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A Study of Ontario Volunteer Environmental Stewardship Groups

by

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Toward a "Common Property Ethic".

1. We need a reversal of perspective with regard to common property resource (CPR) management. Groups that engage in successful CPR management should be recognized as at the cutting edge, rather than seen as anthropological curiosities.
2. Since humans can only live as one component of an interdependent ecosystem (the biosphere), what rationale can there be for slicing that ecosystem into bits and pieces to be "owned" by unconnected actors OR for allowing uncontrolled access to air, water, land or any other biosphere component ?
3. We need a better understanding of the psychology of private property. What makes the difference between a stewardship approach and a siege mentality? Between a sense of community and a castle keep mindset?
4. We must educate children from the outset to have a gut-level sense of common ownership of and responsibility for the earth. "Ownership", where it exists, must connote "stewardship" in the sense of dedicated, careful, informed protection for future generations.
- 5- The duties of stewardship must be negotiated among all stakeholders. Failure to discharge duties must be greeted with outrage.

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1.0 introduction

The Volunteer Environmental Stewardship Program of Research (VESPR) [Department of Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo] was designed to provide information about volunteer environmental groups in order to examine a variety of questions about their evolution, activities, interactions with other organizations, resource needs and members' motivations.

This report presents results from VESPR-Phase I, the focus of which was the activities of Ontario volunteer environmental stewardship (VES) groups, with emphasis on those in close proximity to the Great Lakes.

VESPR-Phase I was initiated to respond to an emerging view of Great Lakes Basin (GLB) issues as complex, long-term, and inextricably linked to the variety of human activities in the Basin. In this view, it is clear that protecting and restoring the health/integrity of the Basin requires a strong *constituency* for the Lakes which must evolve out of a multiplicity of stakeholders and, to function effectively, must take as common ground an ecosystem approach to the Basin.¹

The ecosystem approach to ensuring Great Lakes water quality was adopted by the International Joint Commission (IJC) more than a decade ago. Presently, there is increasing recognition that this approach requires all human activities which affect the Basin ecosystem to be thoughtfully chosen, carefully monitored and effectively controlled. This bi-national action will not take place in the integrated, sustained way necessary unless there is strong public support, expressed as political pressure on both sides of the Basin, for developing and maintaining such action. Thus it seems clear that constituency-building for the Great Lakes Basin is a priority at this time.

1.1 Meanings of "Constituency".

In one sense, *constituency* in the GLB ecosystem context can be conceptualized simply as "a base of political support for sustainable, ecosystem-sensitive development.."² However, some changes in public perceptions and commitments are arguably prerequisite to any strengthened political support for the implementation of an ecosystem approach to managing the GLB.

One such change relates to **connectedness**. Central to the various meanings of *constitute* and *constituent* is the idea of "that which constitutes the essential nature or composition of an entity". This concept draws attention to the fact that people (individuals, human activities, social institutions) are constituent, integral components of the GLB ecosystem, woven into the fabric as it were, rather than separate and independent. In exploring ways to build constituency, it is important to understand the extent to which the inhabitants of the Basin do feel themselves to be "constituent" in this sense. To the extent that they do not, they are likely to think of the Basin (their part of it) merely as a setting, perhaps temporary, to use in any way they wish.)

A more conventional meaning of *constituency* in a political context, highlighting the idea of **accountability**, is that of some entity whose interests are represented and looked after by its chosen (often elected) agent or representative. Since the non-human natural component of the GLB ecosystem cannot "demand" the careful stewardship required to maintain the system's health/integrity, the human component of that system must be the conscious, vigilant constituency for the Basin.

In this context, the phrase "constituency for the Great Lakes Basin" suggests an active, multi-faceted role for Basin VES groups. Group activities that involve monitoring, advocacy, education, restoration, and the like are one aspect of this role. But so is the need to demand equally dedicated and effective environmental action by their selected agents. Thus they must also give direction to these agents, demand careful accounting from them, regularly evaluate agents' conduct of environmental affairs, intervene firmly if such conduct is unsatisfactory, and arrange to replace recalcitrant agents. Both types of responsibility must be met to protect the best interests of the constituency, which in this case is the (human and non-human) GLB ecosystem.

1.2 Effective Constituents. To function optimally as a constituency, the people of the Basin must begin to understand the meanings of "ecosystem", particularly in terms of interdependence, and come to think of themselves as connected, constituent parts of their ecosystems. They must also become stewards for their own part of the Basin by personally engaging in its care and by making those to whom they have delegated responsibility accountable for effective ecosystem stewardship. To reach these goals, the people of the Basin must become involved in setting environmental and quality-of-life goals, allocating sufficient resources to pursue these³, and requiring adequate accountability from their agents. The latter would necessarily

Examples of VES Survey Responses.

