



THE BLUE HERON

The Bras d'Or Stewardship Society

P.O. Box 158, Baddeck, Nova Scotia B0E 1B0

VOLUME II

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NO.1

This NEWSLETTER is being put together not long after a smooth passage into the next millennium had been successfully completed. To those of you who watched the “global party” on your televisions, the coverage of millennium events was staggering. It did seem for a brief moment that the majority of humanity was linked in global celebration never before experienced. The silent message seemingly conveyed: “everyone has a stake in our world’s future”.

Switching the focus from global celebrations to those issues which are of direct import on our future is a most sobering thought. Zeroing in on specific agendas such as that of The Bras d’Or Stewardship Society provides both a challenge towards our future and time to review our successes since the incorporation of the society in August 1997.

1999 was a most active year for the society. It was a year the society worked on specific projects. We organized a water quality study in Baddeck. We sponsored and held a conference on the Bras d’Or Lakes for municipal and provincial government representatives. We assisted in the organization of a **Bras d’Or Lakes Ecosystems Workshop** held at the Coast Guard College in Pt. Edward in October 1999.

Such efforts help to increase the public’s awareness of how important responsible stewardship is in taking care of the Bras d’Or Lakes and its watershed. We feel that the society has taken small, but significant steps in bringing to the attention of the public, tourist visitors, members of municipal, provincial and federal government our serious concerns regarding the overall accountability regarding future environmental responsibility of the

Bras d’Or Lakes.

We believe that there must be a much higher and more accountable level of cooperation between the public and all levels of government to develop new policies that will insure the enforcement of existing regulations effecting the Bras d’Or Lakes. We have stated publicly that we want the closure of 33 shellfish beds reversed. Linking a clean lake bed and water quality with the possibility of creating a oyster growing industry provides economic justification for eradication of fecal coliform contamination from oyster bearing grounds.

We have argued for the remediation and upgrading of municipal sewage systems that presently fail to treat human waste adequately. We know of one serious instance during the summer of 1999 when a municipal system was not functioning satisfactorily. The ugly smell was indicative of inadequate sewage treatment. It seemed as though someone (somebodies) was (were) dragging his (their) feet. This is not acceptable under our agenda. Letters were written to protest this problem.

We realize that building and maintaining a strong membership base is the key to any future successes. We are most appreciative of our current

membership. We hope you will renew your membership for the year 2000 as we begin a new century that will seek a renewed and more powerful focus on the crucial importance of protecting the Bras d’Or Lakes, hopefully, as zealously as individuals and corporations guard their personal and corporate interests.

MAY YOU HAVE A GREAT NEW YEAR IN THIS FIRST YEAR OF OUR NEW CENTURY.

NOTICE:

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BRAS D’OR STEWARDSHIP SOCIETY WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2000 AT 2PM. THIS MEETING WILL BE HELD AT THE ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL MUSEUM IN BADDECK. MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND THIS IMPORTANT MEETING.



*“Our Goal is to Protect, Conserve
and Restore the Bras d’Or Lakes”*

BRAS D'OR LAKES INTERPRETIVE CENTER

During the fall of 1999 representatives of the **Bras d'Or Lakes Interpretive Center** held four community consultations regarding the development of the center in the restored Old Post Office in Baddeck. Meetings were held in Baddeck, Whycomagh, St. Peters and Eskasoni to gather community input.

The center will provide sophisticated computer modules to interpret the natural highlights of the Bras d'Or Lakes watershed as a significant ecosystem. The first floor will house the display modules. The second floor will provide a resource center for data based information banking and research facilities.

The Bras d'Or Interpretative Center is a subsidiary of **The Bras d'Or Preservation Foundation**, a land trust entity. The new interpretive center will represent and investment of \$250,000.00. \$166,000.00 has been received through a tourism enhancement grant and the remainder of the funds (\$84,000.00) will be provided by **THE FRIENDS OF THE BRAS D'OR**, a US charitable entity set up to provide monies to **The Bras D'Or Preservation Foundation**. The Bras d'Or Interpretive Center is scheduled to open in June of 2000. The interpretive center will have the capability of moving its computer modules into schools for student education purposes during the school year. The interpretive center will be a most welcome asset to all concerned. The \$250,000.00 capital investment is a substantial commitment of taxpayers and private dollars for creating sophisticated state of the art computer driven tourism infrastructure.

BRAS D'OR LAKES CONFERENCE

On October 15, 1999 a full day conference was held at the Gaelic College in St. Ann's to discuss environmental issues affecting the Bras d'Or Lakes and its watershed. There were close to 60 participants with good representation from the four municipalities and various representatives of provincial government departments.

