

New Glasgow Community Corp. presentation to:
Public Consultation on Managing Land and Water on a Watershed Basis

Presenter: Jim Newson

Our Context:

Today there is a lot of concern for the environment. Some people blame global warming, many have seen Al Gore's film: An Inconvenient Truth, and they are genuinely concerned. Our politicians are responding with many pronouncements of how they are going to deal with the problem of clean air, carbon emissions etc. There is a window of opportunity to focus this concern into action. Individual and corporate stewardship must be encouraged.

The New Glasgow Community is a newly incorporated body of volunteers representing the people of New Glasgow. Our community is located in the middle of the Hunter-Clyde watershed and forms a valley around the river Clyde as it flows through Hunter River to Rustico. It is a busy tourist destination that depends on a healthy river system and relies on good quality drinking water. The pristine views and landscapes are what attract people to the area. Agricultural businesses are a significant factor in this watershed and there is one major golf course, Glasgow Hills. Our businesses like New Glasgow Lobster suppers, PEI Preserve Co., The Olde Mill restaurant and others are major employers and they support the community efforts to cleanup and improve the watershed. Personally we operate a Bed and Breakfast called Caleb's Outlook along with a certified organic farm. We take guests out in canoes on the river and in the harbour. Our observations are based on first hand experience. I am also a director on the Hunter-Clyde watershed group

► Hunter-Clyde Watershed group:

The Hunter-Clyde Watershed group is lead by our current chairman Andrew Lush and before him Garth MacLean who have both contributed much to what has been accomplished to date. We look after a 22,000 acre watershed stretching from Hartsville and Fredericton through Hunter River and New Glasgow up to North Rustico. We have been active since 1999, employing between 2 and 11 people each summer. Our main activities are tree planting, stream enhancement, education and awareness raising. Much of our activities have been documented on our website at: www.isn.net/hcwg .

The Hunter-Clyde Watershed Group is in the middle of a reorganisation. It was suggested by some members that we co-operate with the three community councils in the area, electing their executive as directors-at-large of our own organisation and holding our meetings in conjunction with those councils. So far Hunter River has agreed and New Glasgow has agreed in principal. North Rustico will be contacted shortly. This is a unique organizational initiative that will provide a good method of communications and provide the nucleus of community leaders so that the watershed group is able to continue and thrive.

The Issues:

The environmental impact on our watershed is significant. There are things that we see that are obvious and those that are hidden.

- What we see is the **algae bloom** and sea lettuce during the early spring and through the summer from Campbell's pond to Rustico. We also observe the **silting of the river**,



and in many parts just below Campbell's pond we can't get a canoe up the river. We have to plan trips on the river with the incoming tide. As a tourism destination these are negative drawbacks in New Glasgow and must be fixed. Accompanying the bloom is a **rise in water temperature** which contributes to the growth of both sea lettuce and big clumps of floating algae.

- What we can't see is well documented: in the 1999 Interpretative Report on Water Quality; it indicated a trend in the rising levels of nitrates and phosphorus among other things. In the majority we are within guidelines, but there are some exceptions for nitrate levels. This is very worrisome for human health concerns especially for the expectant mothers.

- The **public perspective** is that our river system is in trouble.

The question is asked: how we fix it? There is no one point source for all these problems but it is shared by many. We all have to think of our personal and corporate responsibility for STEWARDSHIP.

We all need to consider our domestic practices in the use of pesticides and inorganic fertilizers. We are fortunate to have waste watch and a recycling system in the province to facilitate dealing with potential containments. The buffer zone and riparian legislation has been a step in the right direction. We are fortunate to have a PEI Federation of Agriculture with a clear environmental policy with basic goals that support environmentally sustainable production systems. www.peifa.ca The Island Nature Trust is another option for land owners to reserve natural areas through private agreements.

<http://www.islandnaturetrust.ca/> PEI has an Enhanced Environmental Farm plan that assists farmers to identify critical areas to protect the environment. www.peiefp.ca There are many other support programs that will help agricultural producers be sustainable. We must continue to support them and do more.

- Agricultural practices are often blamed but they do not represent all the possible contributors to siltation. The construction practices for both housing and roads contribute to siltation. Many of our heritage roads are waterways in the spring without ditching.



We now have an 18 hole golf course and we don't know what it contributes to our nutrient load. There must be a vigorous system of sampling and monitoring of the waterways. Sample results from springs and tributaries may lead to different source points for the nutrient load situation.

- There is a real need for education and information on what is happening in the watershed. The Hunter Clyde Watershed group has a web site documenting many of the things we do each year to try to improve the watershed. See: www.isn.net/hcwg there is much more that needs to be done in getting the word out. The “green” discussions represent a window of opportunity to involve many more people in the watershed.
- The citizens who manage the land resources will have to realize they have a role in helping to improve the watershed (they have a vested interest) and the public purse has to help with the conservation and restoration projects that are identified and prioritized by the people in the watershed with the advice of experts in restoration. This is not a silver bullet but it will happen if we focus on the outcomes over the next few years.
- We can always improve on our Watershed Management Plan. It is correctly called the Stewardship plan because we don't own the land we are just stewards of it for a short period of time. There was an old saying in the scouting movement when they referred to the camping experience, “always leave the campground better than you found it” This could be modified to fit the watershed. We don't just want to fix things that have gone wrong but we need to make it better than we found it.

► Solutions:

There is a paradigm shift needed in our thinking to address our watershed issues.

- The stewards of our soil, the farmers, are going to have to pay more attention to our SOIL Health. We need to understand what is going on in our soils, more about the biology of life in the soil and create the conditions where we work with those natural organisms and not against them. This will mean less inorganic fertilizer, longer and more diverse rotations for our agricultural producers.
- We each need to make a smaller footprint in our environment. We need to protect our groundwater from contamination of any kind. There are a lot of good things happening currently but we have to be more vigilant and put more resources into educating the public and monitoring the results on a regular basis. Home gardeners and local residents must realize how the inappropriate use of fertilizers and pesticides negatively affect the watershed. Golf courses need to be examined for their contribution to the nutrient load in our rivers.
- We need to support community-led watershed planning and management. This will mean a focus on increasing volunteerism first, the obtaining the appropriate financial support from the government to address the larger infrastructure issues. This will mean access to expert advice with establishing priorities for the stewardship plan for the watershed. There will have to be a significant component of the assistance to measure, monitor and manage the different eco-systems in the watershed. If we don't measure the critical parameters, management for results will suffer.
- Governments role is to regulate and enforce policies that support the watershed management efforts and prevent further decline in the health of the watershed. Because of the large interest in the environment, global warming and doing things that will green our planet politicians will have no hesitation in supporting efforts that show positive results in our environment and specifically the watersheds of PEI.
- The value of the stewardship perspective should not be lost as we proceed here. Our whole rationale for involving people (volunteers) to improve the watershed starts at home where we live, in our communities where our friends and neighbors are. They can be encouraged and challenged to do things that will support the efforts to enhance our watersheds. Together we have the opportunity to make a better place for our children and grandchildren.

Conclusions:

The big question asked about amounts and sources of funding are big questions that need to be answered. We were also asked to address the larger question of governance. Let us ask our elected officials and their staff to exercise some leadership in this area. May they respond to the outcomes we want as communities and citizens in our watersheds! This will require some leadership and this will not happen overnight. If we focus on the ends or outcomes then we will be able to develop the strategies over time of how to get there. I am confident if citizens are informed of what is happening in the various watersheds and a clear plan of action is articulated then people will make it there business to be involved.