

Conservation Authorities and Ecological Integrity

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Introduction

I would like to thank the organizers for this opportunity to tell you about one of the richest environmental areas in this country and the challenges facing anyone who dares to try to manage it.

Reaching up into the County of Brant are the headwaters of the Big Otter Creek and Big Creek. The Otter meanders through the dairy lands of Oxford down through the fertile soil of Elgin County and eventually spills into the eroded shoreline of Lake Erie at Port Burwell, east of St. Thomas. Big Creek finds its way through the tobacco fields of Norfolk County and fills the inner bay of Long Point Bay. Both of these creeks cut through what is known as the Norfolk Sand Plain and this sand together with the prevailing southwest winds and the moving waters of Lake Erie have created the magnificent 27 mile long, moving sand spit that is Long Point. Long Point lies in between both mouths of these creeks and so in 1971 when the Big Otter and Big Creek Valley Conservation Authorities merged, the logical name was “The Long Point Region Conservation Authority” (Figure 1).

Within this magnificent watershed lies the internationally known “Long Point World Biosphere Reserve.” Its is also known for its place on the North American flight path for migratory birds, hence Bird Studies Canada has its head office here and together with The Canada Wildlife Service they monitor the happenings of many endangered species that find safe haven here. We are known as “Canada’s South Coast” and the combination of rich sand and life giving heat units provides ideal growing conditions for almost any crop and a lush Carolinian forest growth that houses an abundance of flora and fauna.

Thanks to a rather aggressive land acquisition program, successful fundraising efforts with the private sector, great co-operation from various levels government and a very supportive Foundation for Conservation, The Long Point Region Conservation Authority has accumulated some 11,550 acres to date and planted approximately 50,000 trees per year. We spend countless hours of monitoring dams and reservoirs while offering financial erosion control assistance to land owners along our many tributaries and providing planning assistance to our member municipalities. AND yes, we manage our woodlots. Here is a brief history that has brought us to today (Table 1, in appendix of this paper).

