

Watershed Management: A Priority Interest of the Canadian Water Resources Association

The Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) has a membership comprising scientists, engineers, managers, naturalists, and others, who have professional, business or personal interest that connects them to water and its management.

CWRA's mission is to promote effective water management. CWRA has four operational objectives: (1) to stimulate awareness and understanding of Canada's water resources; (2) to encourage recognition of the high priority and value of water; (3) to provide a forum for the exchange of information and opinion relating to the management of Canada's water; and, (4) to participate with appropriate agencies and organizations in international water management activities.

The Ontario Branch of the CWRA commissions studies and organizes workshops and conferences to further the mission and objectives of the organization. The most recent of these activities was a workshop on Integrated Water Management Workshop in Ontario held in May 2008. This is a preface to the summary document for this workshop.

The workshop had its origins in a report prepared for CWRA on Sustainable Water Management. This report was published by the CWRA in 2006 and is available for download on the CWRA website. It is referenced as: Fitzgibbon, J., B. Mitchell and B. Veale. 2006. Sustainable Water Management: State of Practice in Canada and Beyond.

The 2006 report concluded with a set of recommended steps for implementation of sustainable and integrated water management. The recommendations for provincial action were:

“We recommend that provincial governments develop a provincial water policy which promotes sustainability principles and IWRM where they do not exist, or enhance existing policies and practices, in order to:

- promote research into water issues and development of decision support tools to ensure the best science, technology and management practices are shared and available for local application;
- support an adequate monitoring program to measure, change and adapt policies and programs accordingly;
- support the improvement, maintenance and accessibility of resource data for effective local watershed management;
- ensure and facilitate collaboration among provincial agencies and stakeholder participation in matters dealing with water to ensure an interdisciplinary and coordinated approach to water management; and,
- secure adequate and stable sources of funding to finance IWRM.”

In 2007 the Ontario Branch Board of Directors reflected on the extent of implementation of these recommendations in Ontario and in particular whether there was continued growth in the use of watershed units as the basis for Integrated Water Resource Management. Ontario has an

extensive history of watershed-based management dating back to the passing of the Conservation Authorities Act in 1946; The Board was interested in recent trends that might be building on this history.

The last 10 years has seen the emergence of a number of water management issues in Ontario. While dominated by the Walkerton tragedy and the subsequent protection of drinking water, Ontario has also experienced significant droughts, Great Lakes issues, severe urban flooding, land use pressures and the emerging impacts of climate change.

The Provincial government has responded to these issues with several water-management initiatives organized around a watershed unit, but there is little evidence of integration with pre-existing water management programs. Prominent among these new initiatives are the Source Water Protection legislation and the introduction of specific legislation for Lake Simcoe and its watershed.

Responding to this evidence of continuing interest in watershed-based water management in Ontario the Board organized a workshop, held on May 28 2008, with the purpose of examining the topic of Integrated Watershed Management in Ontario with regard to four questions:

What constitutes Integrated Watershed Management (IWM)?

To what extent is IWM being practised in Ontario?

In what circumstances is IWM a useful tool for water management in Ontario?

What steps are needed to achieve the full potential of IWM in Ontario?

The Ontario Board asked Dr Isobel Heathcote to prepare a summary of the workshop presentations and discussion and to add her own commentary on the current status of IWM in Ontario. Key outcomes from the workshop include a strong endorsement, from most participants, of IWM as a useful and sometimes essential approach for successful water management and identification of the need for an overarching provincial policy structure to guide and support the full implementation of IWM in Ontario.

The Board is pleased to make the report and workshop presentation materials available as a useful and provocative contribution to the ongoing discussion of IWM in Ontario. The Board anticipates organizing further CWRA-sponsored workshops as a contribution to development of a comprehensive and integrated provincial policy for water management.

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