

The Lake Vernon Community wishes to preserve and enhance the future health of their lake and its surrounding watershed. The Lake Vernon Association, together with interested stakeholders have initiated the preparation of a long term strategy called the “Lake Vernon Plan”, in order to promote the protection and conservation of the values that are important to the Lake Vernon Community.

The Lake Vernon Plan identifies the significant natural, physical and social features that make the lake a desirable place for people to live and visit. These elements encompass the lake’s health, beauty, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, as well as opportunities for residential and commercial development. The purpose of the plan is to describe these features and to establish an action plan to ensure their health and preservation for future generations.

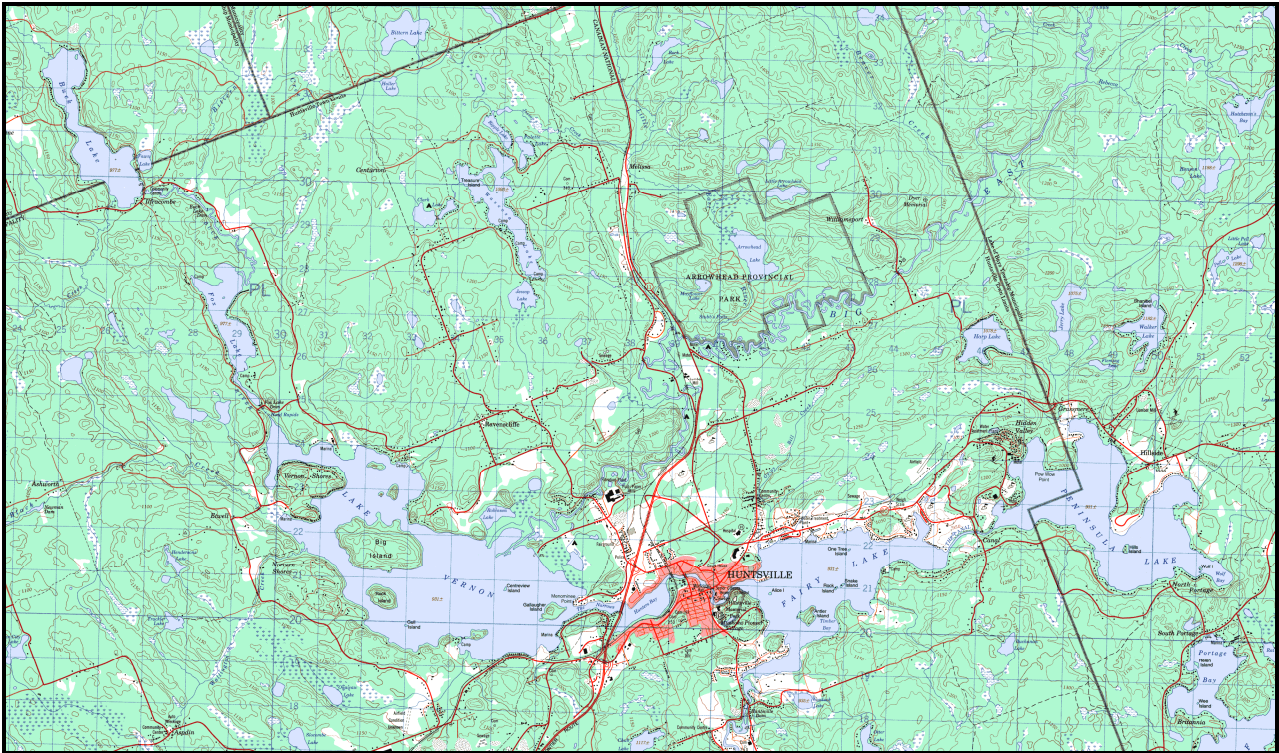
Lake Vernon is one of four lakes in the Huntsville chain of lakes (Vernon, Fairy, Peninsula and Mary) however it is not the first lake in the watershed to formulate a Lake Plan. Peninsula Lake completed a Lake Plan in 2001, and is currently implementing a list of twenty community actions. The Fairy Lake Association has also initiated a lake planning process and will seek approval from its residents and stakeholders during the summer of 2003. The residents of Fox Lake, which is upstream of Lake Vernon in the Buck River and Axe Creek watershed, have also initiated the preparation of a Lake Plan. The Mary Lake Association, which is immediately downstream of Fairy Lake, has expressed a keen interest, however, they have not initiated the process. The experience gained from the preparation of the Peninsula and Fairy Lake Plans has been of great benefit to the Lake Vernon Environmental Committee and the Lake Vernon Association extends its gratitude to both Lake Plan Working Groups and looks forward to the opportunity for future coordination of projects and activities. Many of the issues, concerns and solutions are similar among all four lakes and common objectives were established to co-ordinate strategic actions. It is hoped that all of these associations will work cooperatively on common issues in order to promote a consistent approach to solving issues.

