



DRIFTWORDS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BIG RIDEAU LAKE ASSOCIATION (BRLA)
SERVING THE RIDEAU SINCE 1911 • POONAMALIE TO NARROWS LOCK
– SPRING 2006 (INCORPORATING FALL 2005) –

THE BRLA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

THE EXECUTIVE

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FROM THE BOARD ROOM

Doug Arrand, Acting President

As acting president, I take pleasure in reporting on the great work accomplished by the BRLA and the members of its Board.

Following the 2003 decision by Boards of the BRLA and Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation (RLEF) to fund the establishment of Center for Sustainable Watersheds (CSW) and to turn over the environmental research grant programs and related activities to it, our Board has faced the challenges of redirecting BRLA to its historical roots: rebuilding membership, reestablishing proper records, regaining control of budgets, obtaining audited financial statements for the first time in a number of years, and dealing with a very high financial overhead exacerbated by a mortgage on a building no longer needed. Our hard work has paid off. Last year's successes are reported throughout DriftWords.

Board members came to unanimous agreement that it was in the best interests of the BRLA to sell Drydock. A prompt sale last fall relieved the BRLA of onerous mortgage payments, insurance, utilities and maintenance costs. We have found excellent office space for BRLA and RLEF at a reasonable rent in the Rideau Realty building, on Highway 15 in Portland. Watch for our new signs.

The major challenge facing the BRLA now is the need for members to serve on the Board and our various Committees. I hesitate to call it a crisis but it is approaching crisis proportions if new volunteers do not come forward to carry on the work of this great organization. The following have been vacant this past year: President, Membership Secretary, Recording Secretary, Recreation Chair. For 2006/07 we also need a Treasurer. The next year, we will require an Environment Committee Chair; Pat Chamberlain has announced she will serve one more year. We need members to serve on the Environment, Recreation, Government & Marine, Communications, Cow Island and Membership Committees. Looking even further ahead, BRLA will be celebrating its centenary in 2011. It is critical that we establish a steering committee as soon as possible to plan the celebrations and events. Will you step forward?

The BRLA is in a very healthy financial condition and is back on track on all fronts. We are sought out by other associations and organizations who know of our long history of actively and effectively representing our members' interests. We are reaching out to our local politicians and community leaders to raise the BRLA's profile, but we can do so much more if we have the volunteers. I challenge every member to offer some of your time and talents to BRLA.

I look forward to meeting all members at the **BRLA Annual General Meeting, July 8 at 10:00 am**. I hope to see a keen group of volunteers step forward to serve and to carry on our great programs. I wish everyone a great summer to enjoy our glorious lake!

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*BRLA and RLEF Boards
outside our new offices on Hwy 15 in Portland*

THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE

Your Contact: Pat Chamberlain
environment@brla.on.ca

WE NEED YOU!

The Environmental Committee continues to act on your behalf and to try in different ways to ensure that all shoreline residents are kept informed about environmental issues that affect them and their property. I hope you found the spring mailing from the Environmental Committee both useful and informative. Please contact us at environment@brla.on.ca if you have any questions or concerns.

Some of our committee members who have served for twenty years and more have found it necessary to retire and I want to thank Shirley Wimperis, Janet White, and Graham Mowat for the important contribution they have made to the work of this committee. We are now a committee of two and definitely need more members. An email of inquiry would not oblige you to join us but we would appreciate hearing from those of you interested in the environmental issues that are important to the lake and its future health.



*A Resident of the Big Rideau Shoreline
Photo: J. Trant*



Pat Chamberlain, EC Chair

Photo: J. Trant

WHAT'S ALL THAT GREEN STUFF?

The Number One Question last summer was, “Why so many weeds and what is the all green stuff?” and we may be hearing the same refrain this year. The short answer is “Zebra Mussels”. The longer answer is that zebra mussels are filter feeders and each mussel can filter about a litre of lake water per day removing microscopic plant and animal matter from water as a source of food. Not all of what they consume is digested. What they don't eat is combined with mucus and discharged onto the lake bottom. Great fertilizer for aquatic plants! Couple that with clearer water (caused by the filtering), better light penetration, and shoreline everywhere is showing more weed growth.

