

Watershed Governance in Gander - New-Wes-Valley



Watershed areas, by hydrological design, are inherently 'regional' in nature. In this sense, watersheds do not abide by political and civic boundaries. Conversely, it is often members of communities within a watershed who recognize the importance of thinking regionally, across municipal boundaries, because of interconnected nature of river and groundwater networks and watershed ecosystems. Likewise, these watershed areas represent not only systems of environmental concern, in terms of wildlife conservation and water quality, but also places of high economic and social value. These themes are evident in watershed management areas in Gander – New-Wes-Valley, central Newfoundland, particularly, the Gander River.

A key element to understanding watersheds, and thus watershed management, are the concepts of territory, home and identity. These concepts explicitly tie watershed management to social and cultural activities. Research participants in the [Canadian Regional Development](#) and affiliated projects have indicated that regions, such as Gander River, Northwest River, and Indian Bay River watersheds are critical areas in which they live, work, hunt, fish, and spend time in the outdoors. As such, integrated watershed management must deal with concerns of environment in tandem with economic development and social concerns, as they arise within places. There is also increasing recognition by senior level governments of the value of place-based, community-levels approaches to environmental governance, though the evaluation of these strategies remains difficult (Bellefontaine & Wisener, 2011). This creates a challenge in terms of genuine power-sharing in multi-level governance, as evident in watershed management on the Gander River.

In the late 1980's, Atlantic salmon stocks became an increasing concern of the federal government, which in turn, sparked an interested Community Watershed Management (CWM) in Atlantic Canada (GRMA, 2003). Through the Cooperative Agreement on Salmonid Enhancement and Conservation initiative, the federal and provincial governments started to invest in river groups, while simultaneously local residents in the watershed area expressed a concern for what they saw happening to the salmon stocks on the river. As a result, the Gander River Management Association (GRMA) was formed in 1992, as an umbrella with its board consisting of elected members of various stakeholders groups in the river region,

including: Appleton, Gander Bay, Gander, and Glenwood (GRMA, 2003). During their operation, GRMA worked in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Crown Lands, Forestry, the Department of Natural Resources, in addition to those groups from which the board members were affiliated and the general public from the region. Through the course of their over 15 year operation on the Gander River, GRMA was involved in a number initiatives in which they would attempt to bring a greater local voice to river management. These include:

- the installation of public toilets along river,
- putting river guardians on the river to enforce DFO protocols and reduce/deter poaching,
- removing blockages and obstructions along the river channel,
- operation of the counting fences,
- mapping and monitoring salmon spawning site in key tributaries (i.e. Redd monitoring),
- increasing tourism infrastructure, and
- developing and implementing a Gander River marketing strategy through advertisements, display booths and publications.

Despite folding in 2008, GRMA represents an important move towards community-based environmental management, and their work is seen today in fishery policy on the Gander River, such as the support of a management fall fishery. In order to mobilize locally driven issues, GRMA was active in terms of public engagement in the management process. The public were engaged through public meetings, news releases, and monthly newsletters of GRMAs ongoing and upcoming activities. After their core funding ceased in 1996, GRMA was also actively involved in self-sufficiency measures (GRMA, 2003), but ultimately met with a lack of political support from senior-level governments. However, their legacy remains, and sets a valuable precedent for local environmental management organizations.

Currently, watershed management remains crucial for those who live in (and visit) the region, non-governmental organizations, and senior level governments. The DFO mandated Aboriginal Fishery Guardians have been monitoring the river since the early 1990's, and cover some of the tasks formerly performed by GRMA. Additionally, in 2006, the municipalities of Glenwood and Appleton commissioned the development a Reed Bed effluent treatment system, which was designed and constructed by Abydoz Environmental Ltd, and was built downstream Glenwood, on the bank of the river. The Abydoz Reed Bed system is based on Ocean ESU's Reed Bed technology, which essentially filters out solid waste and sewage effluent through a series of reed beds and is proposed as a low maintenance and environmentally sound alternative to traditional sewage treatment systems (Global Environmental Solutions, 2013) The municipalities went in together on the costs of the reed-bed, and along with the Abydoz, received an Environmental Award from the Professional Engineers and Geoscientists Newfoundland and Labrador in recognition for the application of science, technology and engineering for environmental management in Newfoundland and Labrador (Fitzpatrick, 2010). This serves as another reminder of the importance of regional collaboration in watershed management.

References

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