

Your Water – Your Voice

Central Algoma Region Watershed Unification Project

*Community Round Tables Report
November 19th, 2014*

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Ensuring the Healthy Future of Our Waters

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Forward

The Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition has undertaken a regional initiative to foster relationships, build partnerships, leverage funds, and strengthen resources in the Central Algoma Region. The Watershed Unification Project has been designed to develop a unified vision for Central Algoma which will help insure its sustainability and prosperity into the future.

The outcomes of this initiative will be a Regional Strategic Stewardship Plan that will help to unite the one-off projects taking place throughout the area to work towards a larger to-be-established common vision.

In phase 1 of this project, consultants were hired to facilitate 4 meetings across Central Algoma. The first was held October 21st 2014 with key partners to launch the idea of the Watershed Unification Project and to obtain input and feedback on the initial plans for the project. Following that, three community round tables held across the region during the first week of November to obtain community input and garner support for the initiative.

This report is a summary the findings of Freshwater Future, consulting firm. Next steps will be the development of a Regional Strategic Stewardship Plan which will be released for public comment in January 2015, and then a Regional Launch Meeting of the Strategic Plan in February 2015.

As a valued stakeholder in the Central Algoma Region, your input and participation in this initiative in 2015 is crucial. Looking forward to working with you on the Watershed Unification Project.

Sincerely,



Edith Orr
President, Board of Directors
Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition

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Ensuring the Healthy Future of Our Waters

**Community Round Table Results
Watershed Unification Project
Report to the Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition**

Executive Summary

The Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition (CAFC) hosted three community round table discussions to obtain community input for the development of a unified vision and strategic plan for the protection, improvement, and restoration of the watersheds throughout the Central Algoma Region. The information discussed at these meetings saw a consensus emerge where participants agreed that having a unified vision and strategic plan is a good approach to ensure the watersheds in the region stay healthy, so they can continue to support the communities and economies that the residents and visitors to the region depend upon.

One of the key ideas that emerged was that future projects need to include both an overarching vision such as protecting and restoring water quality in the region, as well as have community-specific priorities such as septic system re-inspections or invasive species prevention. To meet these needs, an organization focused on this regional unified vision is needed. Shared leadership will be important to the success of the initiative because of the many different stakeholders with water-related interests in the region. Finally, in order to truly connect and motivate the region toward watershed protection and restoration, tools such as shared websites and common educational materials will be important.

For this initiative to be successful, Freshwater Future suggests the development of a collective impact model that is built upon the existing capacity of CAFC as a shared administrative backbone. Collective impact is an innovative method to working toward solutions for complex issues that require many different players to change their behavior; water quality is certainly one of those issues. This structure would allow for shared leadership among many types of entities, local decision-making around project priorities, cooperative tool development such as communications and websites and, a shared vision that unites the region around protecting water quality.



Ensuring the Healthy Future of Our Waters

**Community Round Table Results
Watershed Unification Project
Report to the Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition**

Background

The Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition (CAFC) was formed in 2007, to unite the voices of concerned property owners, residents, business owners and non-governmental organizations to address the threats to good water quality, particularly blue-green algae. CAFC has since expanded its focus to include all aspects of healthy watersheds. CAFC's vision is healthy watersheds throughout Central Algoma where people can drink, swim, fish, relax and pursue recreational activities without poor water quality affecting their health and the enjoyment of the outdoors. CAFC is dedicated to the protection, restoration, and improvement of watersheds throughout the Central Algoma Region, which stretches from the eastern boundaries of the City of Sault Ste Marie to the eastern boundaries of the Municipality of Huron Shores, including St Joseph Island.

Through the work of CAFC, in collaboration with numerous partners, many successful projects have been conducted throughout the region including water monitoring programs, vegetation studies, algal monitoring, educational presentations and events, septic re-inspection programs, invasive species prevention workshops, restoration projects and more. CAFC frequently partners with municipalities, organizations (such as stewardship councils, lake associations, not-for-profits, and land trusts) and agencies (such as Algoma Public Health, Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and the Rural Agri-Innovation Network) to develop public outreach initiatives, host workshops, and distribute resources to help educate and raise awareness in empowering people to take steps to protect and improve the water quality within area watersheds.

