

Environmental health of the Rideau Canal Workshop – Government Group Summary

Report by: Isha Mistry (Master's student in Environmental Sustainability), Christine Beaudoin (PhD student in Sociology) and Nathan Young (Professor in Sociology), University of Ottawa

Introduction

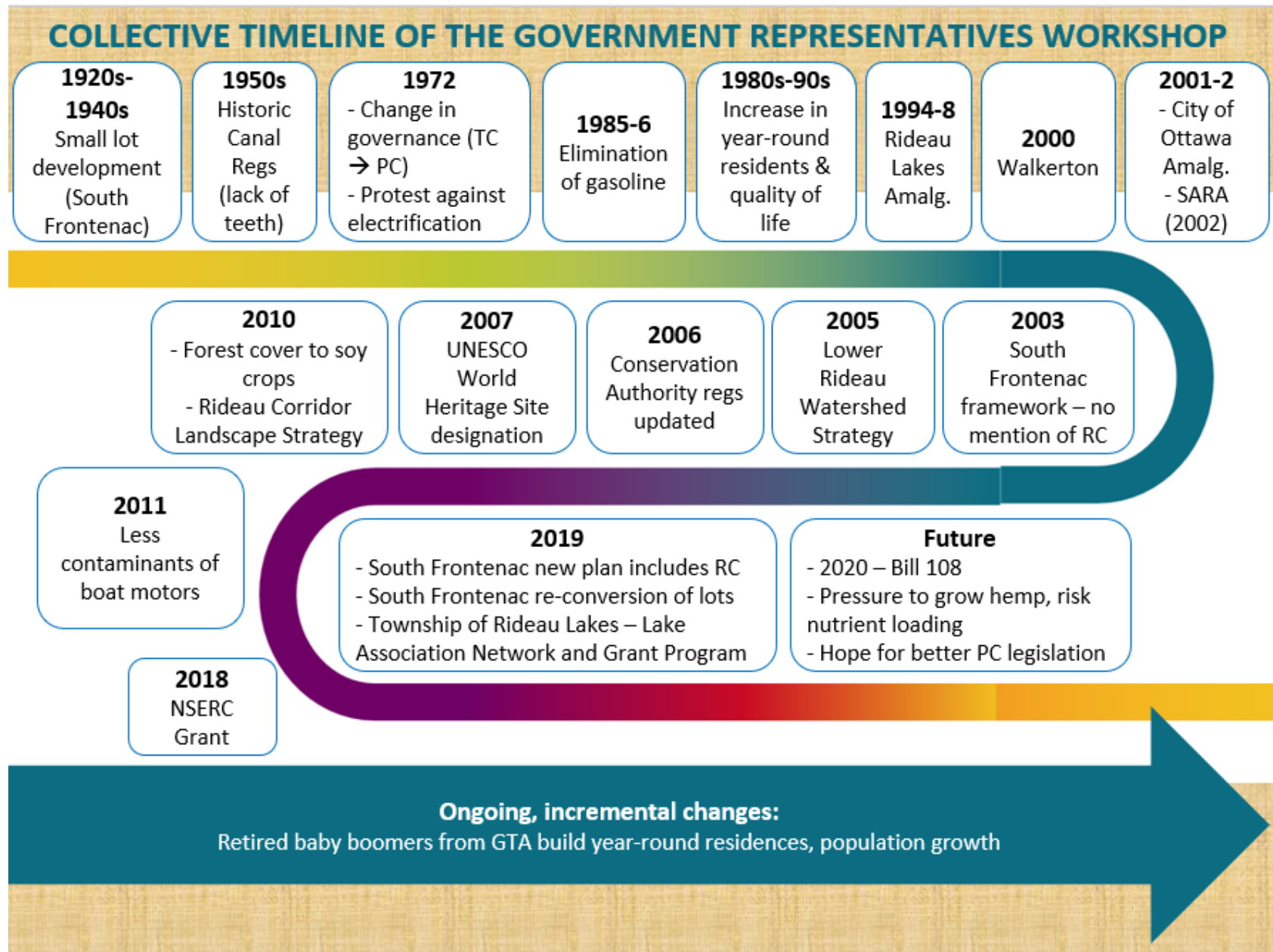
On December 5th, 2019, researchers from the University of Ottawa met in Smiths Falls with government representatives for a workshop on the environmental health of the Rideau Canal. The workshop used a technique called Collaborative Conceptual Modelling to elicit views on environmental health, to identify key factors, challenges, and events that have affected environmental health over time, to model how these different factors influence one another, and to discuss potential leverage points for resolving challenges. This workshop is one of a series, and a full analysis of all workshops is forthcoming. This document provides a brief summary of the findings from the December 5th workshop. Comments from participants are welcome and can be sent to Nathan.Young@uottawa.ca