The Town of Huntsville, together with the Huntsville Ratepayers Association, has initiated the formation of a Lake Council, which is composed of members of all lake associations in the Huntsville area and spearheaded by Mayor Hugh MacKenzie. The intent of the Lake Council is to share resources and ideas on the preparation of lake development guidelines as well as promote volunteer initiatives to sustain the health and quality of life on lakes in the area.

1.1 Scope and Approach

The Huntsville chain of lakes encompasses Lake Vernon, Fairy Lake, Peninsula Lake, Mary Lake and other smaller lakes (See Map 1). The scope of the Lake Vernon Plan applies to the immediate watershed surrounding Lake Vernon (shown in pink on Map 8). In order to ensure that all areas within the chain of the Huntsville Lakes were included, the scope of the Lake Vernon Plan was established in consultation with Peninsula Lake and Fairy Lake Associations. The study area of the Lake Vernon Plan consists of all of Lake Vernon, Hunters Bay, the Big East River up to Highway #11 and the North Branch of the Muskoka River down to the Main Street bridge in the Town of Huntsville.

Map 1 - Huntsville Chain of Lakes



In the fall of 2001 the Lake Vernon Environmental Committee initiated a community process similar to one used by the Peninsula and Fairy lakes working groups. The Association engaged the same planning consultant, carried out similar surveys, obtained the views of a comparable group of stakeholders and utilized much of the same source material and references. Although the character of the four lakes differs, the planning process that was followed was similar.

The intent of the planning process was to identify and protect the various special areas, features and values of the lake. Four broad categories of special areas and features were investigated, namely:

Natural Elements Water quality, wetlands, deer wintering yards, fish habitat, nesting sites, streams, vegetation and other habitat.

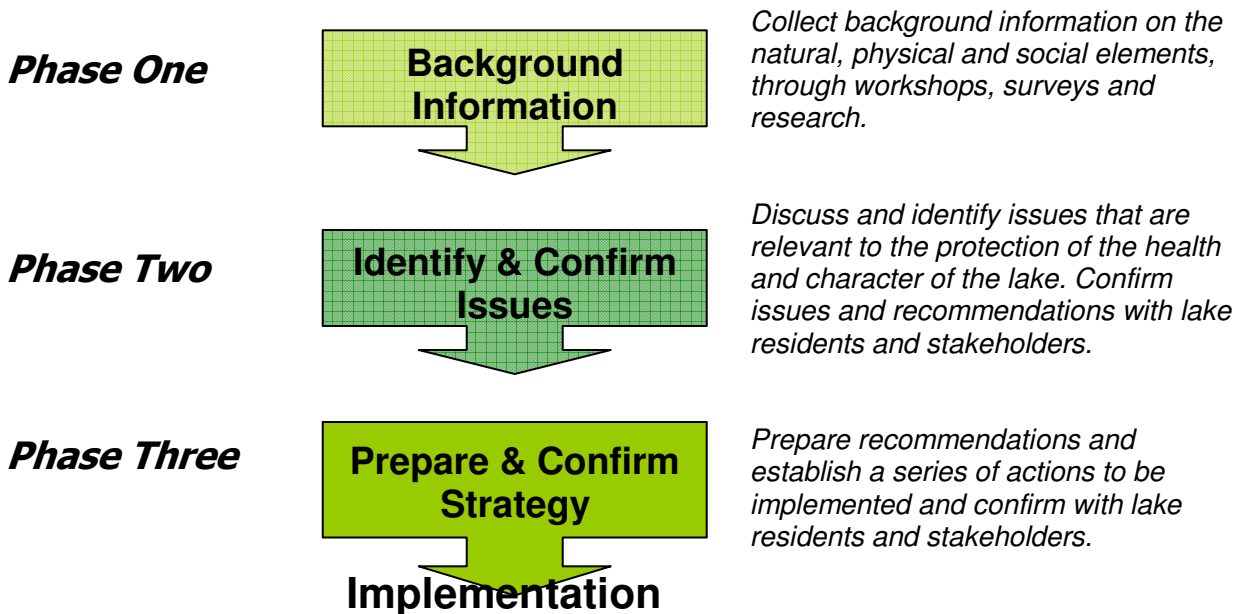
Physical Elements Narrow waterbodies, steep slopes, flood prone areas, access, watershed considerations, physical resources and tree line.

Social Elements Aesthetics, ambience, historical development, cultural sites and landscapes, recreation and boating.

Land Use Existing land use, development potential and state of municipal planning policy and implementation tools.