While specific economic information for the Central Algoma region is not currently available, the following reference provides an example of the importance of water to Great Lakes coastal economies. A Great Lakes Recreational Boating Economic Benefits Study (Nov. 2004) that was prepared for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by the Great Lakes Commission holds several useful highlights. First, the economic impact of Great Lakes marinas is significant, "at a typical Great Lakes marina, ..., the 395 boats renting slips spent \$2.85 million on annual craft expenses and another \$2.85 million on boating trips... The direct economic impacts of trip spending were \$1.8 million in sales, \$661,000 in wages and salaries and \$952,000 in value added to the local economy, supporting 37 jobs. Annual craft expenses directly supported an additional 44 jobs from \$2.6 million in direct sales, \$834,000 in wages and salaries and \$1.5 million in value added."

Vision for Unifying the Region's Watersheds

The type of work CAFC conducts is important to the area for many reasons including the tourism economy, human health, ecosystem health, recreation, and aesthetics; however, their small voice needs additional strength to have real impact. To that end, the group developed the idea of unifying the region's watersheds as a coordinated voice. In order to create a coordinated voice, the group developed the Watershed Unification Project to hear community desires, concerns and hopes related to water and to outline commonalities across communities upon which a collective vision can be created.

Methodology

CAFC held meetings at the Laird Township Hall on Monday November 3rd, 2014, at the Johnson Township Community Centre on Tuesday November 4th, 2014, and at the Sowerby Hall on Wednesday November 5th, 2014. Outside facilitators (Freshwater Future) were used to ensure robust discussion and to collect the data that form the basis of this report. Questions were developed for the discussions by board members and Freshwater Future staff, and were refined after receiving feedback at the first round table. CAFC board members provided an overview of the project idea at the beginning of each round table, and Freshwater Future staff presented questions and collected feedback from participants. More than 50 individuals participated in the round tables, including landowners, elected officials, agency officials and local organizational representatives.

Round Table Discussion Results

Visions, Hopes for Water

When asked what participants want to see in terms of their local waters, in other words, what is important to them regarding water, responses were many, but common themes did emerge, including:

- A standard to know what is "clean" or "healthy." Swimmable, fishable, drinkable was suggested.
- The right to use water also carries a responsibility to care for it.
- Wetlands that connect cottages to the lakes.
- Healthy ecosystems.
- Protected wildlife.
- Strong government and policies to protect water.

Comments and discussions around what participants would like to see for the waters in the region focuses on some common definition of healthy waters. People want to know that their water is and will be safe for swimming, fishing and drinking. While this is a relatively common desire throughout the continent, it is also becoming more difficult to ensure as pressure from development, energy extraction, recreational uses, property owners and more continues to build. These discussions seem to indicate a clear need for a group or collaborative to work to ensure that a common standard for water health is achievable and to ensure that communities and individuals are taking steps to achieve that goal.

Concerns about Water

In response to questions about how water impacts participants and what their water-related concerns are, the following themes emerged:

- Uncertainty about whether the water is clean and healthy.

- People are not sufficiently educated about the impacts of their personal actions on water.
- Property values are impacted by water quality, but they feel that is beyond their personal control.
- Invasive species introductions have major impacts.
- Ground water and connecting waters are just as important as rivers, lakes and wetlands.
- Potential health issues from water quality issues.
- Habitat loss.
- Water levels can have impacts on tourism.
- Marine traffic can have impacts on tourism.
- Water treatment costs can be impacted by water quality.
- Not clear who has the authority to enforce existing laws.
- Potential spills such as oil and the impact on the region.
- Septic systems that are not maintained and properly functioning.

These concerns logically follow from the visions individual participants have for the waters of the region, and seem to be based on what they are seeing in communities. Common elements were:

- Concerns about septic systems polluting the water,
- Fears of invasive species being introduced through uninformed or careless recreational water users,
- Lack of belief that someone is reliably monitoring the water for problems,
- Confusion about who has the authority to enforce existing laws and regulations, and
- Concerns that each of these issues may impact tourism and the local economy.

