

Summary of findings of the Rideau Lakes Watershed Management Plan Business Community Meetings

September 12, 2005, Westport

The two Rideau Lakes Watershed public meetings held by the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA) during the summer months were well-attended and some interesting input from members of the public and interest groups was collected. However, the RVCA felt that the business side of the local community had not been well represented. The environment and economy of the Rideau Lakes Watershed are so directly linked that to exclude one interest group would result in an inaccurate, incomplete plan. The participation of the business community, therefore, was essential to the successful development and implementation of this management plan.

To ensure that the Rideau Lakes business community had a more convenient opportunity to voice their vision and concerns as they pertain to the health of the watershed, the RVCA held two additional meetings on September 12th, specifically targeting local businesses. Participants at the two Westport meetings included members of the public, lake associations and members of the local business community representing rental cottages, bed and breakfasts, real estate agencies and bait and tackle shops.

The purpose of the meetings was to hear from the community about their vision for the Rideau Lakes Watershed, the issues that concern them and the actions they felt should be taken to overcome the challenges facing the area. Although the business community was better represented than at prior meetings, a larger number of the participants were lake residents.

Following presentations about watershed planning and what is currently known about the Rideau Lakes Watershed, participants were asked to contribute to the watershed planning process. By imagining themselves in the year 2025, participants were asked to describe what the watershed looked, felt, and smelled like once the watershed management plan had been implemented for 20 years. Once a vision was established, participants were asked to answer a series of three questions pertaining to the issues and challenges facing the watershed, possible solutions to overcome those challenges, and the priorities that the watershed plan should address first. The following is a summary of participants responses for the two meetings separately.

Afternoon (3-5 p.m.) meeting

Watercraft in 2025 are used in a safe and quiet manner on water of good quality while the size of watercraft used is determined by the size of the lake on which it is used. Cattle have been excluded from waterways, water levels are good, shorelines are healthy and invasive species have been eliminated.

Low density shoreline development and rigorous septic re-inspection programs (in partnership with financial assistance programs) help maintain good habitat for fish and wildlife while user friendly, economical garbage dumps have reduced litter in and out of the water. Finally, government regulations have become more flexible and take into consideration the unique character of each lake.

Having outlined a clear vision for the future of the watershed, participants set out in pairs to list and prioritize the issues facing the area and suggest ways to address them. The summarized results of this exercise are listed in the table below.

Current Challenges

- ◆ Management of invasive species
- ◆ Threatened water quality
 - Cattle access
 - Geese
 - Grey/black water discharge
- ◆ Poor waste management
 - Few clean-up programs, low participation
 - Accessibility and cost of waste disposal
- ◆ Lack of education (public and government) about environmental issues
 - Invasive species
 - Disrespectful and unsafe use of recreational vehicles and watercraft
 - Cost to property owners to comply with regulations
 - Regulation of water levels
- ◆ Lack of communication within government as well as between government and the public about environmental issues
 - Regional, lake issues
 - New regulations
 - Stewardship programs
 - Incentive programs
- ◆ Increased demand on natural resources
 - Commercial fishing
 - Sale of water resources

Solutions

- ◆ Invasive species checks at boat launches
- ◆ Provide education and action strategies to the public to prevent the spread of invasive species

- ◆ Monitor holding tanks on yachts prior to allowing them to lock through the system
- ◆ Enforce existing grey/black water discharge regulations
- ◆ Enact a law to prevent cattle access to waterways

- ◆ Townships should facilitate means of getting rid of garbage, recycling and household hazardous waste through reduced fees and increased opportunities
- ◆ Well advertised and accommodating environmental cleanup programs
- ◆ Provide incentives for shoreline and litter cleanup
- ◆ Legislate use of clear garbage bags to encourage recycling

- ◆ Educate visitors about responsible tourism
- ◆ Initiate a media program to educate everyone (TV, radio, print)
- ◆ Government needs to take environmental issues into consideration when making decisions e.g. water levels
- ◆ Improved education about commercial fishery benefits to the sport fishery

- ◆ Market the watershed as a prime destination for environmentally friendly tourism and ensure visitors know they are expected to respect the environment while visiting

- ◆ Regulatory bodies work more closely together e.g. Ministry of Northern Affairs and Mining, RVCA and Ministry of Tourism
- ◆ Improved communication about the issues (more meetings) with all government, regulators and residents
- ◆ A hotline number for active lake associations

- ◆ Ban the sale of lake and groundwater
- ◆ Ban commercial fishing
- ◆ Better balance commercial fishery to ensure a healthy sport fishery for all fish species

- ◆ Limit boat size based on lake size

Top priorities

- ✓ Elimination of e-coli contamination of surface water and general improvement of water quality
- ✓ Better communication of water quality results
- ✓ Introduction of active septic re-inspection programs
- ✓ More environmental clean-up programs
- ✓ Enforcement of existing laws and regulations
- ✓ New regulations relating to boat size relative to lake size
- ✓ Increase tourism and marketing of the waterway

Evening (7-9 p.m.) meeting

Representation of the business community was greater in the evening although their visions for the watershed and the issues that concerned them were similar to those of the general public.

