

Bay of Quinte RAP seeks tougher protection of watershed

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A new Bay of Quinte Remedial Action Plan discussion paper has been released recommending a further clampdown on phosphorous entering the Bay of Quinte watershed to prevent harmful algae blooms.
DEREK BALDWIN FILE

Decades-long efforts to delist the Bay of Quinte as one of 43 environmental areas of concern on The Great Lakes are ramping up with the release of a new discussion paper recommending a further clampdown on phosphorous entering the watershed to stem harmful algae blooms.

Growing development and climate change demand even more aggressive measures to reduce phosphorous levels in the bay from the current 30 mg. per litre to 26/27 mg. per litre to prevent algae blooms from choking off fish and marine habitat, say paper authors with the Bay of Quinte Remedial Action Plan.

Plan coordinators say the chemical element of phosphorous “in aquatic ecosystems like the Bay of Quinte (BQ), it’s the ability of phosphorus to promote rapid growth that causes problems. It takes only one lb. of phosphorus to grow 500 lbs. of algae.”

“Thick, floating algal mats cut off light and oxygen, choke out other aquatic plants and decomposing algae and weeds take up oxygen in the water that is vital to fish and other animals. They can also cause taste and odour problems in drinking water.”

Sarah Midlane-Jones, community outreach specialist with the Bay of Quinte Remedial Action Plan, said in an interview Friday the 37-page discussion paper will help lead the way toward an even cleaner watershed that is vital to the economic and natural wellbeing of the Quinte region.

“The long-term phosphorous management plan is important to build on the success of the remedial action plan. The plan will be completed in the next few years and there needs to be something in place to assure the bay doesn’t revert back to the conditions when the remedial action plan started,” Midlane-Jones said. “It was identified as an area of concern in 1985 and the reports came out in the early ‘90s.”

In 1993, the Remedial Action Plan released 80 recommendations to reverse years of ecological damage from pollution, industrial runoff and sewage plants that contributed to harmful effluent flowing into the Bay of Quinte.

Nearly three decades later, much progress has been made to meet the recommendations but more work needs to be done to ensure that the health of the watershed continues to improve.

“The main issue with the bay has always been the amount of phosphorous going into it from urban and rural sources. So, this plan sets targets for the amount of phosphorous taking into account there will be population increases, development pressures and climate change that are all going to present future challenges and possibly increase phosphorous levels to the bay,” Midlane-Jones said.

The new plan by the Bay of Quinte Restoration Council, which oversees the remedial action plan, has sought extensive expert input for the latest discussion paper from many sources including University of Toronto, federal and provincial agencies, Environment Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

“All these sort of agencies have had input into this plan and, as part of it, we have to go out and talk to people that it is going to affect. We’ve been talking to municipalities about it and we’re going to be talking to agriculture about it, we will also be talking to the general public about [how] this is the next step once the bay is delisted,” Midlane-Jones said.

Targets are set forth in the discussion paper to tamp down phosphorous levels from leaching from Quinte lands into the watershed.

“The goal is to restore and maintain the Bay to a healthy and sustainable condition for the long term by reducing the risk of harmful algae blooms, while maintaining the sustainable fisheries in

the Bay. The strategy is to be based on best available science and modelling studies, the best available technology for wastewater and stormwater treatment, and the adoption of long-term stewardship initiatives,” the paper states.

Three major sources of phosphorous are identified as needing further reductions to achieve cleaner Bay of Quinte water.

The paper first calls for the reduction of “non-point phosphorus loading from agricultural land use need to be by 20 per cent based on current annual load estimates.”

A second target calls for sewage treatment plants and industrial wastewater treatment plants to reduce “phosphorus loadings by an average of 60 per cent, based on current environmental compliance approval approved limits and no net increase in loadings into the future. This can be accomplished through maintaining a phosphorus effluent limit of 0.1 mg TP/L design objective.”

A third target calls for the reduction of “urban non-point stormwater loadings by 50 per cent. The current loading estimate for stormwater inputs is 6.8 metric tons per year. This can be accomplished through adoption and implementation of existing recommended pollution prevention control plans, enhanced stormwater management controls, retrofits, and use of low impact development technologies,” according to the discussion paper.

The Bay of Quinte Restoration Council is seeking input on the proposed targets and actions that will form the basis for the long-term phosphorus management strategy.

The public is invited to forward its input to Sarah Midlane-Jones via email at smidlanejones@bqrap.ca.

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