



Tourism

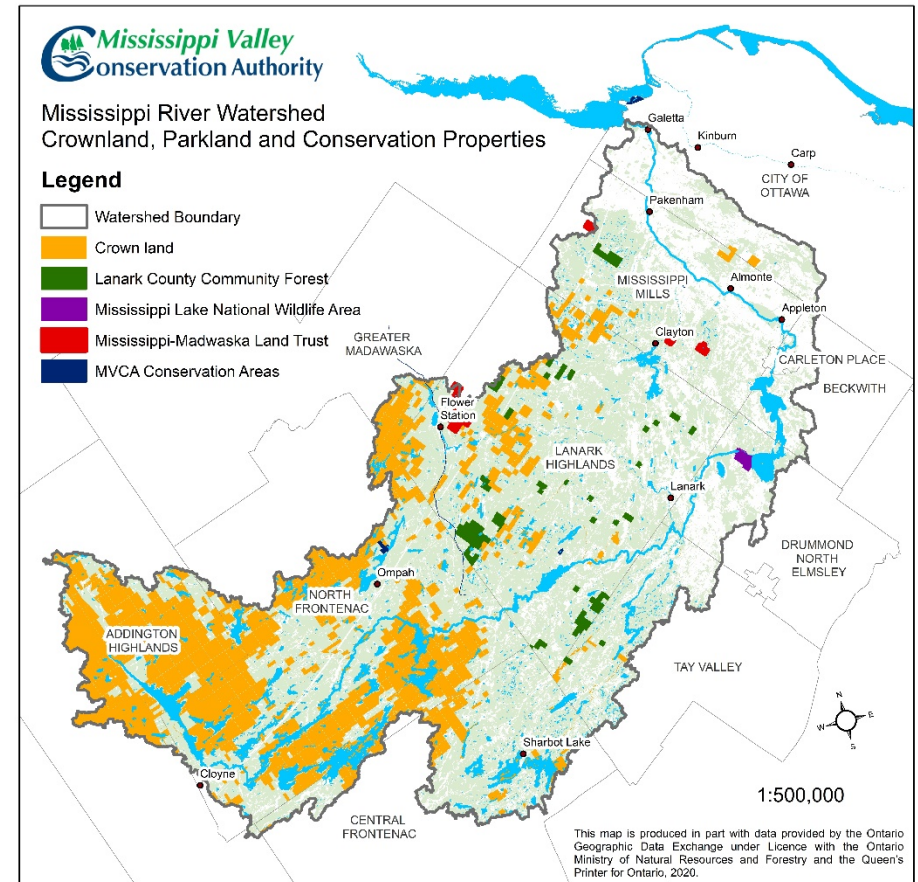
Mississippi River Watershed Plan Discussion Paper Series

TOURISM IN THE MISSISSIPPI WATERSHED:

The Mississippi River watershed offers many nature based attractions that supports tourist operators that are directly marketing an outdoor recreation experience. By attracting visitors to the area, it also generates numerous secondary benefits (grocery, restaurant, gas, other accommodation, etc.). The industry depends on the sustained integrity of the lakes and rivers, shorelines, crown land and other natural areas, vistas and viewscapes.

KEY FACTS:

- Local tourism is largely focused on the recreational opportunities provided by the many lakes, rivers, and vast areas of crown land.
- About 21% the watershed is crown land, with much abutting lakes and rivers and helping to protect the shoreline and aquatic habitats.
- Another 4.7% of the land is protected for conservation or recreation through: Lanark County Community Forests; Mississippi-Madawaska Land Trust properties; Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) Conservation Areas; Municipal Parks; and the Mississippi Lake National Wildlife Area.
- Attractions include: fishing & hunting; camping, trail hiking & bird watching; canoeing, kayaking and motor boating; swimming; scenic routes; and winter snowmobiling and cross country skiing.
- Four provincial parks, (Bon Echo, Sharbot Lake and Silver Lake and Fitzroy), provide 1000 campsites and North Frontenac Parklands (managed by North Frontenac Twp.) provides waterfront camping on a number of watershed lakes.
- The Conservation Areas, municipal parks, public beaches, and recreational trails also attract tourists. The K&P Conservation Area provides a 35 kilometers of multi-use recreational trail.