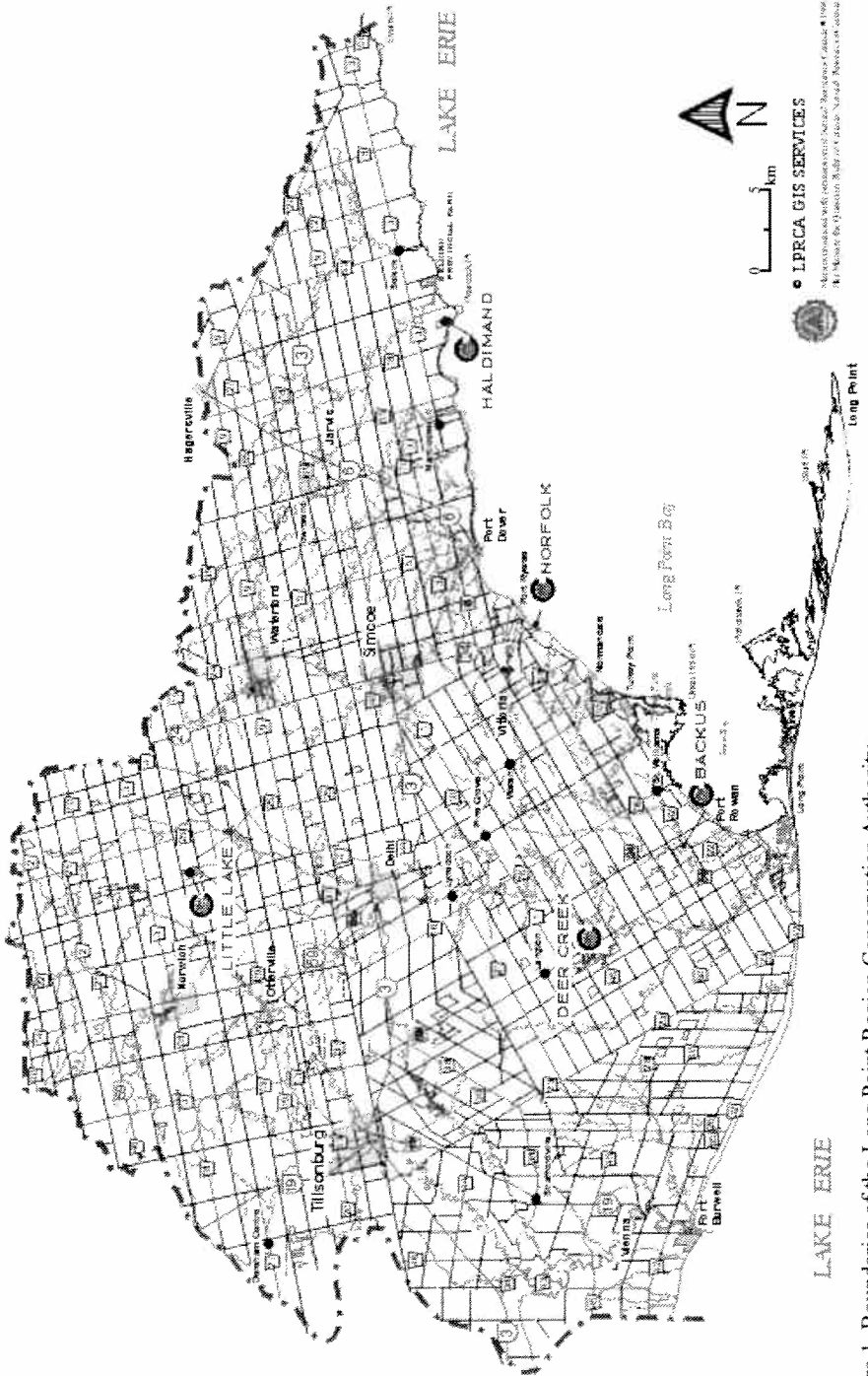


Figure 1. Boundaries of the Long Point Region Conservation Authority

IPRCA GIS SERVICES
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Conservation Roots Run Deep

Who looks after the land and water in the Long Point Region Watershed? We do, and we have been doing it for more than 50 years. We are the Long Point Region Conservation Authority

In 1946, the Ontario government passed the Conservation Authorities Act, which allowed conservation authorities to be formed in watersheds where resource management problems existed and where there was local, community interest and commitment.

Soon after the C.A. Act passed, Big Creek Valley Conservation Authority was formed in 1948 as the eighth conservation authority in Ontario. In 1954, the Otter Creek Conservation Authority was formed. In 1971, the Big Creek Region and Otter Creek Conservation Authorities joined together to form the Long Point Region Conservation Authority (LPRCA).

Today, the LPRCA manages a watershed area of 2782 square kilometres. The Long Point Region watershed is drained by Big Creek, Big Otter Creek, Sandusk Creek, Nanticoke Creek and several smaller watercourses and tributaries that all empty into Lake Erie, as well as 170 kilometres of shoreline, including Long Point Bay. Our goal is to promote the wise use and management of water, soil, vegetation and wildlife and to ensure that people have a concern for and an appreciation of these watershed resources.

Since 1948, the conservation authority has taken on a wide range of programs and services, reflecting the resource management priorities of local watershed communities. Fourteen individuals have been appointed to the LPRCA's board of directors by their municipal councils. They represent the local communities, deciding policies and programs that will lead to a healthy watershed.

For over 50 years, the Long Point Region Conservation Authority has been working with local communities to ensure the conservation, restoration and responsible management of our water, land and natural habitats through programs that balance human, environmental and economic needs (Table 2, in appendix).

Our programs and services today include: flood control, land use planning, soil conservation, forest management and reforestation, water resource management, conservation areas, environmental education, community relations, corporate services and natural areas management.

In the early 1950's the newly formed Big Creek Conservation Authority began an active program of tree planting, assisting farmers with pond construction and erosion control and acquisition of land. Acquisition of forest lands was one of the authority's early priorities in order to protect water-holding areas in the headwaters of Big Creek Valley, as well as emphasizing forest values and potential. Since

that time, more than 11500 acres have been acquired by the Long Point Region Conservation Authority. Through the acquisition and stewardship of environmentally significant areas, wetlands, agreement forest and conservation lands, the authority works to ensure the long-term protection of these natural areas.

Backus Woods is recognized as the most significant remaining block of Carolinian forest in Canada. This forest description recognizes that many of the species of plants and animals found here are unique in Canada and are on the northern limit of their natural ranges (Table 3, in appendix). Species such as the tulip tree, black gum, flowering dogwood, buttonbush and witch hazel, along with animals such as the prothonotary warbler and southern flying squirrel help make Backus Woods the jewel in the forest crown of the LPRCA's lands. More than 540 species of vascular plants are known to exist within Backus Woods. Of such importance is the Backus Woods that the authority is part of a conservation easement agreement with the Ontario Heritage Foundation and Ministry of Natural Resources to manage and protect the woods.

In 1995, the Long Point Region Conservation Authority took over primary responsibility for decision-making in relation to its 9200 acres (3723 hectares) of forest lands. Prior to this MNR held management responsibility through an agreement with the LPRCA under the Forestry Act. Decisions regarding acquisition of additional forest tracts, removal of timber or other forest products, designation of tracts to be "protected", enhancement of biodiversity and significant species and public consultation on all of the above now rest with the board and staff of the conservation authority.

In 1998, the LPRCA commissioned SILV-ECON Ltd., a forestry consultant, to develop a 20-year forest management plan (FMP) for the dozens of tracts of forest land which comprised the authority forest (Table 4, in appendix). Extensive stakeholder and public consultation took place over several months, which assisted in the formation of the 20-year planning document in May 1999.

Conclusion

And that ladies and gentlemen, is a very brief synopsis of how we attempt the balancing act of managing our affairs and putting into practice the theme of your conference "Ecological Integrity and Protected Areas." Dawn Bazely is a valued member of our Technical Advisory Committee and she asked me to give you our perspective. I ask you to consider that the other 37 Conservation Authorities in this province have similar challenges and I encourage you to offer your assistance in whatever your capacity.

I hope that this has been informative, and I hope that you have enjoyed the slide presentation. I welcome you to our conservation areas and wish you well with the rest of your conference.

