

Creating a Tool Kit for Lake Stewards

By Liz Danielsen – Saturday – 3 July 2010

“Our future rests on the shoulders of our lake stewards.” (Don Benson)

“This manual will be a game changer for lake stewardship in Haliburton County.” (Paul MacInnes)

For a relatively new association the Coalition of Haliburton Property Owners Associations is celebrating some very real successes. The CHA has already developed a lakefront property owners' manual that is almost complete and the group is now embarking on establishing a Lake Stewards Manual, a project that results from a partnership with the Haliburton County Development Corporation.

After the lake stewards meeting that the Coalition organized last fall, which in itself was a first, Paul MacInnes said that there was a lot of feedback from those who attended. MacInnes, who is on the executive of the CHA and along with Mountain Lake's Don Benson was one of the organizers of the lake stewards meeting, said that it seemed obvious to the group in attendance that there were a wide range of skills within the group, from extremely enthusiastic beginning volunteers to seasoned retired Department of Fisheries and Oceans personnel.

“The biggest question,” MacInnes said, “is where and how the lake stewards find the information needed to do their jobs.” This includes the tools and information to deal with everything from analyzing the water on the lakes to trying to determine why loons aren't returning to a lake, or finding something wrong with loon nests and working to repair them or how to measure declining fish populations and develop solutions to see improvements.

MacInnes said that after the lake stewards' meeting, he and Benson spoke with the Federation of Ontario Cottage Associations, the Lakeland Alliance, the Stewardship Council and the Ministry of Natural Resources and found that there is no tool or manual in existence to assist lake stewards in addressing ongoing and ever increasing issues like this.

It was then that the idea was hatched to create a manual for the members of CHA. A subsequent discussion between Benson and Barb Bolin, Chair of HCDC, generated an opportunity to speak with HCDC staff and a consensus was reached that if an application was developed within a short period of time, there would be a chance that funding could be received for the project.

“That unleashed a monumental effort to complete an application,” MacInnes said.

With letters of support from the Haliburton Highlands Stewardship Council, FOCA, Century 21 and the Lakeland Alliance attached, the application was submitted. The document stressed a number of needs associated with the request to fund the manual including the fact that with continued development and use

of the lakes and the resulting impacts that increase at an unprecedented rate, the need for stewardship activities becomes greater than ever; that lake associations are expressing the need for more support, information and training while little support is available and existing documentation is either out of date or no longer in print. It also pointed out that an increasing number of lake plans being developed need additional capacity to implement priority actions and finally that the CHA wished to demonstrate the benefits of collaboration.

The CHA also detailed a number of benefits in developing the lake stewards' handbook and associated training including the fact that increased knowledge, skill and motivation would facilitate stewardship activities and promote the importance of healthy natural environments in Haliburton's lake communities.

The manual will include practical, easy to use information on how to set up and sustain individual stewardship programs, will serve as a catalyst and framework to enhance and sustain the existing Lake Stewardship Program in the county, serve as a model for other lake associations across the province and position Haliburton County as a leader in lake stewardship.

According to MacInnes there were 30 or 40 projects vying for funding and there was no doubt of the pride in his voice when he announced to the CHA members that their project was the only one in that round of applications that received all of the funding requested. "A resource like this didn't exist anywhere and we were creating something of value that would assist all of the CHA member associations."

They had applied for and received \$15,500 from HCDC to help with the project and as the full cost was estimated at approximately \$23,000, MacInnes said that some funding had to be raised from the private sector. Since that time the Haliburton Highlands Stewardship Council has contributed \$500 and several individuals have shown their enthusiasm and willingness to contribute to the project including Andrew Hodgson of Century 21 and Ray Selbie who have both donated \$2,000.

"We have to find one or two more corporate funders, but basically we have the money to put the manual together."

Bolin, who was present at the CHA annual meeting, said, "I know that everyone is absolutely delighted about this coalition. This is a wonderful way to share and communicate with people and we are pleased to be involved in the project."

MacInnes said that Barry Martin, of Yours Outdoors and Martin and Associates, will be the consultant working on the project. According to MacInnes, Martin was an excellent fit and had already started consultations with some of the lake stewards. "We hope that the manual will be completed by this time next year."

Benson, who referred to the fact that the federal government was spending millions of dollars to regenerate Lake Simcoe, said that he felt that the lake stewards would become more and more important as time goes by. "The great lakes are being blamed for everything from autism to cancer because of the soup that we drink from them," he said.

"Our lake stewards deserve a lot of support as our future rests on their shoulders," Benson said. And he wasn't alone in his concern. One member said that while it had since corrected itself, they had an algae bloom on their lake which had been a very real wake up call for them.

In response to a question on whether there would be an on-line component to the manual, MacInnes confirmed that the manual would be introduced with a full day's training session and if additional funding was found it was their plan to make regular updates and to ensure that the manual becomes available on their website for members' use. Another member suggested consideration of on line reporting which MacInnes received as a valuable thought for future consideration.

This is a project that will result in a very valuable tool for the lake stewards and there has been an incredible amount of input by a lot of people. Even in the writing of the manual, people like the Stewardship Council's Keith Hodgson will be contributing information on items like some of the important does and don't of fishing behaviour.

MacInnes later said that overall he thought the Coalition had made tremendous progress to date.

He acknowledged that most of the lake or property owners associations within Haliburton are ill prepared to undertake a project with the scope of the Lake Steward's Manual and the project will extend a helping hand to those with a very challenging responsibility.

MacInnes said, "The Coalition of Haliburton Property Owners Associations is extremely grateful for the support of HCDC, the Stewardship Council, Century 21 Real Estate and Lawyer Ray Selbie. This manual will be a game changer for lake stewardship in Haliburton County."