

Report on Presentation by Barbara King, Executive Director of Watersheds Canada, as part of a delegation organized by Fred McConnell to Wollaston Township Council on June 26, 2018, regarding analysis of Wollaston Lake reports on Invasive Species.

By Peggy Stewart, President WLHCA

Barb King presented to the Wollaston Township Council at the request of Fred McConnell, as a concerned citizen.

Barb King is executive Director of Watersheds Canada. Her role includes development management and delivery of Shoreline Stewardship Programs across Canada. See <https://watersheds.ca>. She began by noting the similarities found in the mission statements of Watersheds Canada and the mission for Wollaston Township. The mission for Watersheds Canada states that they “work with landowners, communities, and organizations to protect lakes and rivers through developing effective, transferable, long-term solutions.” The mission for Wollaston also reflects a commitment to the environment, as they state that their mission is to “work towards its long-term vision in a healthy, natural environment by providing transparent leadership, strong communication, quality services, and a welcoming community.”

She stated that their group works towards helping stakeholders in rural communities to work together to seek a balance where the environment and waterways are protected while permitting sustainable development. She noted that caring for the lake was supported by all stakeholder groups even though there are different views on how to achieve goals. She reminded everyone that the protection of freshwater lakes and rivers is very complex with many responsibilities shared at a various governmental levels. Many of the responsibilities have been downloaded to municipalities, requiring them to create and enforce policy and zoning bylaws that protect our lakes.

Part of the challenge is that so much of the development happens at the lake level. Boating, and nutrient loading from rain run-off are some of the factors that go along with development at the lake level. Factors such as climate change, lower water levels, algae etc. can also be factors. Complicating the issue is there does not seem to be a clear definition of lake capacity. Science is important to accurately identify and clarify problems. She stated that it is also important to realize that what happens on land has a huge impact on the quality of water on a lake.

Graham Blair asked about the general effects of Zebra mussels on a lake. Barb said that as the presence of Zebra mussels increases, the clarity of the water increases. As it becomes clearer, sunlight penetrates deeper into the water, causing an increase of plant growth. If a lake also has Eurasian Milfoil, it spreads rapidly with the increase of sunlight caused as the water becomes clearer. When it dies off, the plants use up oxygen, reducing the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water.

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leaving trees that fall in the lake to remain, it provides habitat for fish and wildlife. Municipalities can enact by-laws to promote natural development, to prevent tree, shrub and vegetation removal. She advocated partnering with the conservation groups such as the Land Between Conservation Organization to look at shoreline preservation and renewal with natural and native plantings through the actions of Shoreline stewardship.

She encouraged the municipality to plan for natural heritage through their official plans and to mitigate areas of threat and damage caused by development. Municipalities should themselves make sure that the areas on the shoreline owned by the municipality should have plant buffers and natural shorelines. Planning by municipalities should be for sustainable development where the quality of the lake and its natural vegetation around the shoreline is maintained and not removed. She encouraged setting goals of vegetative buffers through policies and site plan controls.

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Barb King advocated for establishing minimum standards for Environmental Impact Assessments with peer reviews that require minimum environmental standards for development on the shoreline of a lake. They should cover a very wide area of the environment and identify what would be the negative impacts and how they might be mitigated.

She stated that property values are better maintained when strong vegetative buffers are part of site plans and building requirements. She encouraged council to consider ways to prevent the use of fertilizers near the shoreline which could wash into the lake.

To get a community started Barb King, encouraged the creation of a steering committee of all representatives of stakeholder groups to plan for policies to protect the water quality of Wollaston Lake. The steering committee could advocate for best practices and policies that could be adopted by the community and municipality to protect the well-being of Wollaston Lake. They need to access funding to achieve their goals.

I wrote this report using notes that I had made while attending the council meeting where Barb King spoke. I also used the audio recording found on the Wollaston Township website for June 26, 2018. For complete coverage of her presentation, readers can listen to her whole presentation as well as the rest of the council meeting

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