

# Mac Johnson Wildlife Area Master Plan

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A new master plan for Mac Johnson Wildlife Area was adopted by the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority (CRCA) on November 22, 2006.

The Executive Summary is provided below. Click on the links in the sidebar to view the maps and a full copy of the master plan.

*(Note – since this plan was approved in 2006, several of these initiatives have been undertaken and a number of others are underway.)*

## Executive Summary

A Master Plan is developed to determine the best use and direction for a property over a twenty year horizon. Through the master planning process for the Mac Johnson Wildlife Area (MJWA), a vision for the long-term use of the property was developed, goals were set, and specific actions to be taken to meet these goals were identified. The process also identified the steps needed to respond to regional and local growth and the interests of stakeholders while creating an optimal future for the area.

## The Wildlife Area

The MJWA, established in 1968, encompasses 532 hectares, of which 85 per cent are wetland and open water. The remaining acreage consists of forests, fields, trails, and developed areas. At the heart of MJWA is the Buells Creek Reservoir, a Provincially Significant Wetland (PSW). A dam on the reservoir, the Broome-Runciman dam, was built in 1967 to provide flood control for the downstream City of Brockville by regulating flows in Buells Creek.

Visitors to MJWA come from two separate populations: those within walking distance of the property and those from further afield. Because the neighbouring residences are primarily south of Centennial Road, visitors who arrive on foot primarily use the trails south of the reservoir. Visitors from further away are more likely to drive into the Debruge Road entrance and use the northern trails.

The population using MJWA, like the population of Ontario, is growing and aging. Local development, currently occurring south of Centennial Road and along County Road 29, is expected to continue. Aging trends are also expected to continue over the next 20 years. MJWA, with its passive recreation favoured by older populations, will continue to be valued for its trails and nature experience as the population ages. This master plan accommodates these trends.

The property serves six primary functions:

- It provides important woodland, meadow, wetland, and open water habitat for almost 600 plant species, over 160 bird species, and a multitude of other fauna.
- The dam and reservoir provide flood control for the City of Brockville.
- The property is home to the Eastern Service Centre for maintenance of all CRCA properties and water control structures in the eastern portion of the Cataraqui region.
- Its trails and facilities provide passive outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Environmental education programs are offered from the property.
- Wildlife enhancement projects such as the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program are supported at MJWA.

Through the master planning process, it was identified that these functions are most important to stakeholders and should be enhanced and supported over the next 20 years. The steps recommended to enhance these functions are outlined below.

## **The Master Planning Process**

The master planning process, which began in 2005, was intended to update the existing 1983 Master Plan for the property. In preparation for updating the Master Plan, a facilitated workshop was held May 16, 2005 with a group of stakeholders with varying interests in the property. The issues and recommendations raised in that meeting are summarized in the document *“Issues and Focus Paper: Background to Updating the Stewardship Plan for Mac Johnson Wildlife Area”*, of May 30, 2005.

At that meeting, stakeholders developed the following Draft Vision Statement for MJWA:

*Mac Johnson Wildlife Area will continue to be appreciated as an important place, with significant intrinsic natural and cultural heritage values, which provides control of water flows at Buells Creek. The wildlife area will continue to afford valued opportunities for outdoor activity, focusing on appropriate recreational pursuits and environmental learning experiences, healthy living and care for the environment. The local community and visitors to the property will continue to collaborate with the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority in the stewardship and protection of the Mac Johnson Wildlife Area.*

A public open house was held to discuss conceptual plans for MJWA on December 1, 2005. Three concepts were proposed at the open house:

- Northlands Growth (development northwest of the reservoir);
- Southlands Growth (development south of the reservoir); and
- Status Quo (no significant development).

Stakeholders were asked to rate these options and/or offer their own concept, including combinations of the above. They were also encouraged to offer specific comments on the property and its future management.

## **Property Management Plan**

From comments suggested at the Open House and input gathered from other stakeholders, the direction for the property was developed for the next 20 years:

*To retain the status quo with limited northlands development and specific alterations to enhance the property.*

Priority was placed on the retention of all of the six primary functions of the property. As a result, maintenance of existing features (trails, buildings, wildlife habitats) directs much of the management plan. Habitat protection includes continuing to minimize access to both the northeastern portion of the property and to habitats for Species at Risk and Species of Special Interest.

In addition to maintenance, the specific alterations to be made to enhance the property within the next 20 years are as follows.

### **Improvements to Trails**

- Rationalizing trails
- Improvement of MJWA trail access points through completion of the fencing along Centennial Road and connections to the Brock Trail
- Construction of benches and picnic areas along southland trails
- Extension of Trail 5 east to the canoe access point
- Restriction of bicyclists to southland trails

### **Improvements to Facilities**

- Construction of a new Nature Centre (Building #4 on Figure 3) nearer to the main parking lot
- Use of the existing Nature Centre (Building #5 on Figure 2) as a storage facility
- Construction of an addition onto the south side of the Workshop (Building #1 on Figure 2)
- Sale of the Rental Property/Boardroom (Building #2 on Figure 2)
- Removal of the existing washrooms (Building #4 on Figure 2) following construction of the new Nature Centre with insulated bathrooms that can be accessed from outside the centre
- Construction of a new Skating Warming Hut (Building #6 on Figure 2)
- Consolidation of parking lots along Centennial Road

### **Retention and Enhancement of Wildlife Area Features**

- Hosting volunteer and/or staff BioBlitzes in all four seasons and on an on-going basis every few years
- Minimizing the negative impacts of the likely upgrading of Centennial Road to an arterial standard. Steps to be taken will include:
  1. shrub and tree planting along Centennial Road
  2. CRCA involvement in municipal planning of lighting, crosswalks, and stormwater management and
  3. monitoring and addressing the impacts of the road upgrade.
- Investigating and addressing concerns regarding degradation of the wetlands surrounding the beaver pond

- Monitoring water quality in the reservoir and beaver pond to accomplish the following:
  - determine both baseline levels and trends in the reservoir and beaver pond
  - identify water quality issues
  - evaluate whether eutrophication is occurring.

In addition, the following will be undertaken within the duration of this master plan:

- Identification and promotion of partnerships and partnering projects
- Completion of a Marketing and Financial Feasibility Study
- Enhancing recognition of MJWA.

An implementation schedule and relative costs for the above-listed projects are presented in the final two sections of Mac Johnson Wildlife Area Master Plan.

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