

Social elements enhance the quality of life on a lake. Most people like going to the cottage to get away from the busy urban environments. Cottage country is the place where they can relax, recreate and “get away from it all”. While social elements are often the most difficult to control, they are one of the most important elements that contribute to one’s experience at the lake. In the Lake Vernon watershed, these social elements include: landscape and aesthetics, cultural and historic sites or areas, recreational boating capacity, recreation opportunities and the character of the neighbourhood.

The residential survey indicated that 38% of those surveyed valued peace and tranquility. The second highest value was tied between water quality and natural undeveloped shoreline (26% of those surveyed). Every respondent surveyed identified that they valued one or more of the following: water quality; peace and tranquility; natural shorelines; and natural beauty.

However, not all residents and visitors have the same social values. Some people from urban settings bring urban planning designs and landscape ideas to the lake and often these values are in conflict with the natural beauty and landscape that is the character of Muskoka.

6.1 Landscapes and Aesthetics

One of the amenities that are invaluable to a lake community is the physical landscape and natural aesthetics of their environment. These elements incorporate features such as natural shoreline vegetation, the skyline or horizon, the relatively un-built appearance of the shoreline as well as the natural beauty, views and a balance of landscape types (forest, wetland, open view).

Aesthetic values differ greatly from person to person and often depend on the context of a person’s lifestyle. Some people prefer the “urban park like setting” that is characterized by manicured lawns and vegetation, while most others prefer the wilderness or natural setting with few interruptions of human interference.

There are two important landscape lines where development can impact the natural setting of the lake: the shoreline and the tree line or horizon. When viewing the opposite side of the lake, our eyes are immediately drawn to these two lines and anything that stands out on these lines can greatly impact the natural character. As a result any development that occurs on these landscape lines will directly impact the natural setting. The main source of visual impact in these areas is the construction of buildings and structures and the removal of vegetation.

