



GBA Update Media Release April, 2009

The origins of the Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council (EGBSC) date back to the year 2000 as an advisory body to the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) with respect to proposed fishing regulations. In 2006, the original council shifted its mandate and became part of the MNR's *Ontario Stewardship Network*, the Ministry's community, volunteer, environmental program.

Now in its fourth year of operation, the Council has continued to mature and integrate with existing communities and environmental groups throughout eastern Georgian Bay. This maturity is reflected in the increasing complexity of projects, as well as continued advancements in partnerships and collaboration with various community groups. The success of the various projects and programs is directly attributable to the many partners and volunteers, who are the true worker-bees of stewardship.

The theme of the Council's **2008 Lake Stewardship Workshop** was the **State of Our Fisheries** and how fisheries act as indicators of ecosystem health – or canaries in our lakes. An excellent cadre of speakers enthralled over fifty representatives from more than 20 community groups who attended. **In 2009 the theme is Water Quality.** Presentations from Ngan Diep (MOE) Karl Schiefer (Ecological Consultant), Judy Brouse (Muskoka Heritage) and Gord Miller (Environmental Commissioner) will inform, educate and enlighten participants on the need to protect, maintain and enhance water quality and provide direction and impetus to encourage representatives to formulate a community-based monitoring program for their lakes. *The workshop will take place at the Charles W. Stockey Center for the Performing Arts, 2 Bay Street, Parry Sound on Monday, June 22, 2009 from 10 am to 3:30 pm. All are welcome.*

The **Moon River Walleye Rehabilitation Project** took a major leap forward in 2008 with the importation and strategic deposition of over 1,100 metric tons of spawning rubble on, or adjacent to, traditional walleye spawning sites below Moon Falls on the Moon River of Eastern Georgian Bay. This **Spawning Bed Enhancement** helps to address the issue of a highly variable flow regime during the walleye spawning and incubation periods. Unfortunately, sustained high flows on the Moon River throughout the entire 2008 walleye spawning and incubation period meant the egg collection project could not be conducted for safety reasons. However there are high hopes for the **2009 Egg Collection and Rehabilitative Stocking Project**, with planned culturing of walleye to be stocked to the fall fingerling stage.

The Council conducts a number of important surveys every year, in order to improve its knowledge base and identify areas where action is most needed. In 2008 this included:

- The **Spring Littoral Index Netting (SLIN) Survey – Five-Mile Bay**, which assessed the status of natural and planted lake trout in Five-Mile Bay in partnership with the Upper Great Lakes Management Unit. Preliminary analysis indicated a 'medium' abundance of lake trout – equivalent to the Provincial average. Unfortunately there is little evidence of natural reproduction; twenty-four of twenty-six lake trout captured were stocked.
- The **End-of-Spring Trapnet (ESTN) Survey – 12-Mile Bay**, which provided a broad-scale assessment of the near-shore fish community. Preliminary analysis indicated fish community structure and abundance of game fish is quite healthy. Muskellunge comprised 28% of the total catch weight of 383 kg., followed by smallmouth bass (24%), northern pike (16%), rock bass (11%) and 12 other species comprised the remaining 21%.

- The **Killbear Channel and Parry Sound Lake Trout Egg Collection for Thiamine (Vitamin B1) Analysis** took a small, 30-50 egg sample, from 11 gravid females encountered during the survey to test for thiamine levels, a vitamin whose absence is linked to reproductive failure in lake trout. This project was conducted in partnership with the Upper Great Lake Management Unit – Lake Huron Office, Parry Sound OMNR and the US Great Lakes Science Centre in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

In 2009 there will be:

- A **Moon River Sturgeon Spawning Investigation** on an experimental basis, which will use snorkelling gear as a non-obtrusive method to determine the presence and abundance of spawning sturgeon at Moon River falls, and coincidentally allow for an assessment of the 2008 walleye spawning bed enhancement project.
- A **Go Home Bay Index Spawners Survey** which will assess the Bay's walleye spawning population status and serve as a benchmark, or pre-treatment assessment, against which progress towards rehabilitation will be compared.

