



Our Watershed Our Future ***The Art and The Science***

**A Community Forum on
The Health and Future of the Bonnechere Watershed
Visual and Performing Arts Exhibition
BRWP Annual General Meeting
Friday April 15, 2011
Eagle's Nest (upstairs in the Eganville arena), 17 Jane St.**

Hosted by: The Bonnechere River Watershed Project (BRWP)

2:00 - 5:00 p.m. Presentations, Discussion, and Performances

5:00 - 5:30 p.m. BRWP Annual General Meeting

7:00 - 9:30 p.m. Visual and Performing Arts Exhibition

This community forum will provide a positive and constructive atmosphere for local government, resource users and residents of the area to reflect on the Bonnechere River watershed and how to ensure that the environmental benefits valued by local residents today are sustained into the future. The venue will combine technical presentations, community engagement, art and performances by local artists. Community values, a report on stream condition in the Bonnechere River and a set of future scenarios for the watershed will be presented, interpreted and expressed in a variety of artistic media and the focus of a panel discussion with local decision-makers. The work will highlight the need for municipalities to work together to monitor the health of the Bonnechere River watershed and with resource users and residents to employ stewardship best practices to sustain and restore its environmental quality.

KEY MESSAGES

1. About the BRWP

- The BRWP is a volunteer-based organization established in 1998 and incorporated as a registered charity in 2006.
- Its mission is to inform and influence environmental stewardship and enhancement throughout the Bonnechere River watershed by taking a leadership role to leverage, facilitate and coordinate program delivery and to cultivate public debate and discussion on community values and concerns, major threats to river health, and the potential future of the watershed so that the information comes to the attention of key decision makers, residents and other stakeholders.
- The Ontario Trillium Foundation provided the bulk of the funding for the work being presented; the Science Horizons program of Environment Canada provided funding for the RiverWatch coordinator in 2009.
- **What is a Watershed?** A watershed is an entire geographical area drained by a river and its tributaries and includes both the land and water. The Bonnechere River Watershed spans across 13 municipalities/local government, different land use and soil types. From

its headwaters in Algonquin Park, the Bonnechere River stretches 145 km to Castletford where it empties into the Ottawa River. The entire watershed encompasses an area of 2400 km², nearly half the size of Prince Edward Island. Over 80% of the land in the Bonnechere Watershed is privately owned.

2. Community Values

- The rural character and natural environment of the Bonnechere River watershed provide numerous benefits to the health and well-being of the people who live and visit here.
- In early 2008, the BRWP conducted a community workshop with 20 participants to inform the development of a web-based source of information for potential users to support environmental education and community engagement in monitoring, planning and management of the watershed.
- Questions related to water quality and water quantity were of particular importance to participants in relation to pollution (agricultural nutrient/chemical runoff ; municipal drains; landfills and leachate) and the impacts of changing water levels on shoreline erosion and habitat.
- Based on discussions with approximately 40 BRW residents in 2009, what was valued most in ranked order were:
 - Water (quantity & quality)
 - Environmental integrity
 - Good governance (accountable, responsible)
 - Wildlife/Biodiversity
 - Family enterprises (family farms)
 - Education for youth (including experiential learning)
 - Rural identity (landscape connection, family roots, and cultural heritage)
- Environmental concerns similar to 2008 were expressed again, but in addition, concerns about overuse of the watershed.

3. RiverWatch program

- The BRWP conducted a RiverWatch Program in the summers of 2009 and 2010 to assess the health of the Bonnechere River watershed based on the composition of nonfish “critters” in tributary streams and water quality testing on the main stem of the river.
- RiverWatch results showed cause for concern; of 29 sites sampled for stream condition, 10% were Poor, 52% were Fair and the remaining 38% were Good.
- Eleven of 13 local governments within the watershed had at least one site rated Fair; 4 of 13 had one site rated Poor.
- Water quality (WQ) in the main stem met environmental standards but was found to degrade from the headwaters at the edge of Algonquin Park to the outflow at the Ottawa River, in all seasons but particularly during the summer, a finding consistent with WQ testing from 1999-2004 conducted by the BRWP.
- The findings highlight the need for municipalities to work together to monitor the health of the Bonnechere River watershed and with residents to employ stewardship best practices to protect and restore its water quality.

- The need for greater understanding of environmental trends and information sharing through collaboration within the watershed is particularly pressing now given impending effects of a changing climate.

4. Governance

- Based on the discussions with approximately 40 BRW residents in 2009, concerns about governance were related to:
 - Lack of transparency in environmental decision-making process
 - Lack of environmental leadership from political leaders
 - Disempowered municipal governments
 - Renfrew Power Generation (RPG) lack of cooperation/accountability
 - Legislation not adaptive to changing conditions
 - Uneven application of legislation
 - Competing interests of stakeholders
 - Cultural values vs. business values
- Preliminary results of a study by Carleton University researchers indicate that environmental decision-making in the watershed is currently not well coordinated across municipalities and other local government.
- The research results also suggest that there are significant opportunities for strategically improving the effectiveness of watershed-wide environmental governance in the region.

5. Future Scenarios

- Based on the discussions with approximately 40 BRW residents in 2009, other concerns in addition to the environment and governance were related to:
 - Loss of small family farms
 - Forestry industry decline
 - Politics of endangered species
 - Twinning of 417 (urban access and commuting)
- The discussions were also used to develop four scenarios or storylines that describe what the watershed could be like in 2050, under certain conditions, and in response to key decisions and actions taken or not taken. In brief, the scenarios were:
 - The New Rural:* The best parts of rural living are retained and wise investments in sustaining natural and cultural aspects of the area pay off.
 - Entrepreneurial Boom:* The local economy booms (green energy, construction, tourism) but the environment is declining & the boom may bust.
 - Back to the Future:* The watershed divides with affluent families in the north and industrial agriculture, mega-dump in the south.
 - What's Ours is Yours:* The area is managed 'from the outside' as one big natural resource in a way that is sustainable but alienates locals.
- A local artist, Jerome Coulas, was commissioned to paint each future as an aid to the narratives in stimulating discussions among BRW residents and local government about the future of the area and to reflect on the policies, events, and processes that will ensure that what is valued today can be sustained into the future.

- While public involvement in planning and creating a future for the region that is based on shared values is important, especially as we are facing a changing climate, it can also be fun, entertaining, and inspiring!

6. What's Next

Public Engagement

- *Nature in Your Neighbourhood* education and outreach series in partnership with the Ottawa River Institute and TV Cogeco
- Sustainability Network grant for engagement with Algonquins of Pikwakangan
- South of 60 Arts Centre juried visual art exhibition *Watershed* about the Bonnechere and Madawaska River watersheds, June 17-July 17 in Barry's Bay
- County of Renfrew Expo 150, June 9-12 in the Pembroke area

Environmental Monitoring

- Continuation of RiverWatch program (with Carleton University)
- On-going engagement with Lake Property Owners Associations on stewardship activities

Governance

- Completion of research project with Carleton University