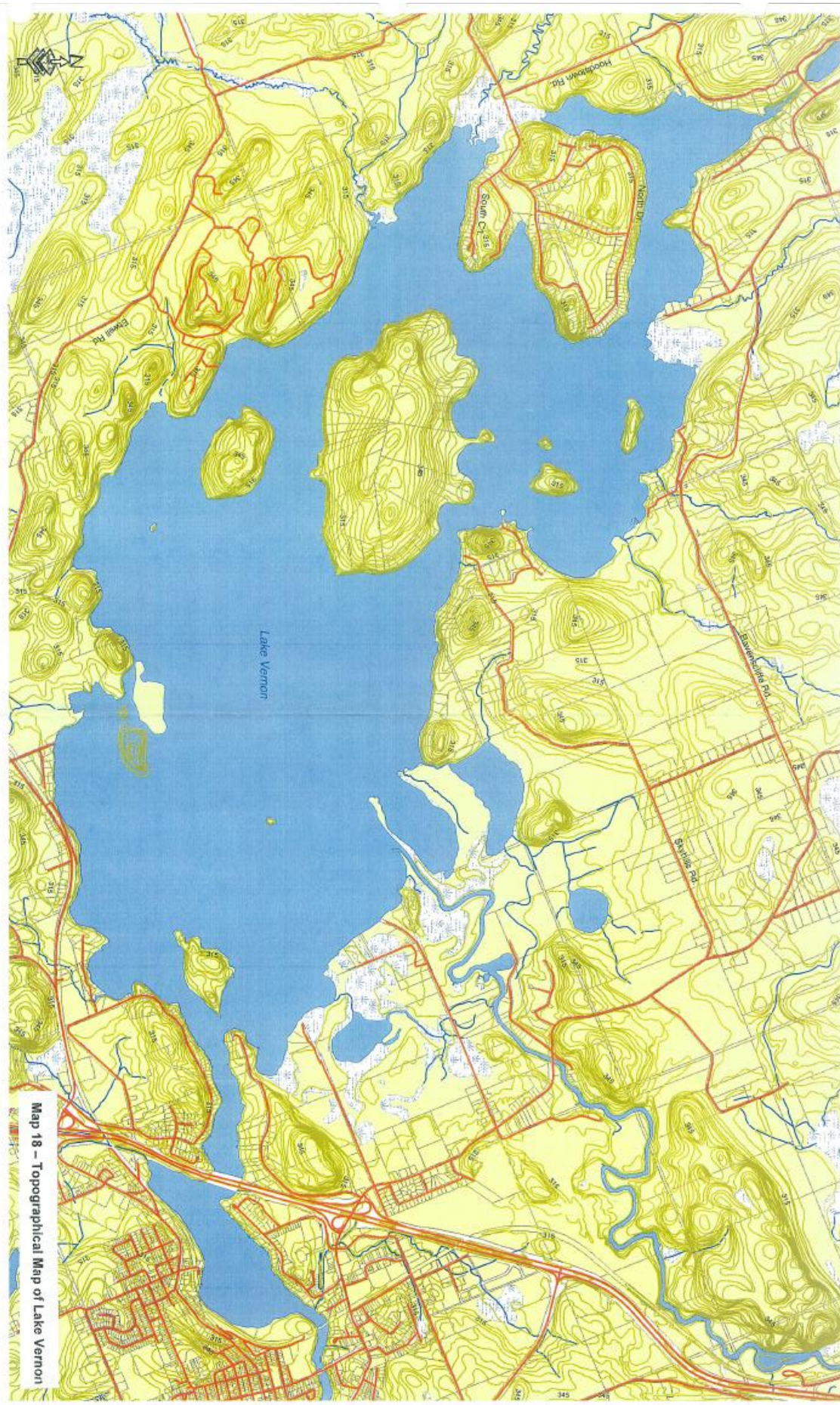
In order to maintain the natural appearance the horizon must have minimal disturbance and shoreline activity areas (boathouses, docks, recreation areas) should be kept to a minimum. High profile structures (such as two story boathouses) and brightly painted structures detract from the natural beauty of the shoreline. There are no existing regulating tools that deal with the issue of colour, and communication may be the best approach. Similarly, high profile development that stands above the tree line or the horizon draws immediate attention to the structure and diminishes

Map 18 – Topographical Map of Lake Vernon

Mark Fynn
Town of Hurstville
Geomatics Depart.
Nov 18, 2002

0 500 1,000 3,000 Meters

Topographical Map of Lake Vernon



UTM, Zone 17
NAD 1927 CM 81 W

the natural value of the feature. Tall buildings and communication towers that stand above the tree-line will have an impact on this feature and should be minimized.

The most significant landscape feature on Lake Vernon is Big Island. This area is comprised of a steep bluff like shoreline and remains relatively undeveloped. The island rises to an elevation of approximately 371 metres (1,217.2 feet) above sea level. The lakes surface is about 283 metres (928 feet) above sea level and the highest point of Big Island is 88 metres (289.2 feet) higher than the surface of the lake. High profile development on the island will detract from the natural landscape of the island, and any exterior lighting will greatly impact the rest of the lake. All development should be encouraged not to locate in high profile landscapes and lighting should be designed to deflect towards the ground and away from adjacent lots and the lake.

Muskoka Heritage Foundation provided a Natural Stewardship Award to Peter and Lidia Jacobsen to recognize their stewardship of Lot 5, Stisted Township, on Big Island. Their property encompasses about one-half mile of shoreline and associated back lot and they have left the property to mature naturally. They designed their wooden cottage so that it is well set back from the shoreline with a narrow granite step path leading from the dock. The property is in various stages of natural succession, as it has not experienced human activity since the cutting and burning of the early 1900's.

