

Exploring Opportunities for Environmental Investment in Coastal Areas of the CRCA

Summary of Recommendations

(Prepared January 2013)

Background

In the fall of 2012 the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority (CRCA) retained a project team at the Queen's University School of Urban and Regional Planning to conduct independent research on the Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River coastline between Brockville and Greater Napanee. This project was the latest venture in a long history of collaboration between the Conservation Authority and the School.

The focus of the research was on potential economic opportunities along the Cataraqui Region coastline and how they relate to environmental conservation, and vice versa. The team was asked to provide the CRCA and coastal communities with ideas that could be used to inform sound planning and management practice, as well as further research.

This document provides a brief overview of the team's recommendations, which were published December 2012 in a report that is available from the CRCA.

The final report by the Queen's University School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP 825, Fall 2012) can be found on:

<http://www.cataraqueiregion.on.ca/internal/SURP825Report.html>

Setting

The Cataraqui Region is home to approximately 210,000 people, most of who live and work in coastal communities. The coastline along the Lake and River varies considerably in respects to geography, ownership, access, land uses and municipal policies. It is an intrinsically important asset to all coastal communities as it provides a drinking water source, economic potential and quality of place.

Research Questions

The primary research question was: "Will coastal communities in the Cataraqui Region derive socio-economic benefits from environmental investment in waterfront lands and amenities?" Five supporting questions were also explored:

1. What is the present situation with respect to conservation, water-related tourism and recreation along the coastline?
2. Which trends are important for communities along the coastline? Which challenges and opportunities are likely to emerge that might influence their economy?
3. What should be done along the Cataraqui Region coastline?
4. Are local policies and practices supportive?
5. Will the coastal communities benefit?

The project team often considered the relationships between economic development and conservation. They noted that vital communities tend to support conservation work, while there is also a threshold at which excessive development compromises the integrity of natural spaces and systems.

Methods

Data collection consisted of an analysis of the spatial, geographic and legislative context, as well as relevant case studies. Current literature was also reviewed to gain understanding of relevant themes and concepts pertaining to the study area. In addition, a workshop was held with local stakeholders from a wide variety of backgrounds. The event brought local perspectives to the attention of the team, and helped to shape their recommendations.

Context

As part of their research the project team analysed numerous aspects of the study area. They made the following observations about the coastline of the Cataraqui Region:

- There are extensive natural resources which provide social and economic benefits
- Environmental threats exist such as invasive species and blue-green algae
- The population is aging
- The economy is growing relatively slowly, and is based on sectors such as public services and health care (notably in Kingston), manufacturing and trade
- There is good water and wastewater infrastructure, with many recent upgrades (e.g. Ravensview Wastewater Treatment Plant, Kingston)
- Three major Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa) are accessible via road, rail and air; also, ferries play important roles as both tourist attractions and as a mode of transporting people and goods
- Land values are relatively stable
- Waterfront amenities are fragmented, but there are opportunities for linkages and enhancement of public access
- There are extensive heritage resources, disconnected from each other
- The eight municipalities in the study area have three common policy goals in their planning documents (strengthening linkages, keeping professionals in the area, and ensuring environmentally sensitive area protection and development compatibility)

Recommendations

The project team made seven recommendations:

1) Create a prioritization toolkit for natural and cultural assets

- Conduct further work to map the natural heritage system of fish and wildlife habitat and identify priority locations for conservation
- Prioritize cultural assets for public investment and promotion

2) Inter-municipal coordination in regards to shoreline development policies and restrictions

- Promote policy harmonization as means to consistent environmental protection and clear direction to development proponents
- Consider lot coverage, natural cover and water setbacks

3) Improve physical linkages in the study area

- Improve cycle lanes and paths along the coastline
- Coordinate signs, websites, tourism promotion
- Consider waterborne connections such as water taxis and boat rentals

4) Improve tourism marketing through themed packages, special group marketing and study

- Package activities such as kayaking and heritage tours
- Promote the Cataraqui Region to urban Ontarians seeking a short vacation
- Continue the work of the Great Waterway (e.g. website, visitor surveys)

5) Pursue opportunities for enhancing protection and accessibility of coastal lands

- Consider the overall network of public and non-profit lands along the coastline
- Maintain or improve boating access
- Consider land acquisition or other forms of protection at locations such as Grass Creek, Hay Bay, Landon's Bay, the Madoma Marsh, and Nicholson's Point

6) Promotion of research and development of water technologies and green infrastructure

- Develop water technologies, such as water conservation
- Invest in green infrastructure, such as innovative methods of stormwater management that are resilient to climate change
- Partner with Queen's University, Royal Military College and St. Lawrence College

7) Improve accessibility by addressing 8-80 cities principles and guidelines

- Ensure that waterfront spaces are easily accessible, safe and enjoyable for all people of different ages and abilities

For More Information

Rob McRae MCIP, RPP
Watershed Planning Coordinator
Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority
1641 Perth Road, P.O. Box 160
Glenburnie ON K0H 1S0
robmcrae@cataraquiregion.on.ca



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CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