- Private waterfront based businesses such as resorts, camps, fishing expeditions, marinas and canoe/boat rentals, are mostly located in the west part of the watershed and on Mississippi Lake.

TOURISM - CHALLENGES

As a largely outdoor recreation based industry, local tourism is vulnerable on a number of factors, both environmental and human-induced, that are beyond the control of the tourism operator. Key challenges relate to both climate change and changes in land use, with resulting impacts to water levels, water quality, aquatic habitats, fish & wildlife health and populations, shoreline aesthetics/health, and the quality and availability of natural landscapes.

Outdoor recreation based tourism is particularly vulnerable to the potential impacts of **climate change** such as: water level fluctuations (lower summer water levels); changes to the fishery (species /recruitment); degradation of water quality (nutrient enrichment and algae); increased invasive species; and forest fire hazard.

Water quality and ecosystem health are essential to providing a marketable water recreation based tourist experience. A lake that has clean water for swimming, with good fishing and beautiful shorelines has significantly more tourism value than one that is becoming overgrown with weeds and algae, and has low fish stocks.

Water levels are a concern for marina and fishing based establishments that depend on the provision of safe and accessible boat docking and launching facilities that are usable throughout their limited peak seasons. Challenges include more frequent extreme weather events, and seasonal frustrations and conflicts when fluctuating levels impact the condition and use of shoreline amenities (ex. docks, boathouses, and retaining walls).

The **density of development on waterfront properties and shorelines** can have significant impacts on ecosystem health and natural aesthetic qualities. With the high demand for waterfront property, the management of waterfront and shoreline development at a sustainable level is an ongoing challenge. [See our Waterfront Properties Discussion Paper for details.](#)

The Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry (MNR) oversees the **management of fish and wildlife populations** through a combination of monitoring and licensing. The licensing of fishing and hunting activities is regulated using area based management units. Restrictions are determined based on factors specific to each management unit. While those tools can help to directly manage the harvest of fish and game in a sustainable manner, the health of fish and wildlife populations is intrinsically tied to the activities described elsewhere in this chapter (i.e., waterfront/shoreline development, agriculture, and forestry).

Natural landscapes and viewscapes across the watershed may be negatively impacted by a variety of land uses including development, forestry, and aggregate operations and natural occurrences (ex. forest fires, micro-bursts, and invasive species impacts).

TOURISM - OPPORTUNITIES

Water levels can be managed to a certain extent through dam operations. MVCA, with the support of its member municipalities, can adopt and implement **Asset Management Plans** to ensure the long term structural integrity of the dams. The **Mississippi River Water Management Plan** can be reassessed to determine if there is opportunity to adjust water level operating regimes in response the impacts of climate change. Since water levels can't be controlled completely, especially during climate extremes of flooding and drought, we must manage expectations through **education and awareness** about how the river system functions, and help property owners design their shoreline structures and use accordingly.

MVCA's regulation of floodplain, wetlands and shoreline areas allows us to restrict new development and require floodproofing measures where we have floodplain mapping. There is room to work with the municipalities to address our mutual goals and responsibilities for minimizing flood hazard risk and for the protection of water quality and natural features and systems. A collaborated review and adjustment of MVCA regulation policies in conjunction with municipal planning policies, and implementation practices, could improve effectiveness and consistency in the management of waterfront development.

Municipal planning policy and implementation of the 30 m water setback combined with a vegetated and naturalized shoreline buffer are the most effective measures to protect water quality and lake health. Municipalities have the ability to implement these measures through their planning approval process and there is potential to achieve

stronger, more consistent implementation between municipalities through update to their municipal policies.

Lake Trout lakes are afforded special protection under provincial policy and guidelines because of their sensitivity to development impacts. These features will be particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Monitoring and reporting of water quality and other environmental conditions provides a documented record of changes over time and helps to flag potential issues that may need attention. It also helps to raise awareness and understanding about the interactions and between human activities, the land and water, and various impacts.