There are numerous other areas (steep slopes, hill tops) surrounding Lake Vernon that have similar aesthetic values as Big Island, and these areas (as recognized in Map 18 – Topographical Map of Lake Vernon) should be protected from indiscriminate development and clearing of land. Natural landscapes and aesthetics provide an ambiance that is an essential ingredient to the quality of life and must be protected from incompatible development.

Observations – Landscapes and Aesthetics

A significant amount of Lake Vernon's shoreline remains undeveloped and in a natural state.

Residential survey respondents indicate that one of the most valued attributes of the lake is the natural beauty and natural shorelines.

The natural appearance of Big Island and other steep slopes and hilltops surrounding Lake Vernon add to the natural beauty of the lake.

Recommendations – Landscapes and Aesthetics

72. Work with the Town of Huntsville and the District of Muskoka to ensure large profile (scale, mass, height and density) development does not occur in the backlands, on heights of land, or in scenic areas.

73. Ensure that significant removal of vegetation does not occur along the treed horizon or the natural shoreline of the lake.

74. Ensure the Official Plan contains policy to recognize the importance of landscapes and natural vistas on Lake Vernon. The Official Plan and Zoning By-law should contain policy to protect Big Island and other high profile areas from incompatible and high profile development.

75. Discuss options (e.g. land trust, stewardship awards) for the protection of landscapes with property owners (e.g. Big Island).

6.2 Social, Cultural and Historic Sites

The Lake Vernon Watershed has many locally important sites, areas or features representing values that contribute to the character, culture and history of the lake. Many of the historical sites are in private ownership and some have deteriorated over time. Private stewardship of these sites is therefore imperative and assistance from the Lake Vernon Association would help to promote their protection and rehabilitation.

The results of the workshops and the Summer Residential Survey suggest that the following areas are important to the Lake Vernon community. Since many of these sites are located on private land, it is important that contact be made with property owners to ensure the protection and rehabilitation of these sites, where appropriate.

The lake community has identified the following sites (Map 19). A brief description of some of these sites follows.

1. Hunter's Bay
2. First Farm on Lake Vernon
3. Huntsville Train Station and Docks
4. Big East River Delta (Muskoka Heritage Area and Provincially Significant Wetland)
5. Robinson's Creek and Lake (unique plant species)
6. Eagle Mountain (also known as Tawingo Mountain)
7. Hutcheson Beach (Kinsmen beach)
8. Vernon Mountain
9. All Islands
10. Post Office at the base of Eagle Mountain.
11. Mentez Sawmill
12. Camp Tawingo
13. Old Tannery
14. Big Island
15. Ravenscliffe Community
16. Hudson Bay Trading Post
17. Peacock Bay Marina
18. Heron Colony
19. Site of first cottage on lake
20. Mount Ararat
21. Black Creek
22. Loon nesting site
23. Wallington Creek
24. Hoodstown Rapids – portage, history

25. Mosquito island Picnic Site (also known as Gull Island)
26. Camp Wabanaki
27. North Branch of the Muskoka River

Hunter's Bay (1) – Hunters Bay is located within the urban area of the lake. The north side of the bay is in private residential ownership and there are several small private residential properties on the south side. There currently exists two means of public access to the bay; a road right-of-way at the foot of Silverwood Dr. on the north side; and Avery Beach on the south side, with a public beach and a boat launch. The Town of Huntsville is also considering the construction of a Pavilion on the water's edge via the Yonge St. right-of-way. The plan will include a double boat launch, temporary mooring pier, public washrooms, concession/club room (rented for small functions), and boat storage. The G.W. Martin Lumber Ltd. owns 7.2 hectares of land on the east side of the bay. CN Rail owns the rail right-of-way along the south shore and a water lot, which was historically the site of a steamer pier. The town also proposes a recreational trail along the Hunter Bay shoreline to connect the Hunters Bay waterfront to the downtown core. The trail is for non-motorized use only and will be developed to accommodate special needs.