The preparation of the Lake Plan took place in three phases (Figure 1):

Figure 1 – Lake Planning Stages



1.2 Information Sources and Support

The collection of background information focused on existing resource inventories and publications. The Town of Huntsville, District of Muskoka and the Ministry of Natural Resources were very supportive of the process and provided assistance in identifying sources and providing available information. The Town of Huntsville's Geomatics Department provided many staff hours preparing detailed maps that are included in this report.

The collection of new information focused on obtaining the opinions and comments of lake residents, commercial operators and federal, provincial and municipal staff. It was imperative to the success of the project to involve stakeholders at the outset of the process and to provide ample opportunity for public participation. This approach created an awareness of the issues and a long-term ownership of the projects and approaches to be implemented.

A Stakeholders Workshop was held in April 2002 and was attended by municipal politicians, federal, provincial, district and municipal employees, numerous commercial operators and the Ontario Provincial Police. The purpose of the Stakeholders Workshop was to gather thoughts and ideas about the process, investigate values and concerns, identify sources of information and determine the level of interest in participating in the preparation of the plan. The workshop proceedings are in Appendix 1.

A Residential Workshop was held in June of 2002 and over 800 invitations were mailed out to residents on Lake Vernon, Hunters Bay and the North Branch Muskoka River. The purpose of the Residential Workshop was to provide a community forum for the discussion of values and issues. The workshop proceedings are included in Appendix 2.

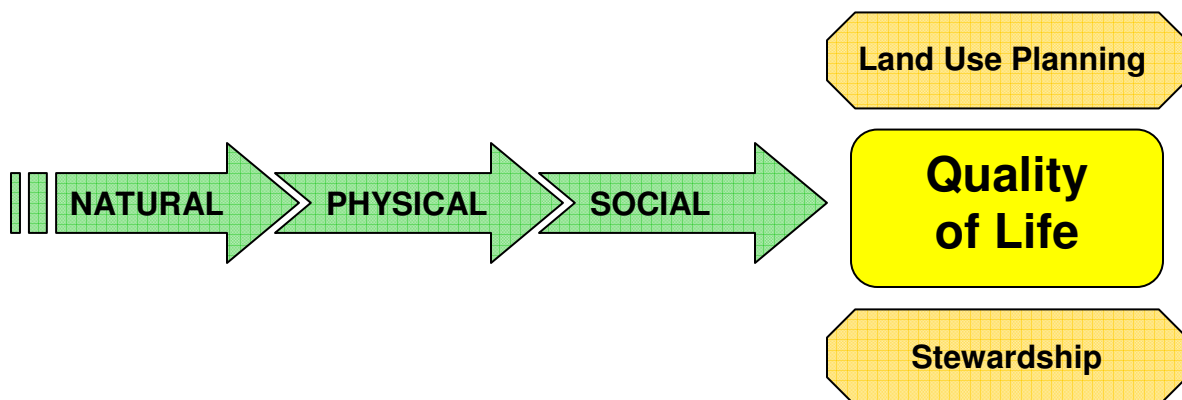
In Summer 2002, the Lake Vernon Environmental Committee undertook a survey of the residents and stakeholders to gather additional ideas and perspectives and confirm the issues, concerns and aspirations of the Lake Vernon community. The survey was designed to obtain information on property size, buildings, features and use, resident occupancy, activities, observations, perceptions, and concerns. The residential survey contained twenty questions and was distributed to all members of the Lake Vernon Association and all residents in the Lake Vernon study area. Eighty-five surveys were completed and returned which, represents about 17% of all the shoreline residents. The results of the residential survey are summarized in Appendix 3. Only 2 commercial surveys were returned and the results were not tallied.

1.3 Report Structure

The intent of the report is to summarize the information that was collected, to identify issues and concerns and to provide observations and recommendations to deal with specific issues. Section 2 identifies the vision, goals and targets of the Lake Plan. Sections 3 to 7 provide a description of the natural, social, physical and land use regulations and contains a brief summary of the observations together with the applicable recommendations. Section 8 provides a summary of the issues and concerns and Section 9 outlines a series of actions to attain the goal of future environmental and social health.

The recommendations in this report focus on Land Use Planning and Stewardship approaches to manage development, redevelopment and human activities in the watershed. When combined, Land Use Planning and Stewardship provide a comprehensive approach to deal with the issues that impact the long-term health of the natural, physical and social environment in the Lake Plan area. Land use planning opportunities include the regulation of new development through municipal tools such as Official Plans, Zoning By-laws, Site Plan Control and other municipal controls. Stewardship approaches will include examples and suggestions to be implemented, such as communication, education and site-specific rehabilitation efforts.

Figure 2 – Elements of Quality of Life



The Lake Plan itself is only the beginning of an evolutionary planning process. To be effective, volunteers must ensure that the initiatives set out in the action plan are implemented as time goes on. The Lake Plan is not an end result. The objectives and strategies should be implemented, revisited, monitored and issues updated as they evolve.