities and act as Youth Ambassadors (YAYAs). The intent of the program is twofold: 1) that the students will encourage their fellow students and citizens to undertake activities that benefit their local environment; and 2) that they will also lead by example as they implement the activities outlined in personal action plans that they develop at the Youth Summit.

Organizers for the Youth Summit aim to have 30 to 40 students and seven to 10 teachers participate in the summit (**Table 1**). For example, in September 2009, 28 Grade 11 & 12 students and five teachers from locations within the Lake Huron watershed attended (**Appendix A**). Through the weekend's program, students were provided with background information and resource materials to become active environmental ambassadors in their home communities.

Following the Summit, YAYAs were paired with mentors in their communities who could support them as they make presentations at school assemblies, municipal councils, water festivals and other environmental events across the watershed. The students are also encouraged to communicate with other students and Summit staff via Facebook and email. Committee members also encourage the students with follow-up phone calls, emails and Facebook pokes and tags.

Table 1: Number of Youth Summit Attendees in 2007, 2008, 2009

Youth Summit	Number of Attendees
Tobermory 2007	29 students and seven teachers
Parry Sound 2008	33 students and eight teachers
Bayfield 2009	28 and five teachers

Actions documented from the 2007 Youth Summit are found in **Appendix B**. Considerable effort by steering committee members ensured that these activities were documented from the 2007 event. Less follow-up after the 2008 event, meant that activities undertaken by participants were not documented.

Approach

This section of the report documents the key areas of organization for a Youth Summit. In January 2009, a steering committee of provincial and federal members of the Lake Huron Community Action Framework and members from local organizations determined that there were four main activities:

1. Registration;
2. Agenda;
3. Transportation; and
4. Actual event logistics (Food, Accommodations, scheduling events)

A work plan and a budget was developed from this list (**Appendix C and D**, respectively). Once a coordinator is established registration and transportation become important tasks that require ongoing dialogue between the coordinator and the various Boards of Education and the teachers from February to September. A revised work plan and time plan for future summits, based on the 2009 event, can be found in **Appendix E**. The agenda and ultimate event logistics were coordinated by first the committee and eventually a smaller committee.

Agenda

Through the course of regular teleconferences held from January through September of 2009, the steering committee developed the following list of activities for the 2009 Summit:

1. Read the Lake Huron Community Action Framework, sign the charter and take action.
2. Build network around Lake Huron and Georgian Bay.
3. Focus on outcomes and learning skills.

4. Improve habitat and water quality in the Lake Huron watershed.
5. Assess our own actions as individuals and communities.
6. Learn about Lake Huron Ecosystem issues.
7. Presentations 101: How to approach municipal councils or other community groups. It should be stressed that they can go back to present to a council year after year as new ideas and new projects arise.
8. Return home with a toolkit that includes a presentation template.
9. Brainstorm a list of projects for the students to consider.
10. Councillors and Water Protection Steering Committee members should be invited to the Summit.

A list of this nature that documents required activities would be helpful for organizing committees to ensure that agenda activities reflect overall summit objectives. An abbreviated 2009 agenda is attached (**Appendix F**).

Some of the specific goals and ideas for the 2009 Youth Summit were derived from the previous youth summits and included: (Achieved goals in 2009 are check-marked.)

- Less time in presentation and more hike time
- Earlier and more streamlined registration process and more clarity required upfront about student's role and responsibility
- A dune walk
- A farm visit
- Highlight river biodiversity
- Contact school boards early
- Local school board member on steering committee
- Determine number of registrants early
- Identify local mentors early
- Document the process
- Provide an evaluation form for students (**Appendix G**)
- Highlight local food
- Simplify the message – relate it to the Framework

Results

Below are the ideas generated from Sunday's action planning with the YAYAs. These ideas were incorporated into the matrix sent to the students as a follow-up in October, 2009.