The following examples of VES survey responses help to convey the flavour of each of the basic activity categories. Because the Advocacy category was particularly diverse, more examples are provided of those responses.

Education

Educational conferences demonstrating environmentally sound lifestyles
Promote garbage reduction and recycling
Educate all persons on the wise use of our resources
Create awareness of conservation techniques
Prepared a research document to educate (about transmission lines)
Promote public awareness on environmental issues
Educate people about (effects of) environmental damage on wildlife
Members give talks for groups on household recycling; plan a video
Present to students, using photos, water sampling data, history
Instruct and inspire members about wildlife
Provide speakers, slide-tape shows to interested groups
Advise private owners about development to protect the bog
Run hunter safety courses throughout the year
Published a booklet on the natural areas of Durham Region
Self-education (of members) in natural history, area environmental issues

Monitoring

Fish counts
Monitor development proposals
Monitor changes in the environment, increase in radiation from industry
Inventory of wintering birds in Simcoe Country
Monitor the magnetic field in the corridor
Build, maintain and inventory wood duck nesting boxes
Monitor local springs used as drinking water source
Water quality monitoring; monitoring of upriver chemical industry
Monitor cleanup of buried drums by company; monitor groundwater
Monitor development on the Niagara Escarpment
Conduct Christmas bird counts and other surveys
Monitor Grand River for pollution
Monitor ecological, water quality effects of the dam
Collect data on local pollution problems
Review rezoning applications to the Planning Department

Advocacy.

Pressure local politicians and polluters to clean up
Publish a tabloid
Advocate legislation to promote conservation of wildlife
Campaign to provide security for the wildlife centre
Regular letters, phone calls and publicity in the media
Seek to influence planning policy to save wetlands
Deliver briefs to planning board, to council
Negotiate fishway funding and construction
Appear before drainage tribunal to get mitigation
Fight official plan amendments via OMB hearings
Party to first EA Hearing held under the Act
Oppose expansion of toxic waste dump
Advocate trail development on old rail line
Present evidence as part of Ontario Toxic Waste Research Coalition
Lobby OMOE for cleanup of toxic sediment
Lobby politicians re protection of natural areas in official pain
Work to stop any future landfill site in the township
Letter writing campaigns to MRN to ban hunting in provincial parks
Requested OMB hearing on proposed developments, negotiated solution
Mobilize public support for preservation of wilderness park (Quetico)
Forced RAP Coordinating Committee to form Citizens Advisory Committee
Forced Conservation Authority to maintain an area marsh
Pressure to move township garbage dump away from the river
Formal opposition to proposed quarry
Pressing MNR and local industry to monitor airborne pollution
Promotion and brief to city on multi-material recycling
Raised end spent \$35K in legal expenses
Act as a resource for other communities on transmission line issues
Trying to force an environmental assessment hearing
Fought OMOE on location of human waste disposal transfer site
Alerted TV and newspapers to illegal PCB storage by a local factory
Successfully intervened in OMB hearing to stop proposed road
Litigating against construction of a by-pass through an ESA
Petitioning against incinerator in the township

Restoration

Stream reclamation for walleye spawning; recovery of beaver ponds
Annual town cleanup
Tree planting
Rehabilitation of stream banks
Helping GRCA control erosion on Whiteman Creek
Wildflower planting in a park

Regraded creek area to prevent waste runoff, fenced out cattle
Maintain section of the Bruce Trail
Shoreline reconstruction
Habitat improvement and restoration
Spawning area enhancement
Peregrine falcon release
Participate in rehabilitation of aqueduct construction corridor
Restore the Avon Trail, working with other trail clubs
Reproduction of white swans in Wye Marsh

Conservation

Deer feeding
Build duck boxes, blue bird houses
Own and operate a rainbow trout hatchery
Fish stocking
Help to conserve the environment for wildlife and plant habitat
Help to maintain a small forest
Planted trees and shrubs on 55 acres for wildlife conservation
Promote the conservation of diverse natural heritage of Essex County
Promote the wise use and conservation of our natural resources
Conservation committee dealing with local environmental issues
Stimulate public interest in the conservation of wildlife
Development of nature trails
Tree-cutting by-law for Haldimand-Norfolk
Identified 40 (regional) Environmentally Sensitive Areas
Landowner contact program to (foster) protection of natural areas

