

WATERFRONT VISITORS

The Lake Ontario waterfront is tremendously important to many people as a place to visit. In addition to the enjoyment of simply being at the water's edge, waterfront visitors can enjoy many parks, marinas, boat launches, lookouts, campsites, beaches, trails, boardwalks and other cultural, tourist and recreational places and events (see Map 7). These amenities attract not only local residents, but also visitors from farther afield.

Tourists are now a major economic force in some waterfront communities, and have the potential to bring a significant growth in economic benefits, as well as the challenges of managing larger numbers of visitors.

In 1992, there were some 35 million person-trips into waterfront municipalities for a variety of non-work activities. The number of these non-residents who actually visit the waterfront during their stay is unknown, but the *Waterfront Trail User Study*, carried out at four waterfront sites in 1993 for the Trust, found that while most Trail users are from nearby neighbourhoods, a quarter came from more than 10 kilometres away from the waterfront. For major waterfront attractions such as Ontario Place, Harbourfront, or Presqu'île Provincial Park, the ratio of visitors from beyond the local area is undoubtedly considerably higher.

The responses provided by current waterfront users to the trail survey give some sense of the appeal of the waterfront setting. Of the trail users surveyed about their reasons for using the Trail:

- over 85% cited "pleasure-recreation";
- almost 75% indicated "health and physical training";
- about 60% said "scenery-natural environment and
- about 25% indicated "social-family outing

If a similar survey were carried out for boaters, or for shoppers at Queen's Quay Terminal, or for picnickers on Toronto Island, the motivating factors might differ somewhat. But the recognition of the waterfront as a special place on the edge of an inland sea, as a source of inexpensive recreation fairly close to home, and as a location for a diverse array of natural and cultural attractions, would almost certainly apply to all users.

Using the same waterfront appeal to enhance the Greenway as a destination area for tourists requires an understanding of tourism markets and trends on a broad scale.

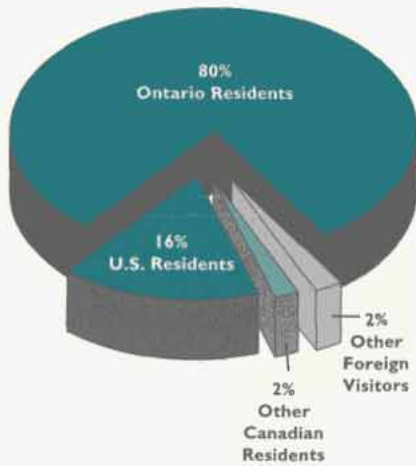
In general terms, the current visitor destinations within the Lake Ontario Greenway can be divided into three broad categories:

- central Toronto waterfront with its mass attractions;
- other urban waterfronts with attractions and green spaces mainly designed for passive use;
- rural waterfronts with small communities and occasional parks.



