

Exceptional Waters
Resource Management Plan
Draft working document as of March 31, 2006

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Acknowledgements

Many partners have made this plan possible. Support from the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan Implementation Committee was the initial boost to developing the Exceptional Waters Community Advisory Committee. Members of the community at large were also involved in community meetings where we asked for ideas on how to manage the resource in the future. In addition to the municipal representatives on our committee we also had valuable input from the City of Brantford and County of Brant Planning Departments.

A major grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation allowed the hiring of a coordinator to help the committee steer the project along.

The Grand, a Canadian Heritage River



Exceptional Waters Paris to Brantford Funders/Partners

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About the Exceptional Waters

The Exceptional Waters Program was introduced to the Brant County area as a recommendation of the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan, released in 1998. The father of the program is Dr. Stephen Born, Professor Emeritus from the University of Wisconsin.

The Exceptional Waters Approach is a community-based process that engages local communities to protect, manage and restore waters of exceptional quality and productivity. The process is inclusive and strives to ensure that exceptional environments are protected as a community asset and resource for everyone. The emphasis is protection, management and restoration through a process of engaging everyone in the community, including landowners, interest groups, agencies and organizations to share responsibility for these environments.

GOAL OF THE EXCEPTIONAL WATER APPROACH

“To develop and promote the engagement of members of local communities so that waters of exceptional quality may be managed as a community resource to ensure their sustainability.”

In 2003 a community advisory committee was formed to champion the process on the reach of the Grand River between the Penman Dam in Paris, Ontario downstream approximately 18 km to the Cockshutt Bridge in the southern section of Brantford, Ontario. Community meetings identified local concerns in maintaining and improving the river from resource, recreational, stewardship and science perspectives. The Grand River had been designated a Canadian Heritage River in 1995.

The choice of this reach of river for the program was supported by the following information.

This portion of the river has seen a significant gain in the quality of the waters and surrounding shoreline habitat. This improvement was demonstrated by a marked increase in the quality of the sports fishery and associated populations of aquatic, wetland, avian and land based plants and animals. It came about through the joint efforts of the municipalities on the river improving their waste water treatment process, storm water retention facilities, the management of flows by the Grand River Conservation Authority and increased efforts by the agriculture community to reduce the passage of animal wastes and agricultural chemicals into the waterways. The municipalities, GRCA, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Fisheries and Oceans Canada have put considerable effort into improving watershed quality.

Since 2002 there have been more frequent reports of successful angling in the reach. The reach is frequented by a diverse group of anglers. We are finding one of these, the fly fishing group, are coming from long distances to fish “The Grand”. They are especially

enthusiastic about steelhead fishing in the fall. It is not unusual for 4 plus kilogram fish to be hooked, landed and released.

Weekends have been an active time on the river with canoe, kayak and raft users. The local outfitters have reported good seasons. A growth in corporate business has been reported but especially important are repeat users.

Three primary access points had been selected for this reach, Bean Park in Paris, and Brant Conservation Area and the Cockshutt Bridge in Brantford. Two of the sites, Bean and Cockshutt, received major funding for improvement from the Brant Waterways Foundation and the municipalities. The third site, Brant Conservation Area was developed with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Grand River Conservation Authority. A major morphology study had been funded in 2001 by S C Johnson, a Family Company on the reach between Paris and the Pedestrian Bridge at Brant Conservation Area and this same area had been designated as a Special Regulations area under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act to protect valuable spawning areas and allow the growth of larger fish of spawning maturity.

A very special indication of improved water quality and fish populations has been the return of bald eagles to this reach of the river. Reports started to surface in the late 1990's of sightings of eagles. Each year there were more sightings reported. In the winter of 2005-06 a local eagle watch program was initiated to compliment an existing program started in 2001-02 in the Cambridge-Kitchener reach. Regular sightings became common place for those that knew where to look. A possible winter population of two adults and two juveniles between Paris and Brantford was indicated from controlled observation procedures. The previous eagle population was decimated by the use of DDT. Only the complete ban on DDT and some other destructive pesticides allowed the return of the birds. That has taken the better part of 40 years.

The return of the eagles is a demonstration of how quick a natural species can be decimated by unfavourable conditions and how long it can take to recover. This knowledge is a primary reason a resource management plan has a special focus in urban development. A healthy natural corridor can lead to improved urban life for those living in harmony with their natural surroundings.

The Community Advisory Committee released a State of the Resource Report in 2005. It can be sourced on the Grand River Conservation Authority website. www.grandriver.ca/exceptionalwaters. The report reviews the human and natural history of the watershed with special focus on the Exceptional Waters Reach. This Resource Management Plan moves forward from that point. It incorporates numerous initiatives identified from community input focused on protecting and improving the resource in an expanding urban environment.