Preservation

Preservation of a range of quartzite hills on north shore of Lake Huron
Catalyst in purchase of lands in Alfred Bog; fundraised \$15,000 (for this)
Voice for the protection of Willow Island
Preservation of farmland, natural environment, Toronto's "last green door"
Working to preserve Lakefield Marsh against intrusion of a gravel pit
Protection of Niagara Escarpment Designated Areas
Forced Lower Region Trent CA to maintain a marsh area
Mobilize support for the preservation of Quetico Park in wilderness state
Want to preserve the Credit Valley CA for the enjoyment of people
Lobbying OMNR for preservation of wetlands, specifically Goodwood Marsh
Working to prevent shoreline erosion, destruction of wildlife habitat
Stewardship award to encourage local (farmers) to protect river banks
Lobbying for city to purchase Second Marsh from Harbour Commission
Try to acquaint the public with the need to preserve endangered species
Negotiating purchase of Hawk Cliff

Table 1

Stewardship Activities of 200 Ontario VES Groups

Activity	Total		Educ. 120	Mon. 117	Adv. 109	Rest. 90	Cons. 56	Pres. 50	Fund. 38	RAP 16	Res. 10	Nat. 46	Sport. 42	Land. 17	Hike. 14	iMon 53
	200	100%														
Education	120	60%	100%	67%	67%	55%	64%	70%	79%	62%	80%	87%	48%	12%	50%	35%
Monitoring	117	58	65	100	73	45	57	70	74	75	80	78	24	76	21	-
Advocacy	109	54	61	68	100	38	39	60	63	94	60	56	24	76	28	32
Restoration	90	45	41	35	31	100	55	32	39	50	30	35	81	23	100	72
Conservation	56	28	30	27	21	34	100	22	34	25	10	41	59	18	21	28
Preservation	50	25	30	30	27	19	21	100	36	25	20	39	9	23	12	23
Fundraising	38	19	25	24	22	17	23	28	100	12	30	26	24	-	7	11
RAP participation	16	8	8	10	14	9	7	8	5	100	10	11	5	6	7	6
Research	10	5	7	7	5	3	2	4	8	6	100	2	-	-	-	-
Naturalist	46	23	33	31	24	18	34	36	31	31	10	100	7	-	12	9
Sports-related	42	21	17	8	9	38	45	6	26	12	10	7	100	-	7	49
Landowner	17	8	2	11	12	4	5	8	-	6	-	-	-	100	-	7
Hiking-related	14	7	6	2	4	15	5	4	3	6	-	4	2	-	100	21
Monitoring: implicit/potential	53	26	16	-	15	42	27	22	16	19	-	11	62	23	78	100

Figures add to more than totals due to multiple answers

Environmental Stewardship Survey
Department of Environment and Resource Studies
University of Waterloo. Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1

1. Please provide the following information about your group:

Name of group _____
Name of contact person _____
Address _____
Postal Code _____
Telephone: home () _____ business () _____

2a. In what year was your group formed? _____
b. Current size of your group's membership? _____

3. Which one of the following best describes your group?
Naturalists Club__ ; Sportsmens Club__ ; Educational Group :
Environmental Advocacy Group__ ; Monitoring Group__ ;
Other__(specify)_____

4. What are the main goals of your group?

(When you return this form, please include any brochures, newsletters, etc. that give details about your group's goals and activities)

5. Please consider the following definition of environmental stewardship:

"Stewardship describes activities that contribute to the protection or restoration of a special area or feature of the natural environment by people who give their time and effort on a voluntary basis."

From this definition, would you say that your group is involved in "stewardship" efforts?
YES__ NO__ (Go to Q. 11 a.)

6. Some examples of different kinds of environmental stewardship activities include stream clean-ups, monitoring or keeping track of environmental conditions (e.g. water quality, health of local fish and wildlife), habitat improvement or restoration, raising and releasing some species of fish or wildlife (e.g. trout, peregrine falcons), inventories/field studies (e.g. of birds, plants), fund-raising, preparing briefs, educational activities. No doubt you can think of other examples. With these examples of stewardship in mind, please list and briefly describe your group's stewardship activities:

a _____

b _____

d _____

e _____

f _____

(Attach additional sheets if necessary)

7. If your group cooperated with other groups, government agencies, etc. on any of the above activities, please indicate which activities were involved and who these others were:

8. What other stewardship activities might be of interest to your group in the future?

9. We would like to reach as many stewardship groups in Canada as we can. If there are any other groups that you think we should survey, please give contact information and a brief note on their activities:

10. Your additional comments or anything else you want to tell us about your group:

ens ~~~~~
11a Might your group want to become involved in stewardship activities in the future?

YES ___ 11b. What activities might interest your group in the future?

_____(Go to Q.12)

NO ___ Thank you for your comments. You need not complete this form, but please return it so that you won't receive a "reminder" from us.

12. If you know of any stewardship groups that should receive this form, please list names and addresses here:


~~~~~  
To all respondents, our sincere thanks for taking time to give us this information. Development of an Environmental Stewardship Network for exchange of ideas and information is one possible outcome of this survey, and we will keep you informed about that. If you would like a summary of the results of this survey, check here: \_\_\_\_\_