

Responding to the Challenges

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The presentations this morning surprised me, in that there appears to be very little understanding of the significant role that conservation authorities play in parks and protected areas in Southern Ontario. So with the time available to me, I will try to outline briefly the scope of our activities, and at the end leave you with some thoughts.

Thirty-six conservation authorities are located in Ontario, 33 in southern Ontario. We represent partnerships with the municipalities within our watersheds. Our mandate, as per the *Conservation Authorities Act*, is to prepare a program for the management, restoration and protection of the natural resources of our watershed(s). We operate within a water-focused ecosystem—the watershed. Our approach is multi-discipline and multi-theme. We strive to understand both the form and function of natural systems.

We have many tools available to carry out our mandate, including: input into the land use planning process; stewardship and restoration programs on public and private lands; information and education; and, land ownership and programming. I believe that we are the major public landowners of parks and protected areas in Southern Ontario. I don't pretend that we have all of the knowledge, or protection strategies; however I think that you will find that conservation authorities can be a significant partner in information supply for research. Our properties can provide ideal research sites. To overlook our expertise and contribution would be to do a disservice to research work.

Three themes were discussed in the presentations this morning that I would like to follow up on.

1. Parks—or any publicly owned property—are really islands in the natural system. To be protected they must be considered within the context that they are a part of. For example, we, at the Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA), are just completing a study of the subwatershed that includes the Forks of the Credit Provincial Park. Through this subwatershed plan, we now know what activities are required for the whole subwatershed to protect the features of the Forks Provincial Park. And we also know that this property is key to the environmental health of the subwatershed. I believe that Conservation Halton is initiating a similar kind of study, only at the watershed level for the Bronte Creek watershed, which includes Bronte Provincial Park.
2. Protected Areas: If you include as protected areas those lands identified through the Provincial Policy Statements (PPS) then I suggest to you that protected areas are a myth and not a reality. From my experience in southern Ontario, you cannot presume that PPS equals protection. A significant amount of the lands identified through these statements are not even mapped, therefore how can they be protected? Be wary of using the PPS as a protection mechanism.

3. **Public Process:** Contrary to the comments made this morning, there is a great deal of experience in public processes in southern Ontario. For example, I am trained in conflict resolution and creative problem solving, and my direct contribution at the CVCA is public consultation. For about the last nine years we have been learning and modifying our public processes. There are a few tips that I can provide for you today:
- Meaningful public processes are those that involve the public from the beginning and together we get educated and informed. Only then can you expect shared values.
 - You cannot go into the process with a predetermined outcome and hope that through the process you can convince the public to see it your way.
 - There may be situations when you cannot let the process determine the end result, and for these situations I highly recommend that you do not impose the public process, other than for information exchange.
 - You must have agency and staff continuity—which is sometimes onerous given the length of some public processes. It is an essential element of the process and involves trust and team building.
 - Be careful of your scale. We have found that people think locally. They even find the watershed scale too big, but they connect well at the subwatershed scale. Therefore it is important to develop and plan your public processes and expectations accordingly.
 - Public involvement needs to be carefully planned by knowing your audiences and ensuring that the process allows for their meaningful input and participation. It is time consuming and adds to the cost of any project. However, this extra time and money represents an important added value and will make the product superior to what you could expect without it.

Finally, I would like to offer some of my suggestions in terms of research needs:

- **Science:** How much of a certain natural feature is needed to protect the health of a system? Is it 30% woodlands as suggested by Environment Canada? How much wetland coverage is needed? We need hard research that can be introduced as evidence in hearings and other legal proceedings.
- **Cumulative Impacts and Sustainability:** What do these terms really mean in the context of southern Ontario?
- **Cause and Effect:** It may be many years before an effect can be seen or measured, and the causes may be multiple. How do we compensate for this in our planning and management?
- **A comparison of the differences in approach to parks and protected areas in northern and southern Ontario.** In the south, landowners are in control. For example in our watershed 98% of the land is privately owned. This calls for different approaches and practices for protection, and restoration.

I support the call from the speakers this morning for increased partnerships. I think that in the past we have all been guilty of not playing the game because of our egos, turf protection and perceptions. Let's move ahead and start a new game!