Stewardship projects are an integral component of Council activities. Since 2006, the Council along with several vital partners have conducted a **Custodial Co-Management of Crown Land campsites** initiative. This initiative aims to mitigate the negative social and environmental impacts of unregulated crown land camping and reduce conflicts between crown land campers and other community members. In 2008, **Carling Township** and **Great Lakes Sea Kayaking Association (GLSKA)** took the lead in two projects with the Council as a supporting partner. The Council continues to pursue similar partnerships at other problem areas including Moon River, Severn River, Gibson River and McCrae Lake. Active partners in this initiative include: Carling Township, Township of the Archipelago, Great Lakes Sea Kayaking Association, Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, White Squall Paddling Center, Georgian Bay Land Trust, North Sound Association, West Carling Association, Barrie Canoe and Kayak Club, Pointe Au Baril Islanders Association, Severn River Association of Property Owners, Moon River Walleye Association and the Canadian Boating Alliance.

The Council undertakes a number of specific projects each year, which vary from long term initiatives to one-offs.

In 2008 the **Invasive Species Awareness Project** provided public outreach and education and was conducted in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Anglers & Hunters (OFAH), Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) and the Ministry of Natural Resources. Erin Hamlyn coordinated and delivered approximately 30 public presentations throughout the summer and disseminated pamphlets, brochures and information packages.

The **Harris Lake and South Magnetawan River Walleye Culture / Stocking and Index Spawners Project** under the auspices of the MNR Community Fisheries Involvement Program, has run annually since 1998. In 2008, 86 walleye were captured with approximately 900,000 eggs collected of which 500,000 were successfully raised to the emergent fry stage and planted throughout the Magnetawan River system. In 2009 at **Tadenac Bay** an **Experimental Walleye Culture in-situ** project, in partnership with the Tadenac Fishing Club, will expand walleye stocking by investigating the feasibility of raising walleye in-situ (cordoned-off embayments) to the summer fingerling stage. Further walleye culture to the advanced fingerling/yearling stages will be done at a **Private Hatchery** for rehabilitative plantings at **Moon River and Go Home Bay** in partnership with OMNR, and 2009 will also see the **Go Home Bay Chutes Walleye Spawning Bed Enhancement Project** in partnership with the MNR.

The Council hopes that its current partners on these two projects will be joined by the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, Georgian Bay Association, Georgian Bay Area Foundation, Georgian Bay Land Trust, Wah-Wah-Taysee Association, Madawaska Club at Go Home Bay, Cognashene Cottage Association, Georgian Bay Township, and the District Municipality of Muskoka.

The **Smallmouth Bass Nest Creation Project** has run for many successive years with high levels of public interest, volunteer participation and positive contribution to increase bass productivity. Its popularity in 2008 was greatly diminished, attributable to having been run for many successive years with resultant project saturation. The Council plans to have the project 'lay fallow' for a number of years and perhaps resurrected at a later date.

2009 will see a **Chimney Swift Nesting Structure** installed at a strategic location on the Seguin River in the town of Parry Sound. This project is led by the Parry Sound Nature Club and other partners include the Parry Sound High School and the Town of Parry Sound.

In addition to these specific projects the Council and Manitoulin Area Stewardship Council (MASC) have been working since 2006 on a **Fisheries Action Plan** for broad-scale rehabilitation of **Eastern Georgian Bay and North Channel** fisheries. In 2008 Councils decided to accept a proposal from i.d.NOR Inc. to use existing socio-economic data to build an economic, job-related business case for fisheries rehabilitation. In 2009 the intention is to formulate background data and a fisheries rehabilitation action plan as a pre-requisite for submissions to funding agencies to actually implement rehabilitative tactics within the plan. The partnership has now been expanded to include the Sault Ste. Marie Stewardship Council, Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, Ontario Federation Anglers & Hunters, and OMNR.

Led by the Georgian Bay Coastal Trail, a feasibility study for a **Georgian Bay Coastal Trail** will be put together in 2009 in partnership with Mountain Equipment Co-op, Georgian Bay Biosphere and others.

For the summer of 2009, the Council will sponsor an **Ontario Stewardship Ranger Crew**, consisting of four high school students and a crew leader. Although the work plan has not been finalized, this crew will provide an excellent opportunity for various community groups and partners to avail themselves of their service and further enhance collaborative working relationships.

It is clear that **Partnership** is the key to success for the Council and it is most encouraging that more partnerships are being formed year after year encompassing an ever expanding group of enthusiastic volunteers. Without this support the Council would not be able to manage and participate in so many projects as well as supporting the conservation efforts lead by partner organizations. The Council is eternally grateful to all those who have helped and would like to express a profound 'thank-you' for a job well done.

Summary reports for the above projects as well as a comprehensive 2008 Annual Report are available on our website at www.helpourfisheries.com.