Huntsville Train Station and Docks (3) - The Town of Huntsville proposes to provide historical information to visitors on the importance of the rail service in Huntsville.

Hoodstown Rapids (24) – Hoodstown was almost the site of a major center as the railway was initially designed to travel through there. The “forefathers” of Huntsville finally persuaded the railway to go through Huntsville and it was not long after that, Hoodstown was abandoned. There exists a portage that connects Fox and Vernon. Local residents wish to see it maintained and available for public use.

Camp Tawingo (12) – Camp Tawingo was the original site of Tawingo Lodge, which was a tourist operation and children's camp in the early 50's. In 1961 the lodge came under new ownership and was named Camp Tawingo (Tawingo is Algonkin for “running water”). The property has three streams that flow through it into lake Vernon.

Camp Wabanaki (26) – The original camp was called Camp Onawaw and was established circa 1925, for a girls camp. Onawaw is the Cree word for “Spirit of the Dawn”. In 1970, the camp was sold to the Kitchener-Waterloo YMCA to be continued as a children's camp. The property comprises an area of 40 acres, containing one large and one small island and 23 acres of mainland.

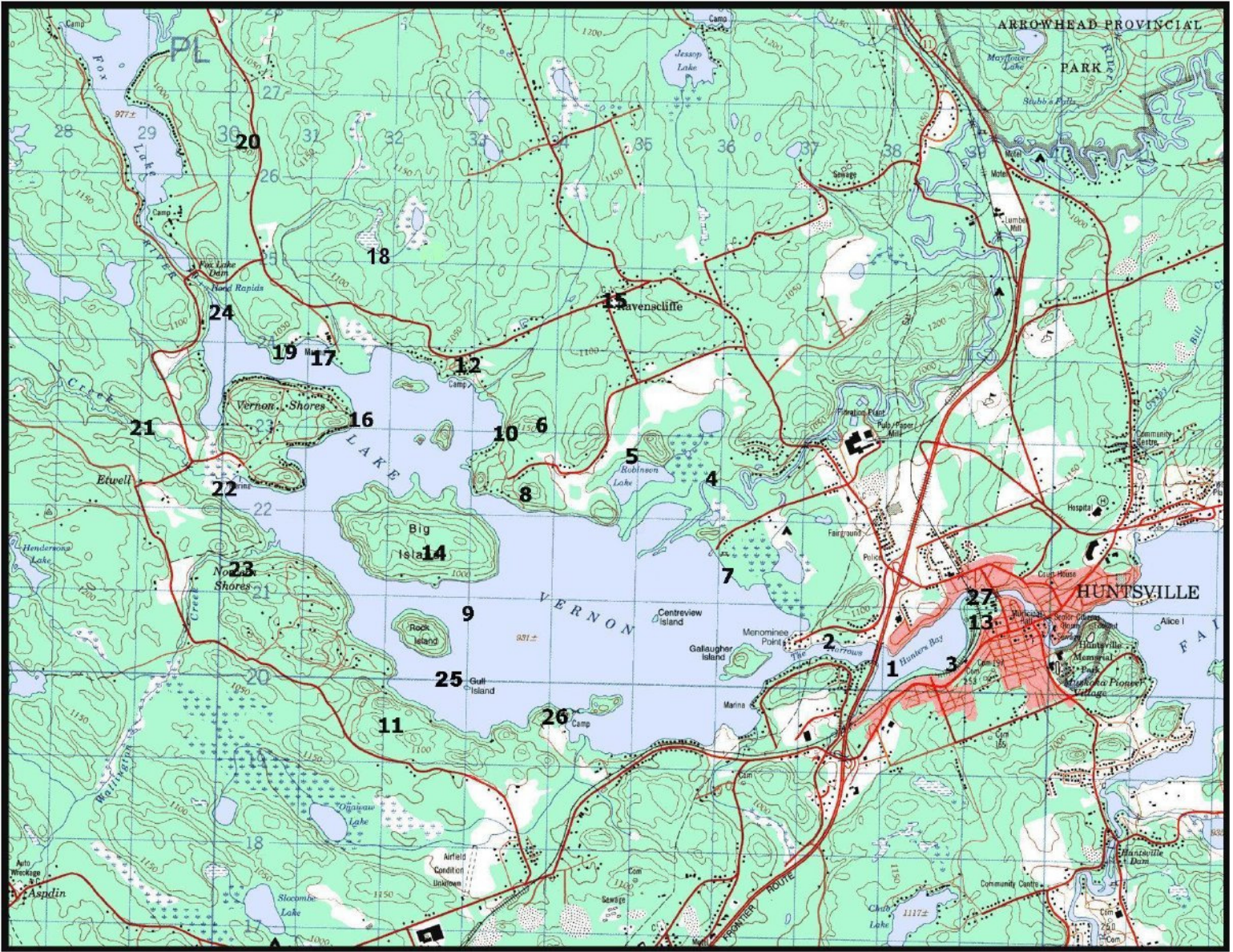
North Branch of the Muskoka River (27) – The North Branch of the Muskoka River starts at ~~Hunters Bay and flows to the Main St.~~ Bridge. The River is approximately 70 metres wide and has an average depth of 6 metres. The entire shore is in private ownership except for a small public right of way adjacent to the Centre Street bridge.

