

Ausable Bayfield
Conservation Strategy Development Team
Notes (Draft) from Meeting - January 13, 2011

The fourth meeting of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Strategy Development Team began at 7:00 p.m. at the South Huron District High School in Exeter.

Attending were:

Dave Crockett, David Kemp, Jennette Walker, Ted Briggs, Joe Vermunt, Mike Leitch, Bailey Williams, Claire Dodds, Jim Reith

Jacqui Laporte and Muriel Allingham joined the meeting by phone and web conference.

Tom Prout, ABCA General Manager, and Tim Cumming, ABCA Communications Specialist, welcomed members and thanked them for their input in developing the new Conservation Strategy. Tim has been to high schools promoting youth input and will approach the municipalities again since their recent municipal elections for nominations to the team. There are many youth entries for the Watershed Tales environmental story writing contest and Tim thanked the Conservation Strategy team members (Muriel and Steve) who were on the judging panel. Tom thanked members for participating in last month's meeting, which was held by telephone due to the weather conditions.

Joe Vermunt stated the Huron Federation of Agriculture might consider funding and/or information towards the ABCA Conservation Strategy youth outreach and suggested Tim may want to attend a Federation meeting to present.

Tom introduced Mari Veliz, ABCA Healthy Watersheds Coordinator, who reviewed how her department developed the ABCA Watershed Report Card. There can be up to 155 indicators for water quality. Conservation Ontario recommended three: phosphorous, E. coli and benthic invertebrates. Forest data is also an important factor with 30% + being ideal forest cover and 10% of watershed area is ideal as the forest interior.

The ABCA watershed was divided into 16 sub-watersheds (e.g., Eight Ausable, two Parkhill, three Bayfield, two Lake Huron Tributaries and one Mud Creek) and a stakeholders' committee reviewed the content. Water samples at each of the 16 watersheds were taken once a month from March to November. Watershed grades are based on forest and surface water conditions. Each smaller watershed was graded in the Report Card and are compared to the whole watershed with recommendations.

An important recommendation is for landowners to complete an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) program and a Rural Landowner Stewardship Guide to help them look at their own property to see how they can improve. The Watershed Report Card is an ongoing process, and Mari states the grades are important but more specific water quality values are also important. The Report Card promotes stewardship and gives landowners a look at their own watershed.

Dave Crockett wondered if forest cover trends are changing. Mike Leitch noted bugs like the Emerald Ash Borer have changed the forests. Tom said when a subdivision goes up in a wooded area, it takes a long time to get that percentage of forest cover back. Tom also noted that some parts of our watershed have a high level of fluoride which increases the phosphorous levels.

Dave Crockett asked how ABCA works with areas that are good to make them better, and how it changes over time. Tom replied that stewardship is voluntary, and the Conservation Authority has developed a long-term Land Securement Fund to protect large forest cover. Dave has planted trees along his property and wants to encourage others to do the same. There are stewardship workbooks available for non-farm, and lakeshore communities as well as the Environmental Farm Plan workbooks.

Dave wondered if municipalities could plant more trees. Jennette Walker said municipalities are limited due to gas, hydro lines, etc., along the side of the road. Mike Leitch also noted when larger trees are taken down, they are quite often not replaced and municipal drains need one side left open for clean out.

Joe Vermunt said the windbreak plantings are good but are not increasing or replacing interior forests which are needed for some wildlife species. trees on the lakeshore replaces trees cover. Joe said some farmers will spend their money to plant trees, but some farmers find that trees are a hindrance for farm maintenance, but thinks the next generation will have a more environmental awareness shift. Tom stated a well maintained woodlot can be logged every 10 years. Joe believes northern Ontario has better watershed report card grades due to less population and less productive farm land.

Mike Leitch wondered how to protect conservation practices at the back of a property by the next landowner after a land acquisition. Tom replied conservation easements are available and they have restrictions for the next owner. Another option is to donate land to the conservation authority to ensure stewardship practices are continued.

Muriel Allingham asked if the ABCA assists landowners with forestry practices. Tom replied the ABCA staff can assist with forest management planning, thinning, stewardship practices and grants. Jennette suggested carbon credits may increase landowner interest in managing their woodlots. Tom noted Pinery Provincial Park is the largest oak savanna in the world, but has to be burnt occasionally to encourage oak growth.

Joe encouraged the Conservation Authority and county to try to get more information out to the public on the EFP, even though the available funding goes fast. Tom said Alberta targets areas for stewardship.

Jim wonders why the Nairn Creek area does not have Grades of A and B. Mari said the area is geologically spring-fed and the landowners had a tremendous uptake of stewardship. They recognize a good area and want to protect it. Jim said there is a natural buffer along Nairn Creek.

Tom noted Lake Huron has been earmarked as having relatively good water quality overall, compared to some lakes, for years and there is now more support to protect its relatively good water quality status. it is being looked at closer. Ted Briggs said the Lake Huron South East

Shore Working Group is looking at areas of remediation but also areas of good water quality that need to be protected.

Dave Kemp thought the presentation was very informative, but the team needs to look at the report card- grades. He toured the Gullies project last fall, and has seen the destruction at the end of the gullies. He would like to develop controlled areas to prevent flooding. Tom noted this also pertains to urban development. Alec Scott or Davin Heinbuck could present rain gauge data to show the amount of water in different watershed areas. The group decided they would like information on flood monitoring and flows at the next meeting. Dave wondered if areas are missing and are they being targeted. Tom noted it is all voluntary, even if 100% funding is available, the landowner has to agree to it. Also, funding sources determine what is offered to the landowners.

Tim Cumming explained the Matrix tool which had been proposed at a previous meeting and developed in consultation with a former team member. He said team members could take the items from the 1993 strategy and populate the Matrix under categories of actions to:

- 1) Start doing,
- 2) Continue doing, or
- 3) Stop doing. The group reviewed the concept and felt they are not yet at the stage to proceed with the Matrix. Tom suggests members review the 1993 Strategy to see what issues / priorities are missing or not identified.

Dave Kemp wonders the location within the watershed of people who are accessing and supporting the stewardship practices and how to motivate people. He feels we should publicize what is working. Mari will make a written report showing where projects have happened and what worked.

Tom suggested the next meeting could be held at the ABCA office. The group agreed this was a good idea. The next meeting is on Wednesday, February 2nd, 2011.

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.