What Can You Do? –Action Plan Brainstorming Session

- Write letters
- Newspaper article
- Present to the Environmental Club
- Go to farmer's market to promote
- Meet local mayor
- Make a display or brochure

- Promote sustainable land uses
- Yellow Fish Road
- Use school page in local paper
- Promote with student council
- Do a battery challenge at school
- Raise dollars with poster challenge
- Bike-a-thon
- Lights off one period a week
- Green square in hallway – communicate
- Plant trees, cleanups
- Clean up pond and create native plant buffer
- Get student body engaged
- Create incentives, use website to promote compost and local gardening
- Community service hours to clean up river
- Promote local 100-mile diet
- Support existing initiatives (i.e., compost, water bottles, re-useable dishes in cafeteria)
- Wind turbine construction (demo)
- Promote wise use of washroom paper
- Plant native species to prevent river erosion
- Swap sale (reuse)

Students have been matched with local mentors via email. Most attendees are signed up on the group's Facebook page. A conference call with the YAYA's occurred on November 17, 2009 at noon. Students will be able to participate and provide updates of their actions via their school office phone. Jacqui LaPorte, Rick Czepita and Randy French will facilitate this call. Students have also been sent a matrix (**Appendix H**) that they can use to keep track of their actions throughout the year. The matrix is an organizational tool, idea generator and motivator. However, the discussion on November 17, 2009 suggested that it might be difficult for students to use. This matrix may be more useful for the steering committee.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In October 2009, two teleconferences were held to review the 2009 Youth Summit, and to prepare recommendations to the Steering Committee for the 2010 Summit. A summary of the student and teacher evaluation and conversations after the 2009 Youth Summit is found in **Appendix I**. The general comments of the Committee members and the evaluations from the YAYAs were positive.

It was also decided that a report could help to sum up the goals, achievements and shortfalls of the Youth Summit Program. This report is a product of that conversation. I would like to contain the discussion to four key points:

- 1) the students need to be engaged prior to, at and after the summit;
- 2) the focus of the agenda should be identification and potential solutions to one, two, or three key Lake Huron issues, that the students can be engaged in upon their return to their community. Water quality improvement with respect to

- land use is an obvious issue. The agenda needs to be outcome oriented (i.e., signed charters from all attendees; a game plan for how to get more signatures, specific watershed actions etc.); and
- 3) a Head Coordinator needs to be designated for the event.

Engaging Students

Attendees of the past youth summits, have suggested that there needs to be fewer classroom presentations at the youth summit. There is a lot of information that we could present regarding Lake Huron issues and we really need to focus on a few key issues that the students could follow on their return to their communities. An over-riding issue for all participants is likely water quality. A discussion about land-use, non-point source pollution and best management practices would help guide students in putting some structure to their interests. I would also suggest that we ask the students why they came to the youth summit.

Prior to the summit, the registration process needs a little more attention. A revised registration form has been produced (**Appendix J**) and calls to the teachers and students in the two weeks prior to the event should help to reduce cancellations.

Following the Youth Summit, it is important for the Steering Committee to have conference calls and that mentors and the youth connect. In 2008, mentors contacted the students and the Coordinator for that event thought that helped students take actions.

The Agenda

Perhaps if we focus on the issues, using water quality impairments as an example, we could then highlight the Framework as a tool, rather than trying to teach the Framework as a stand alone document. A discussion about non-point sources of pollution needs to have hands-on activities. There probably could be fewer sessions. Broadly, I think less information should be covered but the information could be presented in a more directed fashion.

Friday pm - Why you came? What we (the steering committee) are doing? (speed dating idea)

Saturday am – outdoor event - highlight specific issues - What does non-point source pollution look like in forestry, mining, urban development, agricultural areas?

Saturday early pm – discussion - what are some potential solutions

Saturday late pm – hands on enhancement project

Saturday night – discussion re: balance land use and environment

Sunday – action plans

Coordination

In order to be accountable for the safety of the students involved, a head coordinator should be designated for the event.