Cultural and historic sites are essential factors that maintain and improve the quality of the social and living environment. These sites should be protected and enhanced, where appropriate or possible.

Observations – Social, Cultural and Historic Sites

27 areas of social, cultural or historic importance were identified through the Resident Workshop and Survey.

Map 19 – Historic and Cultural Sites



Recommendations – Social, Cultural and Historic Sites

- 76. *Ensure cultural and historic sites are recognized in Land Use Planning Regulations to ensure that future development does not jeopardize their integrity.*
- 77. *Contact current property owners to increase awareness of these features and promote private stewardship of these areas.*
- 78. *Determine the feasibility of rehabilitating some of these areas for future use. Financial assistance and volunteer community effort should be available to willing property owners. Land Trusts could be established as an incentive for property owners wishing to become involved.*
- 79. *Consider the use of historical plaques and information pamphlets to promote the awareness of these resources.*

6.3 Boating Use

Boating is the most popular recreational activity, aside from swimming, on Lake Vernon. It was identified that 84% of the respondents of the Residential Survey, conducted in the summer of 2002, recreate by means of boating. There are many types of boats visible on Lake Vernon, from canoes and kayaks to personal watercrafts and pontoon boats. Figures 26 and 27 show the results of the Summer Residents Survey number of non-motorized and motorized boats on the lake.

Figure 26 – Number and Type of Non-Motorized Boats

Type of Non-motorized boat	No. of Boats	%	No. of Responses
Canoes	1	71.76	61
	2	8.24	7
	3	2.35	2
Windsurfers	1	17.65	15
	2	4.71	4
	3	2.35	2
Sailboats	1	20.00	17
	2	3.53	3
Kayaks	1	18.82	16
	2	4.71	4
Other Non-Motorized Boats	1	11.76	10
	2	2.35	2

Source: Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Figure 27 – Number and Size of Motorized Boats

Horsepower/type of Motorized Boat	Two – Stroke			Four - Stroke		
	No. of Boats	%	No. of Responses	No. of Boats	%	No. of Responses
< 10 hp	1	27.06	23	1	5.88	5
11 – 100 hp	1	31.76	23	1	10.59	9
	2	4.71	4	2	-	0
101 – 199 hp	1	20.00	17	1	23.53	20
> 200 hp	1	5.88	5	1	10.59	9
Jet Ski	1	1.18	1	1	1.18	1
	2	-	0	2	-	0
	3	1.18	1	3	-	0
Pontoon Boat	1	4.71	4	1	-	0

Source: Residential Survey, Summer 2002

There are several issues related to recreational boating that could potentially impact the lake and its residents, such as safety, speed, reckless operation, closeness of boats and water-skiers to swimmers and small vessels like canoes and kayaks. There are also potential environmental concerns, which include damage to shorelines and wildlife habitat, particularly bird nesting areas and fish spawning grounds. There is also the potential of wake damage to property, docks and docked boats, and increased noise from the vessel's engines and occupants of the boats.

