

## **April 2009: OHI Symposium on Preserving Ontario's Freshwater**

The Symposium attracted 107 participants. The agenda is reproduced below, followed by a Summary of comments from the breakout and plenary sessions.

Keynote Address: Distilling Key Perspectives on our Freshwater Challenge 8:45 – 9:30  
**Gord Miller**, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario

Streams of Action: Updates on Agency Initiatives 9:30 – 10:45

Moderator: **Gail Krantzberg**, Director, Dofasco Centre for Engineering and Public Policy, Walter Booth School of Engineering Practice, McMaster University,

Presenters:

- **Rob Messervey**, Manager, Water Resources Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources - The Myth of Abundance
- **Ann Marie Weselan**, Manager (Acting) - Water Policy, Land & Water Policy Branch, Integrated Environmental Policy Division, Ministry of the Environment  
Water Quality: Challenges and Opportunities
- **Aviva Patel**, Terrestrial Specialist, Credit Valley Conservation Authority, Protecting Freshwater through an integrated Natural Heritage System for the Credit

Bio-break

**Pools of Community Expertise** 11:00 - 12:15

Moderator: **Natalie Helferty**, Ecologist, Natural Heritage Consulting

Panel: **Prof. Mark Winfield**, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University:

Urban Growth Management and Water Sustainability

**Quentin Chiotti**, Director, Climate Change Programme and Senior Scientist, Pollution

Probe: Climate Changed: Tomorrow is not just another day

**Harmony Rice**, Chiefs of Ontario: First Nations Water Declaration

Lunch

**Priming the Pump** 1:15 – 2:15

Moderator: **Andrew McCammon**, OHI

Panelists: **Bob Duncanson**, Founder, Ontario Headwaters Institute

**Jim Robb**, Friends of the Rouge Watershed

**Chris Winter**, Ontario Smart Growth Network

**Dave Belanger**, Water Supply Program Manager, City of Guelph

**Mike Layton**, Program Manager, Environmental Defence

**Multiple Currents – The Networking Café** 2:15 – 3:30

Attendees networked in four groups: Community Stewardship and Codes of Practice; Protecting Freshwater Resources in a Changing Climate; Expanding the Source Water Protection model to whole watersheds; and Emerging Needs to Conserve Water in the face of Growth - Regulations, monitoring and enforcement.

**Confluence – A Final Plenary and Closing Comments** 3:30 – 4:30

## Summary of the Day

Key points captured in the breakout groups and articulated in the closing plenary included:

- Freshwater stewardship presents complex sets of issues running from emotional attachment if you live near water to detachment if you just think it comes from a tap;
- Issues such as access to water, its use in industry, agriculture, or by individuals, and its pollution are not fully championed through public education and outreach.
- Increased public education and outreach must thread a balanced path between those upstream and downstream, between the rural and the urban, and between nature, people, agriculture, and industry, and should consider:
  - The use of images and icons that depict freshwater as a public commons; and,
  - Encouraging the development of codes of practice from the bottom up and not just from the top down;
- Agencies at every level must do a better job of providing meaningful, timely, publicly-accessible data on freshwater quantity and quality;
- The Ministry of Natural Resources must have an expanded role in protecting freshwater, wetlands, and headwaters, particularly vis-à-vis environmental assessments and development permitting;
- Conservation Authorities are under-funded and subjected to too much influence by municipal politicians seeking the most economic route to affordable development and increased tax revenue. The development of a new, autonomous, and fully-funded role for Conservation Authorities should be discussed;
- Ontario should extend the source protection model to whole watershed and pursue fundamental changes to business-as-usual practices for land use planning, including the greening of both the development process and the building code, as well as an amended role for the Ontario Municipal Board;
- Ontario, its municipalities, and its utilities should pursue a wide range of water conservation regulations and technologies to leave adequate water for ecosystems, reduce the anthropogenic use of water, and reduce the huge carbon emissions associated with pumping water around the landscape;
- Pressure for increases in water pricing may be as politically difficult an issue as carbon pricing but must be tackled as we approach our carrying capacity for water in south-central Ontario; and,
- Facing a changed climate, with an increasing population and expanding cities, we must help farmers protect watersheds. Economic hardship that could be imposed upon agriculture through societal change, such as possible amendments to the Drainage Act to protect watersheds, must be buffered by financial and other commitments to agriculture.

In conclusion, the Symposium demonstrated a high degree of consensus with respect to:

- The need for greater public education & outreach on freshwater;
- Better-integrated mandates and increased funding for agencies involved in freshwater
- High admiration and respect for the First Nations Water Declaration; and,
- The need for greater support for the future of agriculture in Ontario.

The Ontario Headwaters Institute looks forward to helping preserve our headwaters as an important cornerstone of a healthy freshwater future.