

Wrap-up

Carolinian Canada Coalition Forum and AGM , Sarnia, May 28, 2010

- The conference was graced by the presence of Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley and his strong support for conservation planning for the Lake Erie and Lower Great Lakes coasts.
- Michelle Kanter, Carolinian Canada Coalition, Amber Cowie, Ontario Nature, and Kristina Lee, St. Clair River Rap's, Bi-National Public Advisory Committee, led off with three talks on the Big Picture, coastal greenways and restoration of the St. Clair River. The first two talks focused on building connectivity among natural areas to promote and enhance biodiversity and ecological, recreational and other services to residents and visitors. The long time land owner and bottom up approach of CCC and its role as a facilitator was seen as valuable especially in cooperation with other relevant organizations. The broad provincial approach to greenways by Ontario Nature was seen as vital to building connections within and beyond Carolinian Canada. The St. Clair River Remedial Action Plan was noteworthy for its very broad approach, explicitly linking water quality and habitat restoration with socio-economic and political considerations on a cross-border basis.
- The foregoing approaches and linkages are valuable but pose challenges in terms of how these efforts can be tied together more effectively. Who is linking such programs on a regular basis? Who is working at the fundamental legal, policy and planning level: for example, with respect to the spring 2009 Green Energy Act and its limiting effects on municipal planning and involvement, environmental impact assessment and civic input?
- The topic of the second morning session was Species at Risk in Aquatic Ecosystems and Waterways. The fascinating efforts of Walpole First Nations, as reported by Clint Jacobs, centered on a broad conservation, education and restoration program directed at fish, amphibians and other species at risk. These initiatives offer opportunities for province-wide learning through possible linkages with the CCC Lake Erie Coastal Stewardship Trail Project. Kari Jean of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority outlined the benefits of a community based management plan for protecting species at risk. Joe Crowley outlined progress with a much needed Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas which would provide locations for threatened amphibians and give greater focus to protection and restoration efforts.
- Lunch offered the video "One Shot: The River RAP" which featured a dynamic presentation on the case for conservation, delivered by young people. The video was created by a group from the St. Clair area in cooperation with the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority.

- The first session in the afternoon featured a workshop on Getting Involved in stewardship work. The workshop, led by Megan Ihrig, Coastal Zone Program Coordinator, and Michelle Kanter, Executive Director, CCC, addressed the question of “Can a Coastal Trail Enhance Stewardship?” with a positive answer by an enthusiastic group of participants. A second workshop, focused on Establishing an Aquatic Protected Areas Network for the Lower Great Lakes Area had to be postponed, but interest in the topic was great. Despite relatively little progress having been made in creating this network of Aquatic Protected Areas it is apparent that this is a topic of interest to many people. The development of the CCC Coastal Stewardship Trail could intertwine effectively with the identification and conservation of such areas on the North Shore of Lake Erie.
- The second session in the afternoon focused the Green Economy and Climate Change. The first talk by Gordon Miller, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, included significant comments about biodiversity, environmental conservation and sustainability in Ontario. Relatively few gains have been made in reducing biodiversity throughout the province in recent years. Law and policies have improved but implementation by government is quite slow. There is a need for better linkage between species at risk, protected areas and private and public stewardship throughout southern and central Ontario. Efforts need to be undertaken at all scales but especially at the regional level. The “silos” among agencies and organizations need to be leveled out and a more cooperative system introduced. Some significant advances have been made in the last 10 to 15 years including a new Niagara Escarpment Plan, a new Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, the Oak Ridges Moraine Act and the Green Belt. The Provincial Policy Statement relating to Ontario’s role in land use planning was revised but improvements are still needed, for example, in relation to more effective general policies. Mr. Miller noted that the general policy system tends to be “trumped” through overriding legislation and initiatives for roads and transport, drains, aggregates and, most recently, through the Green Energy Act. Many of these overriding measures relate to the Toronto region and its perceived needs.
- The presentation on energy by Mike Layton, of Environmental Defense, was a broad analysis of the benefits and costs of the Green Energy Act in relation to other sources such as nuclear, coal and petroleum. The speaker concluded that, although many had questioned the Green Energy Act, the benefits through wind and other new sources were greater than the benefits and costs of the more traditional energy sources. Many listeners may have been bothered by this conclusion since the presentation involved aggregation of data as well as graphic analysis that lacked clarity. The analysis was also marked by a tendency to compare and divide benefits and costs of energy between different sources rather than to view them in terms of an interactive set that could be

applied differentially according to environmental, geographic and other circumstances on the ground. This talk also did not refer to the reallocation of decision making roles for energy projects away from citizens and municipalities to the provincial government.

- A talk on Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) by Dr. Robert Bailey, of the Delta Waterfowl Foundation, outlined the market pressures on farmers, specifically in the Long Point area, and the attendant difficulties they experienced in moving to greater environmental protection and stewardship. Their goal is to gain recognition of the contribution of farm woodlots and green operations to environmental services such as conservation of biodiversity, improved air and water quality and amelioration of climatic change. ALUS's vision is greater recognition of these ecological services in the form of government payments or tax concessions tied to their contribution to environmental conservation and climate change. The value of ecological services from farm lands has been recognized for many years in other countries such as the U.S.
- In concluding these Wrap-up remarks I would like to stress two things. First is the need for means of creating better coordination among conservation and stewardship groups -- and relevant government agencies --- in Ontario without jeopardizing and, where possible, enhancing the contribution of organizations operating at many scales throughout the province. Second, areas beyond the Toronto region need more of the attention that the province frequently gives to its expanding metropolis. The Carolinian Canada region --- probably the most threatened environmentally, socially and economically in Ontario, especially since the great recession up to 2008-2009 --- is particularly deserving of focused attention by the provincial government.

Gordon Nelson, Chair

Carolinian Canada Coalition