Promenading along Queen's Quay, Toronto

Peter Simon - City of Toronto

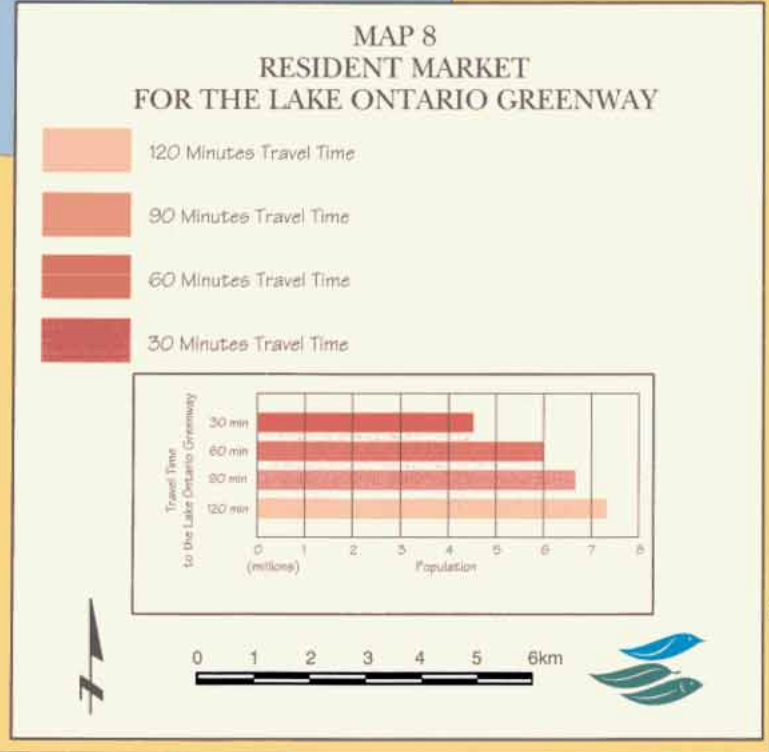