In 2025 participants launched their renewable energy watercraft at public boat launches that provided services including holding tank pumps, and education about lake issues. Once on the lake, they enjoyed the natural looking shoreline, the numerous parks and greenspace, and fishing for plentiful native species while drinking water straight from the lake. This has become possible because both residents and visitors understand and respect the lake ecosystems.

Thanks to education programs and increased tax revenue, every septic system in the watershed is up to standard. This is not to say evening participants want higher taxes, but they dream that the Rideau Lakes watershed is home to a vibrant four season economy that provides jobs for local people and where tax dollars stay in the region.

Communication between government and the public has improved in 2025 leading to less involvement of the federal and provincial governments in regulating certain aspects of the watershed. The RVCA, on the other hand, has been given more authority and is working to maintain the watershed in its current healthy state. Lake associations are now responsible for all decisions regarding lake stewardship and water levels on their respective lakes.

Having outlined a clear vision for the future of the watershed, participants set out in pairs to list and prioritize the issues facing the area and suggest ways to address them. The summarized results of this exercise are listed in the table below.

Current Challenges

- ◆ Management of invasive species
- ◆ Erosion of shorelines
- ◆ Threats to water quality
 - Salt, lawn chemicals
 - Agricultural run-off, cattle
- ◆ Increased demand on natural resources
 - Commercial fishery
 - Lack of sport fish
 - Groundwater
 - Mining
- ◆ Media coverage of poor resource management and effect on economy
- ◆ Environmental issues
 - Not a high enough priority

- Public apathy
- Poor communication
- Large number of users do not have a stake in future of watershed
- ◆ Water level management
 - Impacts on aquatic health
 - Lack of accountability, communication
- ◆ Government regulations
 - Over regulation of drinking water
 - Regulations are too broadly applied
 - May drive small businesses under and force owners of older properties to sell
- ◆ Too many agencies trying to manage the watershed
 - Lack of community voice, control over local resources
- ◆ Watercraft safety

Solutions

- ◆ Inspection of all boats at public launches
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Vegetative buffers
- ◆ Restriction of boat size
- ◆ Enforcement of speed limits by OPP
- ◆ More holding tank pumping stations
- ◆ Eliminate livestock access to waterways
- ◆ Stiffer fines and penalties for poor environmental practices
- ◆ Legislation and penalties focused on preserving water health
- ◆ Regulate replacement of faulty septic systems
- ◆ Septic re-inspection programs
- ◆ Ban or better balance the commercial fishery over multiple lakes
- ◆ Limit size of homes and number of bathrooms
- ◆ Mandate conservation technology for new homes (e.g. cisterns)
- ◆ Interactive website for local information
- ◆ Active lake associations
- ◆ Education for everyone
- ◆ School programs to educate the next generation
- ◆ Education beyond the shoreline
- ◆ Make MNR and Parks Canada accountable to lake associations
- ◆ Control of water levels by local groups

- ◆ Conservation Authority regulations should supersede some federal and provincial laws and regulations
- ◆ Government assistance programs to help businesses and property owners meet standards and new legislation (e.g. drinking water, septic upgrades)
- ◆ Better communication between government and the public
- ◆ More tax dollars should stay in region

- ◆ More control of land and resources by municipalities
- ◆ Local groups have more say about resource management

- ◆ Limit boat size based on lake size
- ◆ Ban seadoos from smaller lakes
- ◆ OPP enforcement of speed limits

Top priorities

- ✓ Better management of water levels
- ✓ Improved communication between Parks Canada, MNR and lake residents
- ✓ Reduce erosion
- ✓ Monitor and improve water quality
- ✓ Control weed and algae growth
- ✓ Replacement of old septic systems
- ✓ Balance growth and conservation
- ✓ Control commercial fishery and improve sport fishery
- ✓ Manage invasive species
- ✓ Give community a bigger voice in resource management
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Government assistance programs to help businesses and residents meet new standards
- ✓ Move away from regulating building permits new water, take a more holistic approach to watershed health

Businesses that would like to share their vision for the future of the Rideau Lakes Watershed but could not attend the meetings should contact Lynn Preston at 1-800-267-3504 Ext. 1171 or email lynn.preston@rideauvalley.on.ca.