The “green stuff” is algae that are also thriving from an altered ecosystem. Remember that algae growth is natural in lakes but can become a nuisance when there is excessive nutrient concentration. The altered water conditions due to zebra mussel activity coupled with run-off from fertilizers, pesticides and other impurities are a perfect environment where algae can flourish.

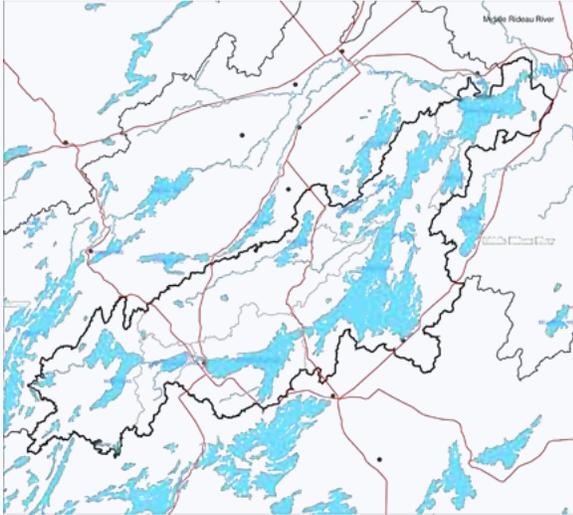
Zebra mussels have no natural predators in our lake and these conditions will likely continue to plague us. But our shorelines can be protected. If we could all **stop mowing the lawn right to the water's edge**, and allow native grasses, plants and shrubs to grow there creating a buffer zone, this would have a very positive effect on our shoreline.

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

We contracted with the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority to do our testing last year since they were doing work of their own on the Big Rideau Lake. They will also do our testing in 2006. The 2005 report indicates that, for the most part, all the water quality indicators we test for were in the normal range. There were no sites in Big Rideau where E.Coli exceeded provincial objectives. Areas of some concern were Mill Bay, Portland and a site in Beveridges Bay that had consistently elevated concentrations of both total phosphorous and total Kjeldahl nitrogen. The Beveridges Bay site had the only E.Coli exceedence recorded during the sampling period. *“While there may be a source or sources in that area and/or the canal may carry in phosphorus and nitrogen, it may also be that the circulation of the lake pushes water into the shallow bay and deposits nutrients.”*

Check the BRLA website for Water Testing Reports which include a map of the sites tested and clear descriptions of lake dynamics and the effects of various nutrients. An explanation of the testing methods, and analysis can be found there as well as a description of the components tested: i.e. phosphorous, chlorophyll, dissolved oxygen, and others.

RIDEAU LAKES WATERSHED PLAN KEEP INFORMED ... BE INVOLVED!



Map of Rideau Lakes Watershed

One's first impression of the Rideau Lakes Watershed in 2025 is the marvellous greenspace preserved through a detailed planning process and the education of property owners and users of the watershed. Hardened shorelines have been restored and there is an abundance of natural vegetation surrounding the lakes and wetlands. Low density homes, cottages and associated septic and renewal energy systems blend effortlessly with the natural surroundings.

This is the first paragraph of the “vision” in the Rideau Lakes Watershed Plan developed through several meetings organized in 2005 by the The Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA). Local lake associations (including the BRLA), businesses and the general public participated to develop this vision of our watershed and to suggest actions necessary to achieve it. There are many thoughtful ideas expressed in the full report: challenges are acknowledged, solutions suggested, and priorities listed. See Rideau Lakes Watershed Plan, Summary of Public Meetings, Sept. 15, 2005 for full details: http://www.rideauvalley.on.ca/watershed/watershed_planning/rideau_lakes/meeting_files/Summary.pdf

Later this year, a Draft Watershed Plan will be presented to the municipalities and other stakeholders for their comment. The final plan will be published following this public review. It will be our vision for the Rideau Lakes area and the future of its development. Any questions or concerns you may have about this project or the Rideau Lakes environment, contact Lynn Preston at the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority at 1-800-267-3504 Ext. 1171 or at lynn.preston@rideauvalley.on.ca.