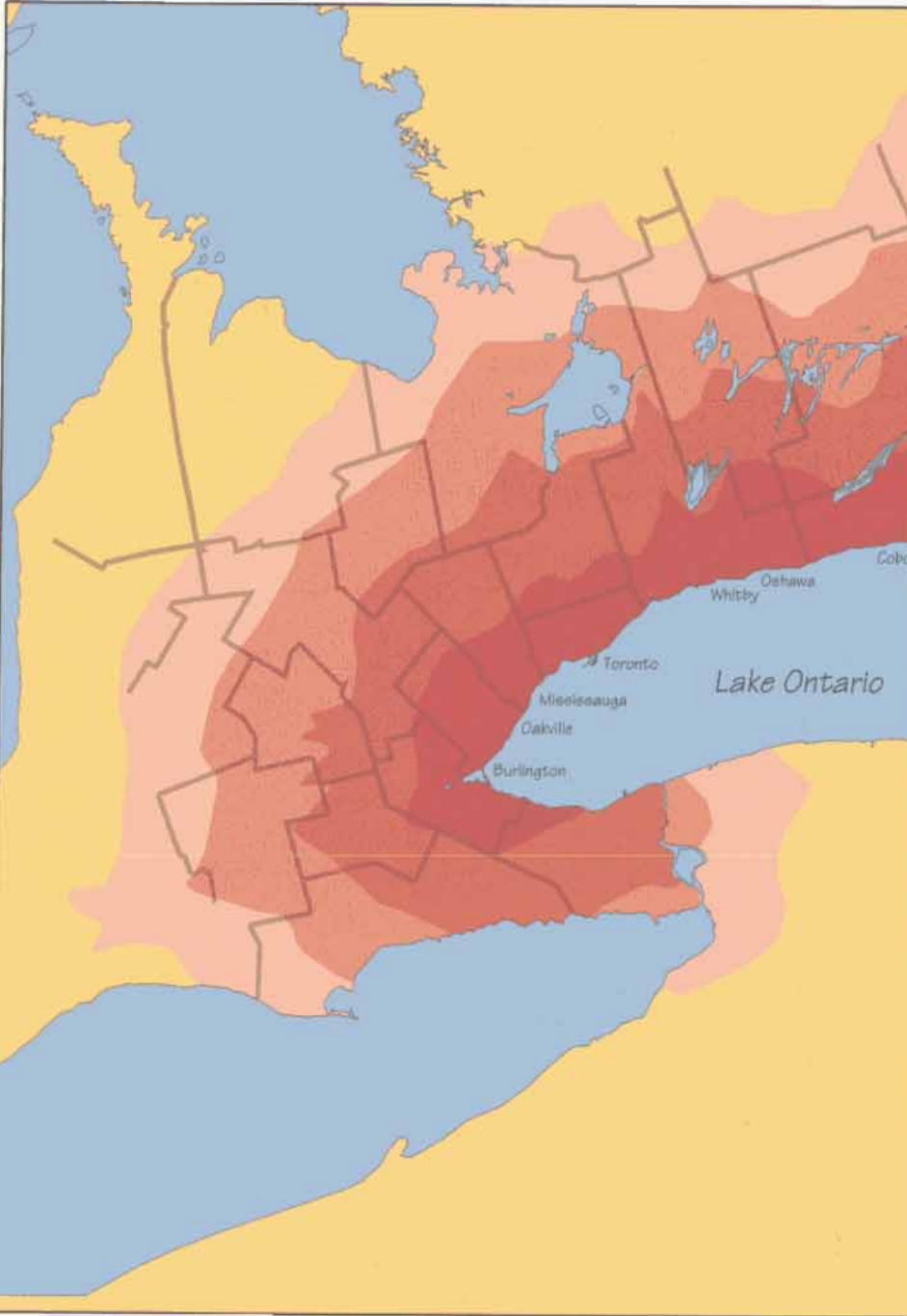
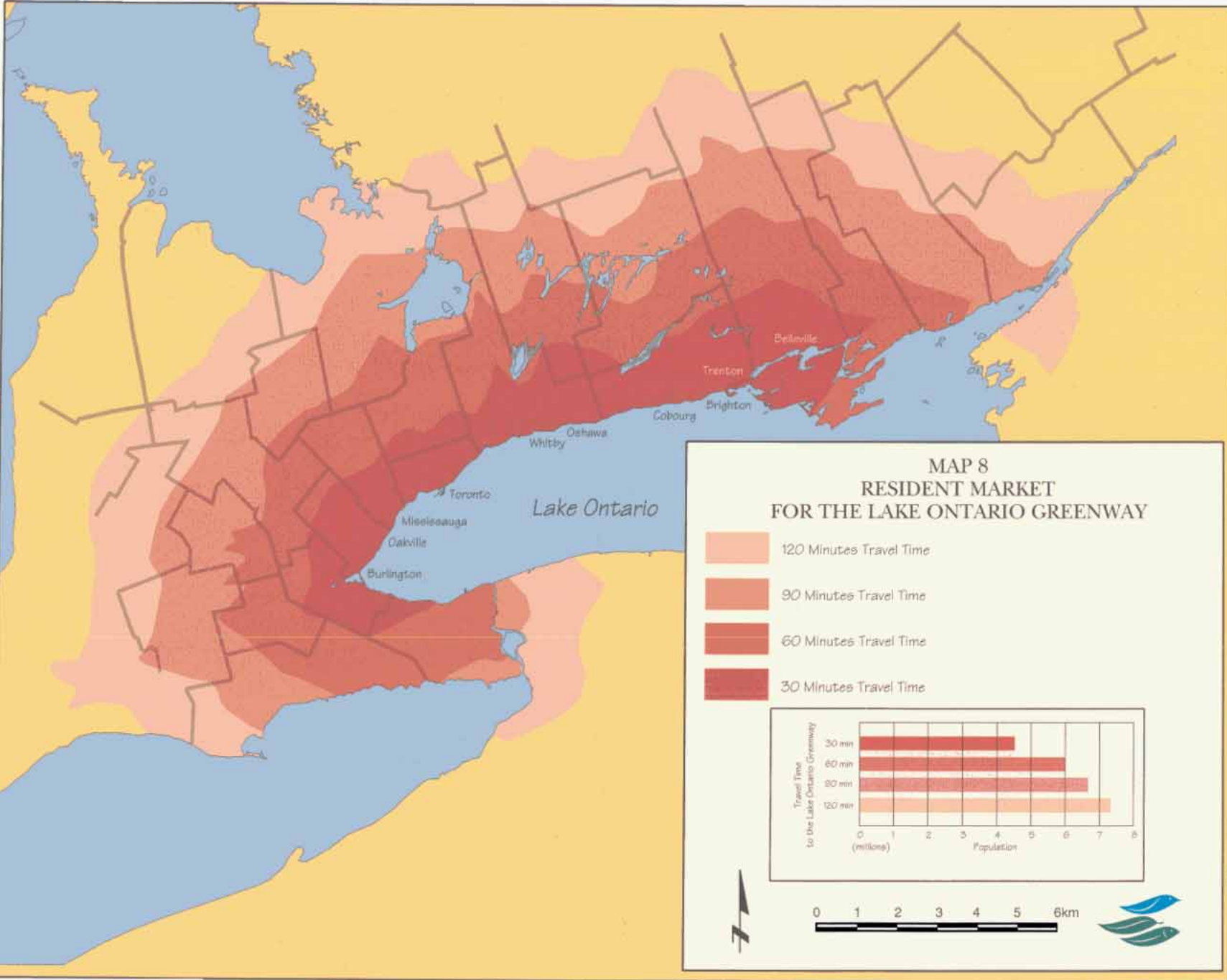