Lake Associations and individuals participate in programs offered by MVCA and others, that are directed at maintaining or improving the health of the water and surrounding environment. Volunteer activities include water quality and invasive species monitoring, shoreline naturalization projects and fish habitat enhancement projects. Many volunteers and volunteer groups also work independently of MVCA in carrying out environmental work.

Education & awareness can help further our collective understanding of the interactions between climate, water and environmental condition, that aren't always within our control. It can also build support and action in the stewardship and protection of water and waterfront assets such as good water quality and a healthy ecosystem. There is great opportunity to work with lake associations and other partners to continually build on education and awareness for our lake/ waterfront communities.

PARTNERS IN TOURISM

Many organizations have an interest in tourism. In addition to engaging area municipalities, provincial agencies and lake associations the MVCA has been working with a Watershed Public Advisory Committee (PAC) made up of representatives from key communities in the watershed including: agriculture, development, forestry, hydro producers, lake associations, tourism and the general public. Other potential partners include the following:

- Counties of Addington Highlands, Lanark and North Frontenac
- Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance
- Economic Development groups/committees
- Federation of Ontario Cottage Associations (FOCA)
- Lanark County Tourism
- Lanark Fish and Game Clubs
- Other area Fish and Game Clubs
- Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH)
- Ontario Highlands Tourism Organization (OHTO)
- Tourist Associations and Business Groups

35 DRAFT ACTIONS

MVCA has identified 35 potential actions designed to address the goals and objectives identified through the watershed planning process. A much longer list was reviewed and culled in consultation with the Watershed PAC. The following actions are relevant to tourism. To see all 35 draft actions visit: <https://mvc.on.ca/watershedplan/>

Action 1. Extend the role of the MVCA Public Advisory Committee (PAC) for implementation and update of the Watershed Plan. (committee is made up of agriculture, development, forestry, hydro power, lakes, tourism)

Action 2. Continue to collaborate with and promote collaboration among lake associations through networking groups and direct partnerships.

Action 7. Update Mississippi River Water Management Plan to address modeling and water budget work completed under Actions 5 and 6, and

to assist in rebalancing the competing interests for the watershed's water resources where needed.

Action 15. Support waterfront property owners in implementing adaptive management measures to address potential impacts of variable water levels.

Action 24. Continue annual analysis and reporting of water quality conditions presented at a subwatershed scale and adjust reporting cycles, parameters, and geographic coverage where needed.

Action 28. Work with municipalities and the Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry to improve application and coordination of regulatory tools for the protection of water quality.

Action 29. Value the ecosystem services and climate resiliency provided by natural asset features and functions (wetlands, woodlands, etc.).

Action 30. Work with municipalities and public agencies to improve the application and coordination of regulatory tools for the protection of wetlands, riparian areas, woodlands and natural systems.

Action 31. Support counties and municipalities in fulfilling Provincial Policy Statement (PPS 2020) requirements for Natural Heritage Systems.

Action 32. Develop and implement a 3 Year MVCA Stewardship Program Pilot for protection of where needed for water quality, wetland and forest cover, and other environmental features. *This may include:*

- *Work with Stewardship Council(s) to review current stewardship programming, needs, overlap and gaps.*
- *Promote participation in existing stewardship initiatives by other groups.*
- *Collaborate with municipalities in expanding implementation of a Rural Clean Water Program to include watershed areas outside of Ottawa.*

- *Promote participation in land conservation incentive programs such as the RVCA Tree planting Program, Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program (CLTIP), the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP) and the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program.*
- *Work with the province, agricultural community, and other owners of large land holdings, to protect and enhance wetlands, woodlands, and natural corridors through land retirement and restoration programs and incentives.*
- *Support indigenous communities in protecting and raising awareness about the importance of wild rice.*

Action 33. Work with Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry to identify crown holdings and develop strategies to ensure the protection of crown natural assets

Action 34. Develop a Land Conservation Strategy to mitigate flood, erosion and other natural hazards, and to support the ecological services provided by natural systems. *This may include:*

- *Continue partnership with Lanark County in the sustainable management of the Community Forests.*
- *Support the promotion of land trusts as a means of protecting natural features and systems.*
- *Pursue acquisition of natural features and systems, and suitable corridor holdings, either by MVCA, land trusts, municipalities, or other appropriate bodies.*