Thoughts about a Collective Regional Vision for Water

- There is a need to create vibrant rural communities ourselves.
- It can be a source of information on how people can address issues on their own property.
- Must be local and approachable.
- Cooperation so we don't have to reinvent the wheel.
- Share data results and provide analysis.
- Make information available through modes people read.
- Can help with sharing of ideas and information.

The Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition was careful to emphasize that they do not need to assume ownership of the Unified Vision and Regional Stewardship Plan, but simply want to ensure it moves forward if communities in the region agree there is a need for the project. It was clear through the round tables that there is a need for the project and that other groups are not likely to step forward to take over the project. As CAFC is an established and trusted partner in the region, they are well positioned to move forward the initiative.

Things to Keep in Mind While Creating a Unified Vision for Water

- Ensure cooperation, not antagonism.
- Pay attention to community perceptions.
- Provide the facts.

- Online communication materials must be fresh and up to date (maybe cooperation with Sault College to help maintain materials for all municipalities)
- Ensure the project has measurable goals that can demonstrate change.
- Beware of public apathy.
- Funders are more likely to fund collaborative and strategic projects.
- Find ways to utilize data and information that already exists from agencies and find ways to access it region wide.

These ideas provide many suggestions for ways to make the implementation of a regional vision effective and efficient. As goals and work plans are created for the project, this list should be utilized as a resource.

Potential Models for Working Toward a Shared Vision

The following organizations might provide insights about what has worked elsewhere for entities working towards a common vision. These are not intended to be a complete list or to provide an exact fit, but rather as resources from which different tools may be borrowed in order to develop the appropriate collective toolbox.

- Waterkeeper Alliance (waterkeeper.org) Waterkeeper Alliance connects and supports local Waterkeeper programs to provide a voice for waterways and their communities worldwide. To champion clean water and strong communities, Waterkeeper Alliance: Supports and empowers member Waterkeeper organizations to protect communities, ecosystems, and water quality; promotes the Waterkeeper model for watershed protection worldwide; and advocates for issues common to Waterkeeper programs.

The portion of the Waterkeeper Alliance that we suggest might be useful is the idea of local affiliates that provide local communications, ideas and education. Because of the strong desire to have the 12 municipalities in the region play key roles in the collaborative, those municipalities might be thought of as similar to the Waterkeeper affiliate idea.

- Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council (watershedcouncil.org) The Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council speaks for Northern Michigan's waters. They are dedicated to protecting our lakes, streams, wetlands, and groundwater through respected advocacy, innovative education, technically sound water quality monitoring, thorough research and restoration actions. The watershed council achieves their mission by empowering others and believes in the capacity to make a positive difference. They work locally, regionally and throughout the Great Lakes Basin to achieve their goals.

The Watershed Council model that could apply to the collaborative is that of having local lake associations as members of the organization. These lake associations provide information about the needs of their lake and watershed, partner with the Watershed Council on projects, provide input for regional policy and funding needs. Local lake associations, river groups and other affinity groups could be organized in a similar fashion.

- Canadian Freshwater Alliance (freshwateralliance.ca) The Freshwater Alliance is a national capacity building initiative that assists Canada's diverse non-profit water community in reaching goals to secure healthy, thriving waters from coast-to-coast-to-coast. Living waters are essential to the health and wealth of all our communities, our environment and our country. In a time when increasing pressures are threatening the health of many of our waterways, the work of the Alliance and its partners is paramount. The Canadian Freshwater Alliance, a project of Tides Canada Initiatives, is committed to serving the needs of Canada's diverse freshwater community.

The Canadian Freshwater Alliance provides a critical service to its members in developing shared resources that help its members have access to high quality resources at low cost. For example, they provide access to database tools at highly reduced cost due to group bargaining. In addition, they provide training and assistance to their members to utilize the tools. Discussions of assisting municipalities with information dissemination and finding partnerships to accomplish common tasks might be a good fit for this model.