The RVCA Website has detailed background on the Rideau Lakes Watershed Plan. See http://www.rideauvalley.on.ca/watershed/watershed_planning/rideau_lakes/

TROUT STOCKING IN BIG RIDEAU LAKE

The Ministry of Natural Resources contacted the Environmental Committee last spring to outline and discuss changes in the trout stocking program in both Big Rideau and Charleston Lakes. We had a good exchange of information and their report, *New Recommendations by MNR for Lake Trout Stocking in Big Rideau Lake* is included in this DriftWords issue (see page 4). Their objective is to “ensure native lake trout populations in Big Rideau Lake continue to survive and be enjoyed by future generations.”

The Ministry of Natural Resources is planning to have an Open House on this topic for the public on Saturday, July 15th from 9 am – 1 pm at the Portland Community Centre. There will be a display and staff will be available for discussion. I encourage you to attend.

NOTICE OF MEETING TROUT STOCKING IN BIG RIDEAU LAKE

WITH THE
MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
SATURDAY JULY 15, 2006

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
PORTLAND COMMUNITY CENTER

NEW RECOMMENDATION BY MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

FOR LAKE TROUT STOCKING IN BIG RIDEAU LAKE

The Ministry of Natural Resources initiated an experimental lake trout stocking program in 1987 on Charleston and Big Rideau Lake in order to try and boost the native lake trout populations. Lake trout eggs were collected from the native fish on the spawning beds, raised in the MNR fish hatchery for 1.5 years and then returned to the lake. This program was rotated between Charleston Lake and Big Rideau Lake. In alternate years the 2 lakes were stocked with non native lake trout. This program was evaluated by conducting netting programs, periodic angler surveys (creel surveys) and monitoring the lake trout on the spawning beds. The results of monitoring the spawning beds since 1980 show that in spite of this stocking with yearlings raised from eggs collected from Big Rideau Lake, the native population continues to decline and the non native population continues to increase. It is particularly disconcerting to see this on the spawning bed. The results of the netting programs and the angler surveys also show this decline of native lake trout. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

There is concern that if the decline of native lake trout continues, the native lake trout will be replaced with non native lake trout. This can lead to a lake trout population that no longer can reproduce and sustain itself. Instead the lake becomes dependent on stocked lake trout populations. This has occurred on Loughborough, Redhorse and Silver lakes. Recent fishery research has shown that it is better not to stock in

lakes that have native self sustaining populations. The native stock will survive better and increase in numbers if there is no stocking on top of the native populations. This has been demonstrated on several lake trout lakes in Ontario. Lake Rosseau which is a well known lake in the Muskoka area had a long history of being stocked with non-native lake trout on top of a native lake trout population. The stocking was discontinued in 1990 and now the lake trout population is fully supported by native fish. The stocked non-native fish declined from 25% to 7% in the netting program. This was followed by an increase in natural lake trout into the population and an increase in angler catch (2-3 folds higher) despite less angler effort. There was also a history of stocking non-native lake trout on top of a native population in Bernard Lake in the Haliburton area. Stocking was ceased in 1996 and the netting programs showed an increase in natural lake trout from 15% in 1995 to 38% in 2000. In addition the overall number of lake trout increased slightly in only 4 years.

These examples and others have demonstrated that stocking can actually replace rather than enhance native (wild) lake trout populations. In addition, the stocking maintains high fishing pressure which increases the harvest on the native population. Smaller lake trout are harvested from stocked lakes because the fishing pressure is higher and the fish are harvested before larger sizes are reached. Harvest rates were found to be higher in natural reproducing lake trout lakes where no stocking occurs.