Top 5 Challenges Identified in the Workshop

Count	Challenge
11	State of the shoreline (development, erosion, alterations/expansions, cumulative impacts, balance, historic patterns)
8	Water management (headwater loss, water quality, water levels, connectivity, variability, flooding)
7	Governance regime (political will, public buy-in, legislation, coordination between jurisdictions, monitoring, watershed approach, changing priorities)
7	Municipal role (storm drainage, planning, enforcement, economy, setbacks for septic systems and development)
7	Land use (wetland and forest loss, impervious surfaces, shift to permanent occupancy)

Collective timeline of events

Disclaimer: These timelines are built from the workshop activities, dates may not be exact and not all key events for the RC may be present. Feel free to send us additional details or events as we will continue to build timelines in our next workshops!



List of leverage points identified by the group

- Create official plans and zoning bylaws with long-term planning in mind that uses consistent language across local levels (e.g. stop building in floodplains)
- Develop mechanisms to manage low capacity for enforcing regulations
- Implement universal use of tile drain outlet controls
- Obtain provincial and federal infrastructure funding for wetlands as it is a burden on property owners
- Shift to self-regulation – there are minimal resources, so we need to use existing knowledge and assets
- Enhance collaboration efforts by breaking down jurisdictional barriers
 - Take a multi-partner approach with economy as the driver (tourism, development and government)
- Think beyond partisanship (past 4-year terms into 7 generations ahead), separating politics from resources and developing cross partisan relationships → generational politics
- Education on a watershed scale, also including Indigenous ways of knowing, led by Lake Associations as municipalities are limited in capacity
- Advocate science stewardship and measure success in a scientific way
- Be positive, show off successes, do workshops like this and encourage each other, balance between positive/negative
- Include youth in considerations as they are the future decision-makers
- Need for a paradigm shift to influence current decision-makers at “Queen’s Park”
- Build relationships with Council, each other and community
 - Westport harbour: Engage the community, tourism and the harbour to connect generations and education on the health of the lake
- Look at other models e.g. Rideau Landscape Corridor and Ottawa Riverkeeper
- Host an annual workshop for the entire system (led by federal and provincial officials) to share best practices at various levels that can help update policies
 - Need a jurisdiction to champion (talk to politicians vs bureaucrats)
- Action in crisis – coordinated action at high and local levels

Summary

Participants in the December 5th workshop focused on shoreline and water management, as well as the role of the municipalities in managing land use activities. Issues of ill-coordinated activities across jurisdictions and between various groups, the lack of enforcement of current regulations, and the need for updated regulations were emphasized. There was a desire in the group for positive, forward thinking that transcends political partisanship and jurisdictional boundaries. Developing relationships with partners and other stakeholders was identified as a key activity in advancing efforts to improve the environmental health of the Canal. The group emphasized the potential of youth to shape the future of environmental management in way that considers sustainability. The Township of Rideau Lakes – Lake Association Committee, was mentioned as an inclusive model for better managing local concerns. Beyond local matters, the group appreciated the workshop as a collaborative effort and would like to see the federal or provincial government lead an annual workshop that can celebrate successes, and where various groups/organizations can learn from each other to influence high and local level policy.