A commitment was made on behalf of the provincial Dept. of Environment to revisit the 1995 University College of Cape Breton's proposal, "**TAKING CARE OF THE BRAS D'OR**", to establish a commission to assist in the management of the Bras d'Or Lakes and its watershed. It is hoped that in early 2000 that substantive steps will be taken to promote sincere cooperation between various levels of

government to work with communities and their municipalities to strengthen a joint commitment to work together to enforce current regulations regarding land development, sewage disposal and conservation options.

BRAS D'OR LAKES ECOSYSTEMS WORKSHOP

In the spring of 1999 the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) decided to

expand biological research activities in the Bras d'Or Lakes. It was resolved that the planning process for this broadened program should have substantial community involvement and that the vehicle for acquiring this community input should be a public workshop held in Cape Breton. The purpose of the workshop would be to define the components of a five year ecosystem study of the Bras d'Or Lakes. Consequently, a steering committee comprising a cross section of Cape Breton community representatives was formed and tasked to plan the time and agenda for such a workshop.

The main objective of the workshop was to plan scientific investigation into the Bras d'Or Lakes and their watershed so that ecosystem considerations can be incorporated into any future integrated management of the area. Scientific study done in isolation is often buried in learned journals and inaccessible to the general public. Thus, it is essential that the planned studies be used as a means to educate communities within the watershed, as well as seeing how science is conducted while learning about the Lakes. Students and volunteers should play an active role in the project. This workshop therefore, was a means for members of the watershed communities to assist in determining the specific objectives of a scientific study of the Bras d'Or Lakes and further to help in carrying it out.

Sponsored by the DFO and ECBC, the public workshop was held last autumn at the Canadian Coast Guard College in Westmount during the weekend of October 22-24. Major themes thought to reflect the major concerns of residents of the Bras d'Or Lakes watershed were water quality, land use, and fisheries and aquaculture. In addition, since awareness, or lack of awareness, of the problems facing the Bras d'Or Lakes was seen as a major problem, education and communication were an essential topic. The core activity of the workshop was working group participation to determine priorities and approaches; however, a morning of preparatory material was included in the program to give workshop participants an introduction to some of the

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problems facing the Lakes and some useful background material to help stimulate later discussion.

About a hundred people, of which about twenty were students, attended the workshop. The agenda got underway with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between DFO and the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources; this agreement outlines the terms under which the research boat *Navicula* will be loaned to the First Nations to undertake biological survey work in the Bras d'Or Lakes. The meetings went well and resulted in eleven recommendations for research being made. Most were related to water quality and siltation in the Lakes. A major concern of most attendees was the lack of a central repository for information concerning the Lakes and for communication of this knowledge. This was addressed in two of the recommendations.

The workshop was acknowledged as a very useful exercise by participants and a report of the proceedings has been published. More information on research plans for the Bras d'Or Lakes and a copy of the workshop report can be obtained from Timothy Lambert directly, or through the Bras d'Or Stewardship Society secretary.

WATER QUALITY MONITORING RESULTS

During the summer of 1999 four students were employed under the guidance by the Bras d'Or Stewardship Society's chairman, Pat Bates, to promote environmental awareness and carry out a series of water quality testing in the harbor of Baddeck. The samples collected were tested for fecal coliform contamination. This was a first for the Society in what is hoped will be a continuing summer water quality monitoring initiative.

The results of the water samples taken in Baddeck on three separate occasions showed fecal coliform counts in acceptable ranges except in certain specific locations. The highest count was after a heavy rain when the Baddeck sewage treatment plant can not handle the excessive flow of water from the storm sewers which become overloaded.



MEMBERSHIP 2000

With this **NEWSLETTER** a return envelope is enclosed with a year 2000 membership form. We hope that you will see fit to support the Society in this first year of a new century. Our membership base has steadily grown since 1997. We will be sending out 300 newsletters. It costs about \$2.50/ newsletter with postage, printing and envelopes. We like to think of the Society has a bottom up organization attracting support from a broad cross section of individuals who understand the importance and value in protecting and conserving Cape Breton's preeminent natural asset, the Bras d'Or Lakes.

THE WEB AND YOU

As you are aware the Society has a website (www.capebreton.com/Baddeck/BSS) established in December 1999. The site has generated close to 1,000 hits. We believe that linkages that can be reached through our website are powerful and informative. We urge you to use our site to explore what is going on out there in the "environment of cyberspace." It is exciting and informative as the links provide a panorama of global environmental networking. The information is free to all and means that no longer is one a hostage of information withholding. With a click of your mouse you can easily travel the environmental information highway.

Have fun!