Personal Water Craft (PWC)

The operation of Personal Watercraft (PWC) appears to have caused the greatest boating concern of shoreline residents. In the Resident Survey (Appendix 3), the most requested improvement desired by residents was to ban personal watercraft (PWC). Survey respondents also noted PWC operation as a source of increased noise.

For some residents, PWC's are very unpopular, not only on Lake Vernon but on many waterbodies across North America. Some states in the USA have banned them. Their two-cycle engine is considered to be noisy and pollutes the water with oil and only recently have manufacturers responded by introducing engines with reduced noise and emissions.

The main concern appears to be with the uncaring attitude of a limited number of PWC operators that causes all of them to be branded as irresponsible. Unsafe PWC operation includes activities such as inshore speeding, erratic maneuvering, jumping wakes, and intentional spraying.

In 2001, Senator Mira Spivak introduced Bill S-26, The Personal Watercraft Act, in the Senate, and it still is being processed. Bill S-26 would require the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to restrict PWC's wherever local authorities find that they cause excessive problems. Restrictions could take the form of limiting hours, setting speed limits, or outright bans. The Federation of Ontario Cottagers Associations Inc. (FOCA) has given its endorsement to the Bill.

Speed

Speed along the river, through the Narrows and between islands and the mainland appears to be a serious boating concern on Lake Vernon. The North Branch Muskoka River is posted with signage restricting speed to 10 km/hr. and there is also a 10 km/hr. speed restriction for all vessels within 30 meters of the shoreline. These speed restrictions should eliminate wakes from most boats, but the size and weight of different vessels makes a significant difference in the size of the wake. For example, a small aluminum boat moving at 10 km/hr. would produce a wake significantly smaller than a large inboard boat moving at the same speed. It has been suggested that 'no wake' signs be posted on Lake Vernon and used in conjunction with the legislated speed signage.

The environmental impacts of excessive boat speeds can be large and can have long term or permanent negative effects on wildlife and vegetation. Erosion of the shoreline not only has negative visual impacts, but this along with propeller driven boats venturing into shallow waters increases turbidity and damages weed beds, resulting in the loss of fish habitat. Disturbance of nesting waterfowl is also a problem, resulting in brood loss. The long-term effects can include a reduction in fish because of loss of habitat, which results in reduced food supply for waterfowl. Eventually this may result in a reduction of the local wildlife population.

In most cases speeders are gone by the time the police are on the scene so it is necessary to educate the public about how to assist with community based policing. It is important that serial numbers and descriptions of the drivers of the offending vessels be recorded. Eyewitnesses would have to be willing to testify in court and video recordings can be extremely useful as evidence.

Navigation Aids

While the Ministry of Natural Resources produced a bathymetry map (lake bottom contours), there is no Canadian Hydrographic Service nautical chart for Lake Vernon. For safe navigation on the lake, boaters are dependent on the general depth contours shown on the bathymetry map and their own familiarity with the lake's features and navigations aids. Shoals and other hazards must be learned through word of mouth or direct experience.

Enforcement and Regulations

A police boat is kept at Huntsville Marina on Fairy Lake between May and October to patrol all 4 lakes. The patrol boat is on the water several times per week and is manned by a trained marine police officer and a summer student. During heavy boating periods such as the July long weekend or the Bass Tournament, another boat is brought in from Lake of Bays to assist.

