

Environmental health of the Rideau Canal Workshop – Economic Interest 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 March 28th, 2019, researchers from the University of Ottawa met in Smiths Falls with business owners, economic development officials, and industry association members 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 March 28th workshop. Comments from participants are welcome and can be sent to Nathan.Young@uottawa.ca

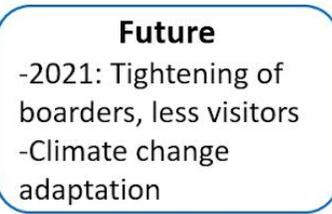
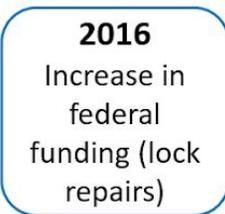
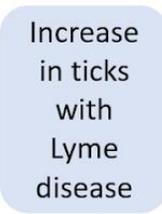
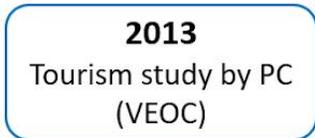
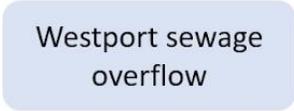
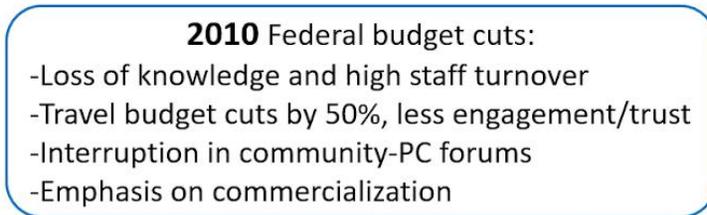
Top 5 Challenges Identified in the Workshop

Count	Challenge
9	Contamination (regulation, waste waters, pesticides, agricultural run-off)
7	Regulation and policies (enforcement, environmental and other, inconsistency among different governments, long-term common vision)
6	Biodiversity (invasive species, weed cover, forest health)
6	Shoreline development (small communities, erosion, waterfront, hardening)
4	Boating related concerns (wake, erosion, vegetation)

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!

COLLECTIVE TIMELINE OF ECONOMIC INTEREST GROUPS



Ongoing, incremental changes:

Change in responsibility, lack of connection, no gathering place, overlap in engagement (repetition, fatigue, lack of coordination), misalignment between development and natural timelines



List of leverage points identified by the group

- Connect individual actions to outcomes
- Prioritize conservation (improve funding, foster outdoor appreciation, see the ecology as an asset)
- Work on public awareness and education (increase visibility and exposure, adapt language to different audiences, cater to a variety of interests, spread multiple messages, mobilize storytelling, place more signage, put emphasis on the World Heritage Site status of the Rideau Canal)
- Use new media to foster interest in the Rideau Canal (have a strong web presence and publicity, use social media)
- Transmit knowledge and caring about the Canal through experiential learning (direct public engagement with nature, the infrastructure and people, foster tourism activities)
- Provide a comprehensive document compiling information on activities and assessments for the Canal
- Connect organizations with limited budgets to pool resources and level the playing field across the system
- Strengthen laws, regulations and enforcement regarding development, fish, boating restrictions and shoreline impacts
- Promote climate adaptation and environmental awareness from the global level to the Rideau Canal and community context

Summary

Participants in the March 28th workshop focused on a range of social and ecological issues and challenges. Issues of contamination and pollution were a major theme of the workshop, particularly the impact of agricultural practices and poor waste management. Problems of invasive species were also frequently mentioned. Public awareness and education were discussed at length in the context of these challenges, particularly the need for better communication and knowledge sharing. Participants seemed to agree that social media and new media holds great potential for educating users of the Canal. Participants indicated that current regulations are not being consistently enforced. A good deal of importance was assigned to actions of the federal government. For example, budget cutbacks in 2010 and free access to parks for Canada 150 were seen as important moments. Participants indicated a strong willingness to participate in governance, and that Parks Canada should coordinate better with community and business groups on issues of common concern. Participants in this workshop identified tourism experiences as opportunities for experiential learning with local and foreign publics, which would get people to care about the Rideau Canal and to work towards enhancing its environmental health.