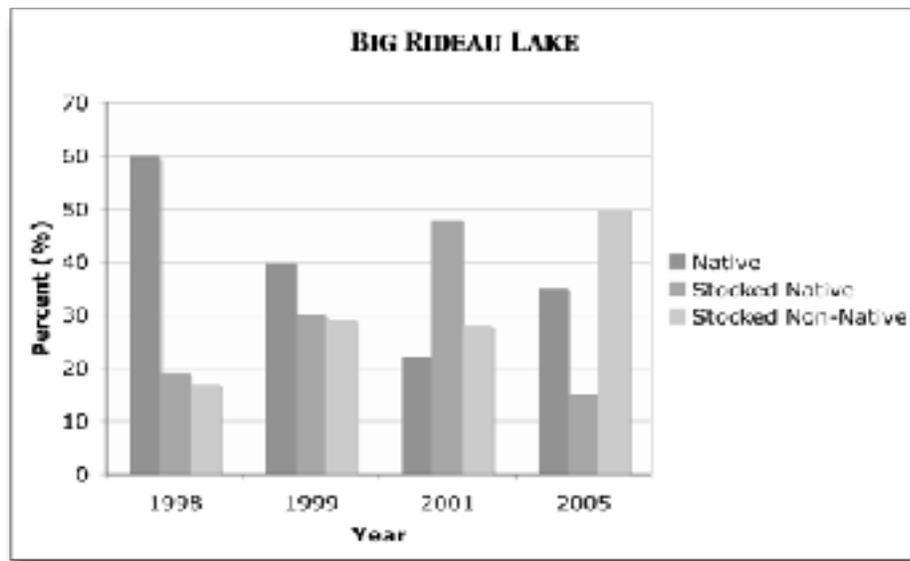


Figure 1: Lake trout sampled in netting programs (Spring Littoral Index Netting) on Big Rideau Lake 1998-2005. Note declining trend in native fish composition (60%-35%) and increasing trend in non-native fish (15%-50%)

Another factor to consider is that stocked lake trout reduce the genetic diversity or adaptability of the native populations. This is an important factor to consider with all the increasing stresses on our lake trout lakes. Currently the stresses on Big Rideau lake include high fishing pressure, development pressure from increased numbers of cottages/retirement homes, declining oxygen levels (which are critical for lake trout to survive), increasing phosphorous levels (from faulty septic systems, fertilizing lawns and agricultural practises on the tributaries) and global warming resulting in higher water temperatures. Lake trout are very sensitive to low oxygen levels and high water temperatures. Lake trout require water temperatures of 15.5°C (60°F) or cooler and dissolved oxygen concentrations of 4ug/L or greater for survival. Science has shown that native populations will adapt to a changing environment better than stocked fish. Stocked fish will prey on smaller natural fish and suppress natural reproduction. Stocking lake trout can mask the health of the native lake trout population. There is often a high level of lake trout harvested from the stocked lake trout giving the perception that the lake trout population is doing well, while the native lake trout population may actually be declining.

New information gained in the last decade on stocking fish has led MNR to promote naturally reproducing fish communities based on native fish populations. Recent MNR stocking guidelines recommend no stocking of fish in waters where

native populations are greater than 15% of the population which is the case in Big Rideau Lake. Since MNR is responsible for managing the fish populations on a self-sustaining basis, MNR is recommending that lake trout stocking on Big Rideau Lake should be phased out. To evaluate the results of this change, a monitoring program should be maintained for several years. This program should include a continuation of the netting program, as well as monitoring the spawning beds and periodic angler surveys.

Big Rideau Lake is a valuable lake trout fishery and is especially important when one considers the lack of high quality lake trout lakes in Southern Ontario. It is our objective to ensure native lake trout populations in Big Rideau Lake continue to survive and be enjoyed by future generations.