- Centre for Sustainable Watersheds (watersheds.ca) works with landowners, communities, and organizations to protect lakes and rivers through developing effective, transferable, long-term solutions.

The transferable idea from the Centre for Sustainable Watersheds is their work to bring solutions to landowners, communities and organizations. This may provide a model of how to develop and market the ideas for local solutions throughout the region.

- The Elizabeth River Project (www.elizabethriver.org) is the non-profit leading community efforts to restore the environmental health of the river while affirming her value to their port economy. The mission of the organization is to restore the Elizabeth River to the highest practical level of environmental quality through government, business and community partnerships.

This may present a good example of the collective impact model with an organization that similarly values municipal, NGO, business and citizen involvement in creating solutions in a complex water environment.

Infrastructure Needs

- CAFC is interested in finding the best structure to carry out the development of a collective vision for the region's watersheds.

Having another organization created in order to lead this effort, could be beneficial as it would create:

- 1) a new identity to rally stakeholders around,
- 2) shared sense of ownership of the organization,
- 3) the form of the organization can be built around the needs of the organization as it grows.

The downsides of a new organization may include:

- 1) resources will be needed to incorporate and form the organization,
- 2) identity of the entity will have to be developed,
- 3) funders will have to be educated about the new entity and need for such an entity, and board members and volunteers will have to be recruited.

CAFC's current structure offers several likely advantages:

- 1) it already exists with nonprofit status,
- 2) it has some brand recognition,
- 3) it has effective board members and volunteers that can help to move things forward,
- 4) it believes in this idea, and
- 5) this effort fits well under CAFC's mission.

Possible disadvantages to CAFC's current structure include:

- 1) some may perceive the organization in ways that don't lend to the new work,
- 2) people will have to be re-educated about the work of the organization, and
- 3) not all stakeholders may identify with the existing entity.

A third option that might take advantage of the strengths of the structural possibilities outlined above is a collective impact model. Collective impact is an innovative method to working toward solutions to complex issues that require many different players to change their behavior, and water quality is certainly one of those issues. The difference between collective impact and other collaborative processes is "collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants¹." The benefits of utilizing a collective model could include:

- 1) The ability to utilize individual organizational strengths across many organizations in order to reach a common goal such as improving and maintaining water quality in the Central Algoma region.
- 2) Shared measurement can help to show progress toward the common goal rather than individual groups showing their individual progress in isolation.
- 3) A shared administrative backbone can help all parts of the collective be more effective and efficient in making meaningful progress.
- 4) Because of the common agenda of the group, there is less competition for resources and in fact, opportunities for assistance with fundraising from the backbone organization become possible.

¹ John Kania & Mark Kramer. Collective Impact, "Stanford Social Innovation Review," Winter 2011. Stanford University.

Possible challenges or disadvantages of the collective impact approach may include:

- 1) Building sufficient trust and common goals among the groups takes time and resources.
- 2) There are costs to maintaining the backbone infrastructure that must be created on a sustainable basis.
- 3) Developing a shared vision and goals will take time and resources.

Recommendations

Based on the input received at the three round table discussions, Freshwater Future offers the following recommendations. It should be noted however that CAFC and the participants know the region and the needs of the region much better than we do, and those should be the primary considerations in developing the final tools and methodology to move this collaborative idea forward.

- **Shared Leadership:** Although the existing structure of CAFC could help move this idea forward quickly without many startup costs, there is a need for a shared leadership model for the effort. This could be achieved through an expanded board committee structure. For example, municipal, lake and river association, business and agricultural committees could be added so that all interested communities/stakeholders could have a seat at the table and help to carry out the work.
- **Project Focus:** While selecting an overarching theme for work that impacts much of the region may provide a good way to strengthen the collective voice, in order to truly be responsive to needs of multiple communities, locally-focused projects that address specific needs will also be important. Therefore, combining annual or long-term themes that impact the region as well as local partnership projects that can be suggested by partners may be needed. The collective impact model may provide a good structure for ensuring that each community is able to address local issues that all lead to the common goal of protected and restored water quality in the Central Algoma region.
- **Mapping:** In order to develop the collective voice and communicate both needs and progress, a mapping project that indicates current issues or needs in communities along with up-to-date project successes may help to unify the region. Such a mapping project could also provide results of past and present monitoring efforts as well show locations where groups or individuals are needed to carry out future monitoring projects.
- **Information Dissemination:** A common need articulated by participants was for clear, timely, accurate and coordinated informational resources. Developing a shared web-based platform that can be linked or embedded into partner websites may help to provide effective resource use as well as a way to unify the region's voice through common materials and "one stop shopping" for water information.

