

The Ontario Headwaters Institute

Working to preserve the foundation of Ontario's watersheds

PRESERVING ONTARIO'S HEADWATERS: A SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS



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Introduction

Thanks to a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, extensive support from conservation authorities, local event partners, and regional communication partners, the OHI conducted seven community workshops on Preserving Ontario's Headwaters, held from Elora to Peterborough between March 4 and April 8, as well as an eighth workshop as described below. Total participation amounted to over 200 individuals.

Sponsor, Dates, Partners, and Locations

Dates, partners and location of events sponsored by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Government of Ontario:



<u>Date</u>	<u>Event Partners</u>	<u>Location</u>
Thursday, March 4	Credit Valley Conservation and Trout Unlimited	Terra Cotta
Tuesday, March 9	Conservation Halton and POWER	Conservation Halton Office
Thursday, March 11	Kawartha Conservation and the Community Stream Steward Program	Nestleton Station
Thursday, March 25	Otonabee Conservation & Peterborough Green-up	Peterborough Public Library
Monday, March 29	Elora Environment Centre	Elora Centre for the Arts
Wednesday, March 31	Toronto and Region Conservation Authority	Black Creek Pioneer Village
Thursday, April 8	Lake Simcoe Conservation and STORM	Aurora Public Library

We also made an eighth presentation in Toronto on April 26 to the members of the Water Guardians Network, a group of public representatives on Ontario's source water protection committees.

Communication Support

In addition to the event partners above, we received extensive communication support from the following organizations, making a total of 30 organizations involved in the series.

Community Stream Steward Program	OEN Water Caucus
Conservation Ontario - for Members and Source Protection Committees	Ontario Nature
Ducks Unlimited Canada	MNR for interested staff and Stewardship Councils
Georgian Bay Association	Plenty Canada
Georgian Bay Forever	Sustainability Network
Great Lakes United	Trout Unlimited Canada
H2O Info Network	Water Canada
Ontario Greenbelt Alliance	Water Guardians Network

Summary of Presentations

Eight workshops held in the spring of 2010 from Elora to Peterborough allowed 200 people to increase their understanding of and express their interests in the long-term protection of Ontario's headwaters.

Each event began with presentations from community partners and/or the local conservation authority, each of which provided a wide range of perspectives, and was followed by the OHI's presentation and a Q&A session.

Community partner welcomed participants from the area and in several instances identified local concerns, running from development and aggregate operations to needs for increased stewardship funding or greater policy and financial support for sustainable agriculture.

Local CAs, on the agenda at six of the workshops and with a staff member of the Grand participating informally in Elora, generally described both their broad responsibilities for watershed management and their specific initiatives that protect headwater areas.

This later aspect varied widely, as the majority of upstream headwater areas in some CAs lie in protected areas such as the Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges Moraine, or the Greenbelt, while in other CAs headwater areas may have extensive settlement areas and/or agricultural or aggregate operations.

Regardless, and while it would have been fascinating to have had all presentations at one event, key aspects of CA presentations included the scientific approach of the Stream Continuum, summaries of rural stewardship engagement programs, or descriptions of the evolution of policy to better protect small streams and, in the case of Halton, broad areas of countryside north of Highway 5 in Oakville.

Following on, the OHI's presentation distilled information on the importance of headwaters, as well as sections on headwater challenges, strengths, and opportunities. Key points on the importance of headwaters included:

- The concept that headwaters form the foundation of our watersheds;
- Technical descriptions of headwaters as zero-, first-, and second-order streams, including those that are ephemeral or intermittent; swales, wetlands and aquifers; and headwater drainage areas such as the Oak Ridges Moraine; and,
- The importance of headwaters as consisting of 50-80% of total watercourse length; their contribution of up to 70% of annual mean stream flow, as well as the majority of a watercourse's nutrient matter, phosphorus, organic material, and sediment, and; the provision of both niche habitat and the majority of a watercourse's bio-diversity, and the foundation of downstream ecological communities.

The presentation then described headwater challenges as consisting of development, pollution, and climate change; Ontario's strengths in headwater protection as extensive public engagement in stewardship, with slightly less mature efforts developing policies, protocols, and best management practices; and the opportunities that can build on these strengths to increase headwater protection through better provincial and regional policies, increased funding and support for stewardship, and improved landowner best management practices.

Presentations from local partners consisted of the Community Stream Stewards Program, the Elora Environment Centre, Peterborough Greenup, Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine, and Trout Unlimited.

Summary of Participant Discussion

Regional headwater concerns expressed in the workshops were highly varied. In the Credit and Halton workshops, the primary concerns were various aspects of development, with emphasis on storm water management ponds and watercourse impacts of aggregate extraction. In the Grand and Lake Simcoe, it was lowered water tables from perceived impacts of pits and quarries. In the Kawarthas, attendees were well versed in and supportive of local stewardship initiatives, especially for agriculture. In Peterborough, Permits to Take Water topped the list. Two events, Peterborough and Toronto, targeted outreach to practitioner participants, while the presentation to the Water Guardians Network brought together members of local Source Protection Committees. No dominant issue arose in these three meetings, which tended to focus on the need for policy and implementation tools for better headwater protection in general.

Regardless of differences in regional concerns, the following common threads were clearly visible:

- Many people not familiar with the word "headwaters" intuitively understand what it means and benefitted from the simple, technical description provided by the OHI;
- The policy framework for headwater protection, which needs provincial leadership to address significant gaps, is similarly poorly understood but had significant uptake as people were able to relate it to local concerns for small streams, wetlands, groundwater, and source water protection;
- People and organizations know about and respect agency programs aimed at increased stewardship but want more funding for agency actions, community stewardship programs, and the encouragement of best management practices in all sectors;
- While few workshops had more than one farmer, each and every workshop included a profound consensus on the need to protect and support Ontario's family farms and/or increased nurturing for local, sustainable agriculture; and
- While people and organizations were not previously familiar with the term Integrated Watershed Management (IWM) as profiled during the workshops, local experiences indicate some frustration with what are seen as silos of agency interest and gaps in cross-agency coordination, and perceived the benefit of IWM as a possible solution.

Closing Comments and Next Steps

The Ontario Headwaters Institute extends its deepest appreciation to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for its sponsorship of the series of workshops; to the 13 participating conservation authorities and local partners; to the provincial communication partners; and to the 200 participants who made the series a great success.

In order to improve understanding of and better protection for Ontario's headwaters, we will be working in 2011 on several post-workshop initiatives. These include a headwater mapping project and a second project to identify headwater metrics for potential inclusion into various agency monitoring and reporting programs.