

HABITAT



ISSUES
AND
OPTIONS



Habitat for fish, birds and other wildlife has been degraded or lost in the St. Lawrence River area of concern. This pamphlet describes how this has happened and discusses options for dealing with the problem.

The St. Lawrence River is one of the richest wildlife habitats in Ontario, supporting many species of plants and animals, including game fish and waterfowl. This abundance forms the cornerstone of tourism and recreation in the area.

Charlottenburgh Marsh and Bainsville Bay are two key wetlands that provide a home and breeding ground for over 150 species of fish and wildlife. Another large wetland lies along the south shore in and adjacent to the Mohawks of Akwesasne Reserve.

Aquatic plant beds in the river also provide valuable habitat as do wetlands located in the watersheds draining into the St. Lawrence.

Historically, construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway changed wetlands and

eliminated many reefs and shoals that sustained aquatic life.

Today, development of wetlands for residential, commercial and agricultural use is major concern, as is the combined effect of many small shoreline projects. Construction of docks, canals, retaining walls and agricultural drains can degrade water quality and alter flow patterns, causing erosion and siltation problems and damaging habitat such as fish spawning areas.

Seaway traffic and natural wave action also cause erosion. For example, natural wave action erodes Point Mouillee, adjacent to Bainsville Bay, at the rate of about 1 to 2 metres per year.

An additional concern is the effect on habitat of chemical pollution, an issue outlined in other pamphlets. But dealing with river pollution will not in itself preserve the valuable wildlife habitats of the Cornwall area of the St. Lawrence. Protection against physical damage and gradual loss of habitat must accompany pollution control efforts.



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OPTIONS

Options that address habitat issues in the St. Lawrence River area of concern have been developed and are now being evaluated.

The proposed actions aim to protect habitat that is not degraded, rehabilitate degraded habitat by improving existing features, and restore lost habitat by constructing new habitat features.

Options to protect existing wetlands include acquiring key wetlands, developing management agreements with landowners and regulating municipal land use.

Cooper Marsh Conservation Area is an example of a partnership in which all levels of government worked with private agencies and local individuals to protect this portion of Charlottenburgh Marsh by means of public ownership.

Wetlands can also be restored, by creating nesting and living areas for wildlife and shallow water reefs for fish.

Shoreline areas need protection to preserve fish habitat by preventing erosion and siltation. Private landowners can be encouraged to use environmentally friendly techniques for shoreline work. For example, natural vegetation or blasted rock can be substituted for solid retaining walls.

Government regulation is one option for controlling shoreline development. For example, legislation now regulates how docks are built and whether vegetation can be removed from shorelines.

Government programs dealing with shoreline erosion are already under way in some areas. These programs can be expanded or new ones created. In addition, options exist for supporting private landowner erosion control projects.

In rural areas, farmers can be encouraged to limit erosion by leaving a strip of vegetation along the sides of drains and fencing livestock out of waterways.

Actions addressing chemical pollution of the river, which also affects habitat, are discussed in other pamphlets.

This pamphlet is a very brief summary of the many habitat issues and options being evaluated. To obtain more information, call the Cornwall RAP, Environment & Energy Ontario, 1-800-267-0974.

We invite you to comment on any of the options outlined here by attending openhouses or public meetings to be held in the Cornwall area.

Bainsville Bay and Point Mouillee
Point Mouillee, adjacent to Bainsville Bay, erodes at the rate of 1 to 2 metres per year. This threatens the Bay, which is home to fish, waterfowl and many other species.

Charlottenburgh Marsh

Much of this wetland habitat is now protected through public ownership and the marsh can be viewed at Cooper Marsh Conservation Area and Visitors Centre.



- Canadian area of concern (Cornwall RAP)
- U.S. area of concern (Massena RAP)
- Akwesasne lands



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