According to Officer Rawluk of the Ontario Provincial Police, on a typical shift between 25 and 35 boats are stopped and inspected and half of those are issued warnings for equipment violations (i.e. insufficient number of life jackets). Very few actual charges have been laid, although regulations may be more strictly enforced in the future. There is a web site available to get regular updates on crime within the immediate area at www.crimealerts.net. Huntsville information is posted in the Central zone.

Operator Competency Regulations are now in effect for powered recreational vessel operators. Since 1999, any operator under the age of 16 was required to have an Operator Efficiency Card. As of September 15, 2002 all operators of powered recreational vessels under 4 meters or 13.1 feet, regardless of the operators age, must be certified. The final phase of this legislation comes into effect September 15, 2009 at which time all powered recreational vessel operators must have a competency card.

There are courses available through the Canadian Power and Sail Squadron and the Canadian Coast Guard. These are available several times throughout the year at Canadian Tire and other locations around town. Information is available on the web sites www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca and www.cps-ecp.ca or by calling the Boating Safety Information Line at 1-800-267-6687.

Pollution

There is an increasing amount of information on the use of two-stroke vs. four stroke engines. According to the Resident Survey, about two thirds of all motorized boats have 2 stroke engines. Environment Canada's Environmental Technology Centre tests show that two stroke outboards produce 12 times as much benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes, and five times as much oil and grease as four-stroke outboards.

Environment Canada's Green Lane Web site indicates that:

“Although outboard motors exhaust their emissions into the water, recent studies of their impacts on lakes revealed that most hydrocarbon compounds in the water migrated into the air within 6 hours, and that samples taken about a metre below the surface showed no contamination. However, heavier hydrocarbons, such as oil and grease, remain on the surface for a longer period of time and may affect the health of microscopic organisms.”

“Further comparisons of the exhaust emissions from a light-duty van, a 9.9 two stroke outboard and a 9.9 four-stroke outboard showed that the two-stroke produced 50 % more carbon monoxide than the four-stroke and nearly 60 times more than the van. The two-stroke also emitted 15 times more unburned hydro-carbons than the four-stroke, and nearly 125 times more than the van.”

Source - http://www.ec.gc.ca/science/sandemay00/article1_e.html

There is no specific information about the impact of boat pollution on Lake Vernon. However, the general information provided by Environment Canada should make us more cautious about purchasing older two-stroke outboard motors.

Observations – Boating Use

Personal Watercrafts on the lake are unpopular to some residents.

There are several stretches of natural shoreline along the waterways that provide breeding habitat for both fish and waterfowl. Excessive speed can cause damaging wakes and noise disturbance threatening wildlife populations.

Damaging wakes can cause shoreline erosion and therefore property damage to both the landscape and personal property such as docks and docked boats.

Excessive speed and boat wakes should be discouraged in the river, narrows and where islands are close to the shoreline as these areas may be the most environmentally sensitive.

Recommendations – Boating Use

80. *Encourage licensing of boat operators by providing courses to obtain a boat license.*
81. *Consider conducting a Boat Capacity Study to determine the actual numbers using the lake, where they are from, and identify the busy areas. This will help to determine whether and where other safety precautions are necessary (e.g. more buoys).*
82. *The Association should continue to support community based policing to enforce speed control and boat wakes in the channels. Safe boating practices should be encouraged by all of those who use the lake, including non-residents and visitors. Signage could be used at ramps and in newsletters and other means for distribution.*
83. *In order to educate boat owners about safety requirements, the Lake Vernon Association should encourage and assist the O.P.P. to continue to operate courtesy vessel inspections on an annual basis. A program could be offered where boaters could go to a determined location for a free inspection of safety equipment without the risk of being charged for infractions.*
84. *Signage should be posted in order to raise awareness of wildlife habitat. Boaters may be encouraged to reduce speed and noise levels in the waterways if they have prior warning of nesting areas.*
85. *The feasibility of having an official nautical chart prepared for the Lake should be investigated.*
86. *The Association could support Bill S-25, The Personal Watercraft Act, and other agencies should be approached to do so. Agencies and individual residents can show support by sending a message to:*
 - Senator Mira Spivak: The Senate of Canada,
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4 spivam@sen.parl.gc.ca*
 - Fisheries Minister Herb Dhaliwal: Room 121, East Block, House of Commons,
Ottawa, Ontario K11 0A6 Min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca*
 - Environment Minister David Anderson: Room 133, East Block, House of
Commons, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6 anderson.d@parl.gc.ca*