Goals of the Resource Management Plan

This plan will identify issues and recommend strategies and tactics as they relate to recognizing the benefits a powerful resource provides to a community, such as a quality river and adjacent dry and wetlands corridor. It will look at protecting and maintaining it as a good and adequate source of drinking water. The potential of the river to build a significant tourism market for the area can be enhanced by a strong stewardship program that promotes maintaining a clean environment and positive relationship with adjacent public and private landowners. Understanding the science of a healthy watershed system will help to understand the best ways to protect and enhance the resource.

Ultimately there will be more urban development in the watershed. It is much more economical to protect our water resource before development than to correct mistakes that lead to a decrease in water quality and the removal of the tourism potential. Having a quality recreational resource in our own back yard is a tremendous benefit to a community, providing not only healthy activities for local residents but also encouraging visitors to come and share in the resource, thereby adding a positive economic input.

As a corollary activity the plan will establish characteristics of overuse and ways to establish a resource load management technique that will avoid getting into an overuse scenario. As of the writing date for this plan overuse is not a current factor and forward planning should help to maintain that position.

The Community input sessions generated an extensive list of issues to consider within the plan. The issues list could be divided into six identifiable areas, further described as objectives. These objectives are:

- Land/Water use and Management (capacity)**
- Regulations-Enforcement and Compliance**
- Access Development and Management**
- Education and Awareness**
- Tourism and Recreation**
- Program Sustainability**

The Planning Process

The Exceptional Waters program was a “best bet” of the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan, (GRFMP). The plan was published in 1998 after a three year gestation period. The plan was a joint effort of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Grand River Conservation Authority. Many community partners with an interest in the watershed fishery were involved with the development of the plan including universities, angling and conservation clubs, Six Nations Eco-Centre and Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The plan reviewed the fish resource within the Grand River watershed and provided direction on how this resource and the land base which affects it could be managed.

The fish resource of the Grand River watershed is diverse consisting of 80 confirmed and 18 probable/possible fish species. This represents 62% of all fish species found in Ontario. It is noteworthy six fish species considered to be “Vulnerable” or “Threatened” in Canada are found in the watershed.

Since its release in 1998 the “Plan” has gained global recognition for its approach to watershed fisheries management. It is considered a model by many jurisdictions as they examine how they can protect and enhance their own watershed resources.

In 2002 the GRFMP Implementation Committee established an advisory committee to focus on the Exceptional Waters “Best Bet”, one of 42 identified in the plan. At this time an improving fishery in the reach between Paris and Brantford was becoming obvious. The size of the average smallmouth bass was smaller than expectations for a good sports fishery. In 2002, after extensive input, the fishing regulations initiated a conservation zone restricting an area to catch and release, barbless single hooks and no live bait. The intent was to provide a sanctuary where spawning and the growth of various fish, but primarily smallmouth bass, would receive a level of protection that would in time increase the overall size of the population and provide more fish of spawning maturity. River bass take considerably longer to achieve spawning maturity as the food source over the winter months is very much reduced and the population congregate in natural pools and basically hibernate. Their lake cousins have access to a fairly stable food source all winter and maintain a less dense concentration. Lake fish can reach spawning maturity in 5-7 years while river bass may take 15-16 years to reach the same size and maturity.

The advisory committee initially focused on the special regulation section and invited additional community representatives from the two municipalities, local conservation and sporting clubs, local foundations and business involved with the river plus the community at large. An expanded Exceptional Waters Community Advisory Committee then searched sources of funding to allow hiring of a coordinator to implement the various objectives for the reach. A primary objective was to build awareness of the resource to the local community and to generate the baseline State of the Resource report identified above.

In May of 2003 the committee was awarded a grant of \$124,000 to cover the cost of a coordinator for a period of two years. After the selection process a coordinator was hired and started the position in December 2003. In late 2003 the advisory committee determined the official reach of the river for the Exceptional Waters program should be from Penman’s Dam in Paris to the Cockshutt Bridge in south Brantford. The rationale for the extension of the reach was to focus on a section that the local population frequently used, was actively used by outfitters promoting canoeing and angling and would expand the focus beyond the special regulations section, thereby allowing a more obvious separation between the regulations and Exceptional Waters. The special regulations and Exceptional Waters programs were complimentary but not directly connected.

The Brant Waterways Foundation was also about to complete a major rehabilitation of the Cockshutt Bridge landing, supported by a large grant from S C Johnson, a Family Company.

The State of the Resource report was completed within the budgeted time frame. Considerable connections were made with the municipalities. The Exceptional Waters program and other environmental issues became a formal discussion point in their official plans.

River usage in the reach increased and more visitors from further away began to discover the heritage designated Grand River's Exceptional Waters.

Permission from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to use surplus funds from the original budget allowed the coordinator's contract to be extended to work with the advisory committee and build a resource management plan. The advisory committee went back to the community to identify issues and provide input for the plans content. The input forms the basis of the following Objectives, Issues and Strategies section.