THE BRAS D'OR STEWARDSHIP SOCIETY

The Blue Heron, the newsletter of the Bras d'Or Stewardship Society, will be published periodically to keep members informed of important issues and concerns regarding projects, responsible stewardship, and important events. The Blue Heron would like input from its readers. Please submit to:

The Bras d'Or Stewardship Society P.O. Box 158, Baddeck, Nova Scotia, Canada B0E 1B0

The Bras d'Or Stewardship Society

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Bras d'Or Watch

A telephone number and fax number are now available to report any observed acts, incidents and violations which should be recorded for future reference with regard to adverse effects on the Bras d'Or Lake and its watershed. Please feel free to call 1(902)756-3264 or fax 1(902)756-2965. This service will allow monitoring and reporting threats to the integrity of the Bras d'Or watershed.

2000

BRAS D'OR STEWARDSHIP SOCIETY

MEMBER \$15.00
FAMILY \$25.00
CONTRIBUTOR \$50.00
SUPPORTER \$100.00
LIFETIME MEMBER \$500.00

Yes, I am in favour of conserving and restoring the
Bras d'Or Lake and watershed through
responsible stewardship.

Mail check or money order along with your
name and address to:

Bras d'Or Stewardship Society
P.O. Box 158
Baddeck, Nova Scotia, B0E 1B0

Phone

e-mail

Fax

Do We Need A Bras d'Or Lakes Charter?

by Dr. James V. O'Brien

"WORDS ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH" W.B. Yeats

During the last six weeks in Cape Breton I spent a total of four full days at different meetings, all concerning the threatened ecological integrity of the Bras d'Or Lakes system. Many individuals and groups were involved and many aspects of human activity taking place within the Bras d'Or system were addressed, whether economic, scientific, cultural, or leisure.

During these deliberations three words have cropped up again and again were "**resources**", "**management**" and "**development**", none of which I think are so "certain good" as the post suggested, but all of which have powerful and troubling connotations from the point of view of the future welfare of the Bras d'Or Lakes system.

To take the last first It seems to me, that all too often, the fact that "**development**" almost invariably involves the long term or permanent destruction of a piece of the ecosystem, is either not mentioned or conveniently forgotten. It may be an overused point to make, but unspoiled land, particularly unspoiled land around the Bras d'Or Lakes, is a finite shrinking entity. No new land is being made, yet we continue to exploit this finite irreplaceable asset, as if we had no descendants and there were no tomorrow.

I have misgivings with the idea of regarding all or part, or aspects of, the lakes as being "**resources**". For this word also has adverse connotations, since it implies we should regard the lakes, or aspects of them, primarily as commodities to be exploited commercially. The profit motive becomes the main if not the only serious consideration. To conceptualize the Bras d'Or Lakes in these terms, carries troubling implications.

To illustrate the point: Imagine that a multinational corporation came forward with a plan to develop in the Lakes a form of aquaculture on a massive scale, a plan that was labour intensive and more profitable than all the other all other economic activities currently taking place. Let us even suppose this corporation was honest enough to admit such development would cause serious damage to the ecology of the entire system, and probably adversely effect most of the other activities in or around the Lakes. If we see the Lakes primarily as an economic resource" to be exploited in order to provide the maximum number of immediate jobs and profit then, despite the potential damage, this could be seen as an acceptable and reasonable thing to do in terms of "resource" development and exploitation.

As for the questions of "managing" our natural resources, this is part of the monotone mumbo jumbo chanted by the corporate sector and the gurus of the business and finance. One might, for example, recall that the stocks of Atlantic ground-fish were super-abundant when left solely to the biodiverse processes of the natural order processes we still know little about. Then we decided to "**manage**" them. The end result of homosapiens's self-centered "**management**" of this "**resource**" is the virtual disappearance of this abundance.

Because of the devastation we have already inflicted on the

environment, we may now sometimes have to interfere in order to remedy the damage, but I suggest that wherever possible we should leave the "managing" job to mother nature-if, for no other reason than we have only the most fragmentary knowledge of how the natural order works.

Words are important, and they can be used to obscure and hide the truth. In this case, "**management**," "**resource**" and "**development**" don't hide the truth, they reveal it. If we see the Bras d'Or Lakes in terms of a natural resource like coal or gypsum, which provide jobs and profit only when exploited, then we are seeing them totally in the wrong light. If we *MUST* use a financial analogy, it is much wiser to conceive of the Bras d'Or Lakes as **communal shares** in a good company which are wise to hold on to, while living off the dividends, rather than as a stock we sell for profit from its short term increase in value. The dividends keep coming in, once the profits from the sale are gone they are gone. Unfortunately when we use terms like "**resource development**" and "**management**" we are putting ourselves in the short-term profit mode, long-term bankruptcy mind-set.