Appendix

Table 1. Time Line of Selected Significant Events for the Long Point Region Conservation Authority

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|---------------|---|
| 1982 | LPRCA approved its revised "Goal and Objectives", which include objective statements, ... "to identify, protect and enhance significant wetlands", and "to identify and preserve areas of unique flora and fauna." |
| 1994 | LPRCA approved its "watershed strategies" document which stated long-term strategies for various programs of the Authority. LPRCA approved a series of policies and procedures to guide the Authority and staff in overseeing the management of forest properties formerly under management by MNR. Among other relevant policies, were the following, ..."all management activity within individual forest properties or blocks of adjacent properties will maintain the integrity and sustainability of the forest environment", and, ..."forest properties will be managed to maintain and enhance biodiversity, to protect and enhance significant natural features and to maximize water conservation values." |
| 1995 | LPRCA and MNR signed an agreement to terminate the traditional management agreement for LPRCA forest properties. The LPRCA and MNR (Aylmer District) signed a new agreement whereby LPRCA would make all management decisions on forest management (based in part on ecological input to be provided by MNR) and would retain all revenue from forest management. Any annual revenues would cover the cost of any management expenses. |
| 1996 and 1997 | LPRCA saw its provincial grants through MNR dramatically reduced |
| 1999 | LPRCA approved the 20-year FMP and approved the formation of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) |
| 2000 | The TAC held its first meeting, and began its work of providing advice on annual operating plans and scheduling of properties for management and selection of candidate properties or tracts for natural heritage woodland (NHW) designation. |

Table 2. Objectives of the Long Point Region Conservation Authority

Our Objective: To ensure that the Long Point Region watershed's rivers, lakes and streams are properly safeguarded, managed and restored.

How we do it:

- Working with the community to address water quality and quantity concerns in targeted watersheds (recent examples include LBORP and Big Creek)
- Undertaking research to help understand our natural environment (groundwater monitoring network, Big Creek Water Basin Study)
- Addressing soil erosion concerns by providing in-field and in-stream conservation services (soil bioengineering techniques and structural repairs reduce sediment and nutrient loading into watercourses)

Our Objective: to develop and maintain programs that will protect life and property from natural hazards such as flooding and erosion.

How we do it:

- Providing flood control and warning
- Regulating the development of valley lands, flood plains and environmentally sensitive areas

Our objective: To protect, manage and restore watershed woodlands, wetlands and natural habitats

How we do it:

- Ensuring protection of more than 11,500 acres (4650 hectares) natural areas
- Planting native trees, wildflowers meadows and windbreaks on authority-owned and private lands
- Working with community partners such as Bird Studies Canada, Long Point World Biosphere Reserve Foundation, Ontario Power Generation, Backus Woods Advisory Committee, youth groups and students
- Recent examples: work with Ruffed Grouse Society to enhance grouse habitat, initiated a multi-year cucumber magnolia recovery project in 2001, public review and input to develop forest prescriptions

Our Objective: To provide opportunities for the public to enjoy, learn from and respect the watershed's natural environment.

How we do it:

- Guiding environmental and historical learning (Backus programs)
- Providing opportunities for camping, boating, fishing and hiking at several conservation areas

Table 3. Natural Heritage Woodlands (NHW)

The FMP sets out selection criteria for inclusion which the LPRCA Board has approved by approval of the FMP, and which the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is using and modifying in making recommendations on properties for inclusion. Criteria will include area of identified "interior" forest, stand, age, presence of at least 10% Carolinian tree species, and/or previous identification in natural areas inventories as regionally or provincially significant. Factors such as presence of known VTE (Vulnerable, threatened, or endangered) species and total biodiversity will also be considered. NHW examples include Backus Woods, Watson Conservation Areas Forest, and South Walsingham Sand Ridges Carolinian Canada site.

Table 4. Highlights of the LPRCA 20-year Forest Management Plan 2000-2019

LPRCA will

- Designate not less than 20% of its forest lands as "natural heritage woodlands" within the first 5 years of implementation (Backus Woods (319 ha), Watson CA (124 ha), South Wal. Forest (79 ha) = 522 ha or 14 %).
- Establish no less than 3 "demonstration forest areas", totaling approximately. 1100 acres within the first 10 years of implementation.
- Complete the forest resource inventorying of the remaining 2000 acres of Conservation Lands forests within the 1st year of implementation (Already done)
- Revise and add to its silvicultural practices and standards to ensure they are appropriate for various forest types and will promote ecologically-sound and commercially-sustainable forest management.
- Encourage forest and ecological research in its forests, both demonstration/natural heritage woodland properties and properties subjected to timber extraction, and will attempt to maintain a database on such research.
- Continue to inform and consult with the public and partner organizations annually on its proposed management activities and regarding development of new standards, policies and guidelines affecting its forests.
- Continue to harvest certain woodlot properties annually to total approx 596 ha in the first 5 years, 626 ha in the second, 656 ha in the third, and 690 ha in the fourth 5 year period. (It is estimated this will generate approx \$200,000 annually in 1998 dollars).