Objectives, Issues, Strategies

Appendix: to be developed

Background Documents: 1- Terms of Reference 2- GRFMP 3- State of the Resource Report

Objective**Land / Water Use & Management (capacity)****Issues****Strategies**

Maintain Water Quality

Environmental Awareness Committee(EAC) for Brantford & Brant (2)

Greenbelt scenario for valley lands
Woodlot Management in groundwater and valley walls areas

Land Clearing, tree- cutting, siltation, run-off leading to degraded conditions

Developers influence, economic return, smarter and better development that considers quality of life (2)

Subdivision development and storm water control
Landfill issues, new sites away from rivers, streams and wetlands

Aggregate extraction below water table, influence on ground water infiltration and outflow

Establish accountable staff and partner in designing directions & solutions

Identify and adopt Best Management Practices, go beyond minimum standards

Monitoring water quality, i.e. spills and other

Slow promotion, allow science to catch up, develop longer range science based plans

Know more about the features and resources through an inventory and assessment; establish a baseline

Clarify and Protect this green zone, assure it presence in 5-10 years

1- Improve Waste Water treatment and release
2- Encourage RWQP

Encourage the formation of an EAC for affected municipalities

Further establish benefit of continuous greenbelt and protection of wetlands

Promote GRCA and OMNR woodlot management programs

Promote Rural Water Quality concept including the use of riparian zones

Demonstrate value of green development to a community's lifestyle and health

Enforce existing by-laws and make part of long term plans
Support municipalities long term plans to put landfill in areas not impacting groundwater and the water table

Review existing processes for adequacy

Why not 50 years

<p>Keep as much water in the river as possible</p>	<p>Establish pike and walleye spawning habitat and retain for the duration of the spawning cycle</p>
<p>Establish a plan & growth strategy</p>	<p>Look at current models to determine relevance to today's science</p>
<p>Landscape and view to be maintained as natural with quality of vegetation and aesthetics</p>	<p>Define acceptable sightlines</p>
<p>Plan to address protection of natural areas as the surrounding areas are developed</p>	
<p>More protection of groundwater discharge/recharge through a variety of means including streams, intermittent channels, ravines, e.g. buffer zones</p>	

Objective

Regulations- Enforcement and Compliance

Issues	Strategies
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<p>Establish River Watch, a conservation program and improve angling regulation enforcement</p>	<p>Currently being pursued</p>
<p>Continue enforcement of angling regulations, especially near dams. Make regulations easier to understand (2)</p>	<p>Fishing regulations facing a major revision in 2007</p>
<p>ATV's & 4x4's have no regards for the river benthic populations (river bottom)</p>	<p>Find the closest facilities for off road play</p>
<p>Limit motor size, e.g. 4hp or electric</p>	<p>Are any motors practical in EW reach?</p>
<p>Restrict Jet Skis'</p>	
<p>Improve policing by education; etiquette and communications; presence of trail bike patrols</p>	

Objective

Access Development and Management

Issues	Strategies
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<p>Access</p>	<p>Monitor maintenance needs; Revisit GRFMP access study measure change in use/access since 2000 study</p>
<p>Handicapped Access</p>	<p>Involve user groups in discussion for needs</p>

Loss of Access to Resource Increase landowner and developer involvement

Respect landowner rights Improve user ethics and stewardship

Objective

Education and Awareness

Issues

Strategies

More public advocacy to build awareness to politicians, staff & community

Use media, i.e. paper, radio, TV, website to build awareness

Education Awareness program for everyone, talk about the rules. Further engage post secondary educators and students. More information, education & communications on the river and the EW program (4)
Establish the value of the natural resource. Decision makers need to be fully aware of the resource (2)
Identify sensitivity to existing values

Can a speaking program be developed for all school levels?

The public lack of respect for the resource and their perception. Reinforce stewardship issues (2)

Promote ethics and stewardship

Market to other employers +boards of education
Increase use of CD's and other materials into schools
Increase Nature Centre focus on the river and increase appreciation.

Convince municipalities of the value to the community, solicit province's support
Link urban kids back to the natural environment
Involve developers in education programs

Have river workshops and fun days to build awareness; need to let the kids know what we have (2)

Continue the Children's Water Festival Days (coming to Brant in May 2006)

Objective

Tourism and Recreation

Issues

Strategies

Quality of Life Issues

Promote physical activity as a healthy life issue

Maintain current access, improve other natural features, i.e. Mohawk Lake (2) Expand EW concept to Mohawk Lake (2)

Develop criteria to understand over use, i.e. carrying capacity. Current recreation use vs. 10 years, what is capacity?

Move to multi-use; ensure multiple angling opportunities

Look at access in middle section; Whitemans

Improve trails maintenance
Most tourism clients from outside Brant, build home grown awareness

Develop criteria to understand over use, i.e. carrying capacity. Current recreation use vs. 10 years, what is capacity?

Contact know over use area, probably mostly in USA, but also in neighbouring conservation areas i.e. GTCA

Objective

Program sustainability

Issues

Strategies

Private Sponsorship
EW & Trails Funding Sustainability to maintain momentum

Establish long term partnerships
1- develop municipal partner funding
2- search for additional grant sources

Maintain Exceptional Waters coordinator position