Obviously it's not likely that these kinds of words will stop being used, but at least they could be made less damaging for the Bras D'Or Lakes if we would develop an acceptable code of behaviour for all economic and other activity within its watershed area. We could write a **CHARTER** for the Lakes as suggested in "**TAKING CARE OF THE BRAS D'OR: A NEW APPROACH TO STEWARDSHIP OF THE BRAS D'OR WATERSHED**" (published by UCCB in 1995). About decisions related to planning, development and protection, it says, "*The CHARTER should be a clear and explicit statement of pre-eminent importance for protecting the health and integrity of the land and water within the watershed.*"

If such a **CHARTER** existed then perhaps we could worry less about the implications of the language used when it came to individual schemes, since the limits of "**resource development**" and their "**management**" would already be defined.

A last point: It is a sobering thought that if we, as a species, disappeared off the face of the earth, almost all other forms of life would benefit greatly! We alone it seems, are poison irrespective of our race, religion, creed or colour.

Jim O'Brien is Secretary of the Bras d'Or Stewardship Society

(Printed previously in the Cape Breton Post)

Water And The Next Millennium

by PAT BATES

Water, Water, Everywhere a phrase taken from Samuel Coleridge's "*Rhyme of The Ancient Mariner*", an author who allegedly could not secure his needs despite the notion of abundance. As we enter the new millennium. There are serious indications that the need to conserve and protect the world's various water resources will be a major issue of international concern. As Canadians, we have been blessed with some of the world's best resources of good water. It has been just recently that the average Canadian is catching a glimpse of the significance of our good fortune and the increasing number of risks to our ability to protect and conserve this natural asset.

The subject of water in terms of its quantity, quality and availability to meet our daily and future requirements is complex and will likely receive extensive coverage in this new year. The Nova Scotia Department of Environment has become actively involved in searching for ways to manage allocation of the resources between legitimate consumers, domestic and commercial, within the province. While we may take the availability of water for granted, it is nevertheless essential to the functioning of our economy and large and reliable quantities are as much a factor of production in our pulp and paper mills, fishery, agriculture and tourism sectors as are electric energy, availability of capital and skilled work force.

Members of the Bras d'Or Stewardship Society share the concerns of others regarding the quantity and quality of our consumable water. But in addition, Society members are aware of the need to conserve our lake waters, whether in terms of personal consumption or for the purposes of protecting a resource for the employment of citizens and to support responsible and sustainable economic and social activity.

There have been some useful albeit expensive lessons learned in a number of Canadian locations wherein important water bodies were not protected. For example, White Pine Lake in the Ontario region contaminated by PCB's and PH related chemicals is reported to have been restored, the 1999 status report by the Lake Erie Lakewide Management Plan official reveal significant progress on the clean-up of pollutants (chemical and human waste) from that waterway and some progress is reported on the clean-up and restoration of the St. Lawrence River. All such activity is the story of persistent neglect and poor stewardship followed by alarm when the problems reached crisis proportions in costly remedial action to have the situation reversed.

Residents in many parts of Canada are becoming keenly aware of the increasing levels of risk to our important lakes, rivers and streams. In Newfoundland there has been a program developed for Watershed Management and Salmon Enhancement geared to the economic benefits of a growing recreational fishery. This fishery has been threatened for a number of reasons including the suspicion of unsuitable forest harvesting practices within the respective watersheds effecting brook and stream inflows. In the November 19,

1999 edition of the North Bay Nugget Newspaper there is the report of the establishment of the Lake Nipissing Stewardship Council for the purpose of providing advice to the minister on regulations and actions essential to address problems of pollutant discharges into the lake and restoration of a valuable fishery.

The circumstances related to the risks experienced in many of our waterways will differ but the principle approach under the Lake Erie example appears to have broad applications in most all cases. Through the Lakewide Management Plan it was decided to employ an "**Ecosystem Approach**" to safeguard the Lake. To quote from the LAMP 1999 Report, "*With safe beaches, clean drinking water, and healthy fish and wildlife populations in mind, the Lake Erie LAMP is using an ecosystem approach to co-ordinate the work of environmental and natural resource organizations that do not routinely interact. This approach integrates water and air quality as well as natural resources management practices. This coordination effort combines the work of researchers, regulators and environmental managers from public and private sources. Pooling these resources makes it easier to achieve commitments to the LAMP process for key environmental improvements to Lake Erie.*" There is also provision for citizen input.

Needless to say, this is a very useful systems approach now employed in the Lake Erie context was driven by a problem allowed to grow into crisis proportions. Hopefully, we can learn from the experiences of this other jurisdiction and work toward establishing a code of personal conduct and corporate practices that will safeguard the Bras d'Or Lakes avoiding a problem of crisis and costly proportion.

Pat Bates is Chairman of
The Bras d'Or Stewardship Society

