

## **Waterdown man recognized for harbour restoration work**

Thirty-year Conservation Halton employee awarded lifetime achievement award for harbour remediation efforts

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Waterdown's John D. Hall was recognized last week for his long-time leadership in cleaning up Hamilton Harbour.

Even though both pleased and gratified to be awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Hamilton Environmentalists of the Year Awards Committee, Hall hasn't lost sight of the bigger picture.

Many people have been involved in the long-range project to improve the environmental quality of local harbour and its watersheds.

As coordinator of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan (RAP), however, Hall perhaps appreciates better than most just how big the project is and how all-encompassing it has become.

"My greatest satisfaction is being able to work with different groups," like scientists, municipal employees, civil servants and "an active citizenry," he said. "That's something I've always enjoyed."

### **DIVERSE FIELDS**

A 30-year employee of Conservation Halton, currently seconded to Environment Canada to work on the harbour cleanup, Hall suspects that his ability to work with people from diverse fields is what landed him in the job of RAP coordinator six years ago. "They were looking for a generalist to work with people, not a specialist who might bring a bias to how things were done," he explained.

### **WATERFRONT PLANNING**

The job was a natural fit for Hall, who had been working on waterfront planning in Burlington and Hamilton during his stay with Conservation Halton and on an earlier secondment with the Ontario Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans.

As RAP coordinator, he spends most of his time working with the implementation team mandated to bring sustainable natural ecosystems to Hamilton Harbour and make way for more extensive recreational uses of the waterfront.

The Bay Area Implementation Team (BAIT) represents 18 key government and industrial stakeholders. RAP, itself, represents over 40 agencies from industry, environment and government, including representatives of all levels of government,

the Royal Botanical Gardens and the two area conservation groups, Conservation Halton and Hamilton Conservation.

Overseeing public participation and scrutinizing the work being done by Hall and other RAP partners is the Bay Area Restoration Council (BARC).

The community-not-for-profit group plays a valuable role as the public outreach and education arm of the project, Hall explained, while quickly noting, "It's one of the groups I really enjoy working with."

Hall feels that his job offers the best of both worlds. "Not only do I get an opportunity to see results with the environment, but I also get to work with some really wonderful people," he said.

One project that he takes pride in is the restoration of a beach for waterfowl and other birds, and creation of a natural and complex shoreline at the LaSalle Park Marina. The area can be reached by traveling south down Waterdown Road until the lake comes into view. There, people can enjoy walking along the shoreline and seeing the many different species of birds that visit the area.

A series of reefs and shoals offshore has also helped increase the fish population. While there are 60 different species of fish in the harbour, the goal is to restore the water's natural balance so that the numbers of more popular species, such as pike and pickerel, increase.

The growing number of aquatic plants in the harbour is seen as evidence of improved water quality. And as the harbour becomes a more desirable place to visit, strides are being made in increasing public access to the waterfront.

In 1990, about five per cent of the harbour's shoreline was accessible.

Today, about 20 per cent is open to public use and by the time the RAP reaches its targeted closure, up to 35 per cent will be accessible, Hall said.

While justifiably proud of the progress already made in the fish and wildlife restoration of Hamilton Harbour--a project that won international recognition from the Waterfront Centre in Washington DC in 1998--the RAP coordinator acknowledges there is still much to be done.

Hamilton's wastewater system needs further upgrading and the harbour's large coal-tar blob at Randle Reef, offshore just west of Stelco, needs to be contained.

Both projects are essential to restoring the environmental health of the harbour.

Hall applauds the City of Hamilton for the steps it has already taken in upgrading its wastewater system. "The city is committed to meeting the final RAP water quality targets," he said.

City council has approved water rate increases for the past five years in an effort to secure funds to sustain the system and meet quality requirements.

Construction of the engineered containment facility at Randle Reef will be huge project, involving millions of dollars coming from all levels of government. The facility will contain about 600,000 cubic metres of contaminated sediment and the overall project is expected to take five to 10 years to materialize.

Continuing fish and wildlife restoration along the harbour's 45-kilometre shoreline remains an important initiative, along with the restoration of the 250-hectare Coote's Paradise marsh at the west end of the harbour, Hall said.

While the RAP is just past its halfway point, its coordinator remains as fervent as ever about the project that will restore fish and wildlife habitat, increase public accessibility and recreational use of the harbour and reach water quality goals in accordance with the Great Lake Water Quality Agreement between Canada and the United States.



Hamilton Harbour RAP coordinator John Hall of Waterdown surveys a restored beach for waterfowl at the LaSalle Park Marina in Burlington.