The Ministry of Natural Resources is planning to have an **Open House on this topic for the public on July 15 from 9:00 – 1:00pm** at the Portland Community Centre. There will be a display and staff available for discussion.

WATER TESTING

BOTTLES FOR WATER TESTING ARE AVAILABLE AT THE COUNTRY ROADS COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER ON HIGHWAY 15 IN PORTLAND.



*Swans are once again living on Big Rideau Lake. Admire them from distance. They can be aggressive.
Photos: Irma Aikman*

DRIFTWORDS – SPRING 2006

COW ISLAND REPORT

YOUR CONTACT: DOUG ARRAND

CowIsland@brla.on.ca

Cow Island has not looked more attractive for many years than it did in the summer of 2005. The reason it looked so beautiful can be credited to a number of happenings.

First of all, the BRLA Board provided funds to the Cow Island Committee to purchase a new lawn mower to cut the grass and groom the grounds. We also purchased a gasoline powered generator so we now have power to carry out work on the grounds and buildings with the use of power tools when necessary.

Next we were given sufficient funds to hire our day camp staff to work on the property on days when the camp was not in session. Our young staff did ground maintenance including clearing the land, taking accumulated garbage to the dump, cleaning up the buildings, burning brush and painting the utility shed. They were a marvellous team.

Lastly we had the benefit of two terrific volunteer dads whose children were involved in our day camp program. Don Harris and Doug Cowardine were a team to be reckoned with. Both engineers by training, they took on a number of tasks with great enthusiasm and gusto including sawing up downed trees that could prove a hazard, doing grounds maintenance duties but most importantly, they took on the job of assessing the condition of the main camp building. They removed the skirting boards along the base of the building in order to view the perimeter beams on which the building sits, to assess the condition of the floor joists and see what needs to be done to bring the floor of the building back to a level condition, a first step to rehabilitating the entire structure in future. They have presented a report on the condition of the structure along with a plan to carry out the work this coming summer. The BRLA Board extends its appreciation to Don and Doug for their gift of time and talent.

Last summer we were very pleased to have a fairly large number of day camp participants as well as having a large number of parents and BRLA members visit the island to see what we are doing to enhance the property. BRLA held an afternoon social and provided live music for the event last July on the island and we were pleased to have so many visit the island. We would be delighted if more members would become involved in the adventure. We can always use more help and we have a good time sharing the work.

It is our quest to make the island a pleasant and desirable destination for our members to visit and to use its facilities. We have purchased new picnic tables from the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority to be installed this coming summer. We are hoping to have the septic tank and tile bed replaced



The BRLA's Cow Island

Photo: J. Trant

this year. Recently we have enlisted the assistance of the Environment committee to arrange to have shoreline preservation experts assess the island and to establish a plan to take corrective action where necessary thereby providing the members of both BRLA and the larger community with a demonstration model of shoreline preservation and restoration. In the future, we hope to install alternative power sources such as solar and perhaps wind generation to provide power to the island and again to provide a model for our members to assess the merits of such an approach.

It simply makes good sense that as property owners, BRLA should maintain its property and buildings in the best condition possible. The island has been recently appraised by MPAC at \$234,000 (we're appealing). In order to maintain its value on the real estate market it is necessary to keep the current buildings in relatively good condition. Advice of real estate experts supports this point of view.

Under current building regulations it would be impossible for a new owner to get a building permit to build a new cottage on the current building's site, should it ever be torn down or allowed to deteriorate to an unusable condition. But they (or we) could certainly rebuild and upgrade the current building which is in relatively good structural condition at the present time although it will need new siding and windows and doors in near future. This advice is another motivating force to maintain the island and the buildings in a good and marketable condition. Responsible land ownership demands it of the BRLA.

Cow Island has been the site of many memories and participation in BRLA activities there has founded many friendships over generations. If any member would like to join our committee and participate in a rewarding experience, please contact Doug Arrand at cowisland@brla.on.ca.



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ON THE RIDEAU**

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SUMMER 2008**