- 87. *Provide information to boat operators on the impact of boating and encourage proper maintenance and operating procedures.*
- 88. *Encourage the replacement of two-stroke outboard engines with four-stroke. All lake users should be made aware of the benefit of four-stroke engines.*
- 89. *Take steps to have speed limits imposed in Dangerous Narrows I.e. between Gallagher Island and Falcon Lodge (mainland), and through river and into Robinson Lake.*

6.4 Noise and Lighting

Peace and tranquility is highly rated as one of the essential elements of life on Lake Vernon. Noise and indiscriminate lighting impacts the enjoyment of the natural setting. Figure 28 outlines the concerns of residents based on the Residential Survey.

Figure 28 – Resident Noise and Lighting Concerns

Occurrence	% Significant Impact	% Moderate Impact	% Minimal Impact	% No impact
Daytime Noise	8	20	39	28
Nighttime Noise	2	9	36	45
Lighting	8	8	20	57

Source: Resident Survey, Summer 2002

The lake is heavily used during the summer months and boat traffic and most particularly, jet skis add to the background noise. In winter, snowmobiles run down the length of the lake, but these are less offensive as most residents are indoors with their windows closed.

Many of the homes along the shoreline have cleared natural vegetation resulting in the need for lawn mowers, weed eaters and leaf blowers. The lack of trees to absorb sound means that the opportunity for noise trespass is increased. The sound of a stereo being played on a deck or unnatural noise can be heard from great distances, especially across water where there are no barriers to sound.

The Town of Huntsville has in effect By-law 95–20, “A By-law to Control Noise”, which was prescribed by the Ministry of Environment and is well formulated. The By-law contains noise prohibitions that are suitable for property on Lake Vernon except for those properties zoned RU1 or RU2, where it allows at any time during the day the following:

- The operation of any motorized conveyance other than on a highway or authorized snowmobile trail (this includes boats);
- The operation of powered or non-powered tools; and
- The operation of solid waste equipment.
-

Light pollution is another man-made impact that affects many shoreline residents. The popularity of landscape, string, spot and garden lighting of all types adds to the unnatural level of light around the lake. The brightening of the night sky is a universal problem that continues to grow. Unless some serious initiatives are taken to inform the public as well as business about the effects, not to mention the costs, of wasteful nighttime lighting, viewing the stars at night will become increasingly difficult. The Town of Huntsville does not have a by-law to control outdoor lighting.

Observations – Noise and Ligthing

The removal of natural vegetation along the shoreline necessitates the use of noisy machinery like lawn mowers, leaf blowers and weed trimmers as well as increases the impact of noise.

The Town of Huntsville has a Noise Control By-law, but it does not adequately cover property zoned RU1 and RU2.

Excessive residential shoreline lighting is offensive to lake residents and results in reduced visibility of the stars.

Recommendations – Noise and Lighting

- 90. *Encourage the limiting of excessive noise after 11 p.m. and contact offenders, through communication and education.*
- 91. *The Town of Huntsville’s Noise Control By-law No. 95–20 should be amended to provide time restrictions on the operation of any motorized conveyance other than on a highway or snowmobile trail, persistent pet noise, powered or non-powered tools and solid waste equipment.*
- 92. *Prepare an information bulletin on “good examples” of lighting and discourage the excessive use of lighting along shorelines.*