

# **Morrison Dam Conservation Area**

## **MacNaughton - Morrison Trail**

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### **A. Introduction**

Morrison Dam Conservation Area was created with the Morrison Dam and Reservoir project in 1959. The reservoir was a water supply for the canning factory in Exeter and a project of the ABCA and Town of Exeter.

In the 45 years since the project transformed a river valley into a reservoir, it has become a healthy lake ecosystem with a complete aquatic ecosystem. It is influenced by upstream stresses of the Ausable River and cleanses the water by filtering out impurities. However, due to its shallow depth, it may increase the temperature of the downstream Ausable River.

Over the years, a trail system was developed around the lake and in the forests. The lake also became an important recreation area for year-round fishing and canoeing. In recent years, few people use the lake for swimming. In a municipality with about three percent forest cover, the conservation area is an island of nature for terrestrial and aquatic species and humans.

The canning factory no longer uses the reservoir as a water supply but benefits that were secondary at the time of its development are important to the community and the watershed. Although no formal attendance records are kept, it is estimated that thousands of people use the area for recreation annually with hiking and fishing as the main activities.

A granular surface has been applied to the main nature trails to deal with the pedestrian traffic and make it safe for a wider variety of users including wheelchairs, runners and multi-season use. This also protects the marsh and forest plants by allowing people to stay on the trails rather than creating new trails around wet areas. Side trails are kept in a natural surface but are pruned regularly.

The MacNaughton - Morrison Trail follows the Ausable River between Exeter and Morrison Line. Although used informally for decades, agreements with landowners along the trail has resulted in a high quality, year-round nature trail.

The Ausable Headwaters subwatershed has a high stress rating for natural area loss making the Morrison Dam Conservation Area an important subwatershed feature. This also makes it a valued recreation area for residents.

## **B. Goal**

To maintain and enhance water quality and quantity in the Ausable River while providing an area for recreation and education

## **C. Objectives**

1. To augment flow in the Ausable River
2. To enhance the Ausable River watershed
3. To provide habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species
4. To improve water quality in the Ausable River
5. To provide an area for recreation, nature appreciation and conservation education
6. To demonstrate sound conservation practices
7. To provide an area for research and scientific study
8. To provide a site for the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation Commemorative Woods

## **D. Action Plans**

Current management techniques achieve the property goal of maintaining and enhancing water quality and quantity in the Ausable River while providing an area for recreation and education. The following action plans focus on enhancing visitor facilities and protecting water quality and wildlife habitat.

1. Manage aquatic and terrestrial resources to provide habitat for species, including Species At Risk.
2. Update the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems inventory and develop a fisheries management plan for the reservoir.
3. Encourage fishing practices that will improve the health of the reservoir fishery.
4. Encourage good land use upstream of the reservoir to improve and protect water quality for aquatic species and recreation.

5. Develop a complete 10 km trail system suitable for a competitive run by upgrading the Deer Run loop at the east end of the property and developing a nature trail on the north side of the Ausable River.
6. Acquire land or establish an easement agreement for the purposes of trail development.
7. Strengthen the “Friends of MacNaughton and Morrison” including developing a relationship with area Scouting/Guiding groups.
8. Demonstrate good forest management and riparian management.
9. Manage the reservoir levels to augment flow in the Ausable River.