- **Structure:** Of the three potential models described briefly above, we believe the most promising structure may be the collective impact model based on the input received from the round tables and because CAFC has existing infrastructure that could help get the work going right away. This model could take advantage of existing strengths of many collaborators, ensure a collective vision is developed, provide a shared leadership among collaborators, as well as appropriate infrastructure for information dissemination, joint projects such as mapping and allow for local project focus while maintaining a collective overall goal of good water quality.

Conclusion

It is clear that many entities in the Central Algoma region agree that a common vision and collaborative projects are needed in order to protect the water resources upon which the economy and way of life of the region depend. Participants also agreed that several criteria are needed in order to move forward such an idea. Those criteria include a structure that enables: 1) shared leadership, 2) a common vision, 3) projects focused on individual community needs, and 4) sharing of resources for communication and other needs. We believe that the collective impact model of organizing may present the best fit for ensuring these criteria are met and for developing solutions to this very complex issue among a broad set of stakeholders. Our review also indicates that developing such a structure may be jump started by utilizing the existing infrastructure of CAFC as the administrative backbone on which this effort can be initiated in a collaborative and innovative way. If the resources can be devoted to developing this collaborative we believe the region could become a model for bringing together diversity entities under a common vision to solve a complex set of issues relating to water quality of the region.

Appendix: Raw Notes From Roundtable Discussions

Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition Launch Meeting October 21, 2014

Preamble: This summary was developed by categorizing the many thoughts and ideas that were put forth during the October 21st launch meeting. Some very strong themes emerged which are important that we recognize.

1. What are the benefits of a Regional Strategic Stewardship Plan?

The main benefits identified include:

- A common goal/vision to work towards cooperatively
- Stronger partnerships between the various stakeholders in the Region
- Information and knowledge sharing
- Funding collaborations
- Improved watershed health
- Shared resources (staff, tools, funding, knowledge, reports, information)
- Regional synergy
- Breaking down barriers
- Public forum for issues, opportunities, concerns, and ideas
- Lobbying power
- Creates a larger vision for individual projects to fit into

2. What are the common issues facing Central Algoma?

The common issues facing Central Algoma include:

- Lack of organizing body (conservation authority, regional group, steering committee)
- Funding
- Resources and information
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Water quality (wetlands, nutrients, farming practices, industry, beaver dams, etc.)
- Ignorance/lack of awareness
- Lack of assistance from levels of government
- Declining population
- Lack of data
- Cultural differences

3. What are the factors needed for a Plan to succeed?

- Good clear plan

- Increased communication
- Active buy-in from stakeholders
- Funding
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Consistent and continuous testing and results
- Education
- Engagement

4. What are the barriers to moving forward collaboratively?

- Size of the area (and a clear definition of the boundaries)
- Funding
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Communication
- Complacency
- Scientific data/historical data
- Past histories and hard feelings
- Driving body to lead the initiative
- Competitiveness between groups, municipalities, businesses, etc.
- Lack of awareness and caring

Appendix: Raw Notes From Roundtable Discussions

Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition Round Table Nov 3, 2014

What do you want to see?

How do lakes, rivers, shorelines and other waters impact you?

- How do I know the water quality?
- Concerns about lack of education and personal actions
- Not everyone takes it seriously
- Property values impacted by water quality
- Asian carp and invasive species
- Do decision makers act to protect?
- Ground water and connecting water important
- Health issues
- Recreation
- Habitat loss, wetlands and shoreline

What water resources are most important to economy and way of life?

- Water management (quantity and quality) for productive agriculture
- Fish healthy to eat
- Good quality of life for residents
- Water levels
- Good water quality, good to drink
- Wetlands – connects cottages and lakes

What are your hopes for the waters in the region?

- Healthy ecosystems
- Enforcement and follow-up
- Properly resourced
- Education
- Good laws and standards (septic systems) (drainage act)
- Water conservation and efficiency
- How people relate to water

How do you know it is better?

- Swim bans lifted
- You can drink it without lots of filters
- Good fish diversity
- Healthy food web

What unified priorities?

- Do something about septic systems, More! Better!
- Bar River – cows in river
- Trusted source of information so people make good choices
- System to monitor and catch things early to stop problems
- Natural hazard management. Flooding in particular

Appendix: Raw Notes From Roundtable Discussions

Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition Round Table November 4, 2014

What's exciting about the idea of a collective voice for the waters of the region?

- Must create vibrant rural communities ourselves
- It can be a source of information on how people can address issues on their own property
- Must be a local approachable body
- Townships list local resources as part of "Welcome Wagon"
- Cooperation so we don't have to reinvent the wheel
- What are the results of the data collection? Share and feedback
- Information available in areas other than CAFC website
- Some media resources-newspapers-can make space available for free

What's important to you (VISION) regarding water?

- Drinkable tap water (effects of runoff from landfill and wastewater) (broadening free programs to recycle household hazardous waste)
- Recreational access for boats and spread of invasives
- Responsibility of all of us comes with the right to use water
- Wildlife attracts tourism – protect it
- Offer help – make it a win/win for area residents, problem-solve
- Consistent area bylaws and rules
- Open dialogue and partnerships
- Government and policies also affect water. How can our voice influence their policies and actions
- Energy infrastructure impacts
- Helping people make good choices

Concerns? Water-related issues?

- Water levels impact on tourism. Marine traffic impacts on tourism
- Better water quality to start with can reduce water treatment costs
- Large economic disparities between various communities in region
- Engage companies that cause some of the problems to be part of the solution
- Can feel overwhelming
- Information sharing and collaboration critical
- Funding to implement solutions
- Some resources are out there, but people don't know about them

Concerns regarding process

- Pay attention to community perceptions
- Cooperate, don't be antagonistic
- Need the facts, not just hearsay
- Online communication material must be fresh and up to date (idea: cooperation with Sault College)
- Education and outreach
- Media campaign
- Does project have measurable goals? Must demonstrate change
- What's the right balance?

General Feedback

- Public apathy
- Regressive government regarding environment policies

Parking Lot

- Tension regarding calling out individuals in the community via websites and online videos
- How is this information shared?

Appendix: Raw Notes From Roundtable Discussions

Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition Round Table November 5, 2014

Vision for our waters

- Concern around recent negative water testing results – wants to fix it
- Worried about raw sewage dumping
- Soap suds, backfill, proper boat maintenance to stop invasive species – big need for education
- All water as good as Big Basswood Lake, good water quality
- No blue green algae. Want to swim

What's exciting? Concerns?

- Wants follow-up progress reports, more communication
- Enforcement: who does what? Must address concerns, what's CAFC's role?
- Youth involvement – more!
- Develop north shore provincial park land for non- cottagers to experience nature and stewardship
- Who is in charge of what? Who has authority? Who to call?
- Getting people to change behavior – use positive reinforcement
- What's role of lake associations vs role of CAFC? Partnerships?
- Watch out for creating too much bureaucracy
- This can be "Muskoka done right". Do something before it's too late – be proactive

What can a unified vision do?

- Protect from dilbit oil spill and other larger threats
- Funders more likely to fund collaborative and strategic projects (like beaver management)
- Cross pollination
- Communicate and share info with others outside region too
- A lot of data is out there. MOE, MNR, MNM – examples of information. How can it be accessed region wide?
- Better methods of communication. Send info out with tax bills
- Waterkeepers alliance?

Other thoughts?

- Blind River area can learn from this



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