Origins of waterfront visitors

The length of stay of visitors varies considerably with their origins:

- Ontario residents, who make up 80% of non-work visitors, usually return home from waterfront communities the same day, with less than 3% staying more than three nights;
- Other Canadians, who are about 2% of visitors have an average stay of 4.5 days in waterfront communities;
- Visitors from the United States account for 16% of the visitor market; 70% of these stay in Ontario (not necessarily solely in waterfront communities) from one to three nights;
- Other foreign visitors make up 2% of visitors, and typically stay in Ontario (not necessarily solely in waterfront communities) for much longer, with half staying more than 17 nights.

Some 875,000 people live within three kilometres of the waterfront. As shown on Map 8, the resident population expands rapidly for various drive times, with 4.5 million within a half-hour drive and 7.3 million within a 2-hour drive. While most waterfront visitors currently come by car, there is a choice of transportation modes to access many parts of the Greenway, including public transit in larger centres and the GO Transit system from Burlington to Oshawa.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Through the course of the Royal Commission's work, subsequent public hearings and meetings sponsored by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the deliberations of six workgroups, and the consultations to date about proposals for the Lake Ontario Greenway Strategy, a number of issues have come forward repeatedly. While these issues do not affect every waterfront location, they do recur in all sections of the waterfront. They provide the central set of challenges which this Strategy addresses, and the central cast of opportunities where progress can be made.

Access to the shore

Most people who live in or near the Greenway want to protect or increase their access to the shore. For many people, the ability to walk near the water's edge is a priority; for others, a priority is access at reasonable cost for boating, or the freedom to swim or windsurf without curtailment by beach postings. For many people, visual access to the water is an important factor – they are disturbed to see the lake being “walled off” by too many buildings.

In many parts of the waterfront, private property limits opportunities for public access, and many municipalities have responded with policies to require new waterfront developments to provide at least some access opportunities.

In some places, conflicts with transportation corridors limit visual (and sometimes physical) access to the lake. This is a major issue in Toronto's central waterfront, but similar concerns about the barrier effects of busy roads or rail corridors can be found in parts of Burlington, in the Port Union area of Scarborough, and in parts of Port Hope, Cobourg, and Trenton. Transportation links need to be designed to reduce barriers to the lake, and to provide alternate means to private automobiles, such as transit and bicycling, for people to visit the Greenway.

An accessible shoreline involves more than being able to walk to the water's edge. Degraded water quality, which limits fishing, windsailing or swimming, is also a barrier to access for significant groups of waterfront users. Equality of access is another important aspect of this challenge. The waterfront should be increasingly accessible to user groups of diverse ages, ethnicity, personal abilities, and incomes.



Reversing environmental degradation

Consistently, people say that simply protecting what remains along the waterfront is not enough – we need to move beyond protection into actively reversing past damage. This need is perhaps most strongly expressed about water quality, and elements closely related to water quality such as the edibility of Lake Ontario fish. While considerable progress has been made on a whole-lake basis, that progress is often not clearly evident in the near-shore areas that continue to have visible pollution problems.

Among the places where environmental degradation is most evident are the former waterfront industrial sites where contaminated soils and/or groundwater are factors that sometimes delay or stymie re-development activities. These sites illustrate well the interconnected nature of waterfront issues – certainly they are environmental problems, but while they sit idle or require expensive remediation, they quickly become economic concerns as well. In many cases, they also hinder a community's plans for waterfront renewal. While the greatest concentration of sites with historic

land uses of concern is in Toronto, they occur in communities from one end of the Greenway to the other. A few of these sites have been restored, and other projects are in the early planning stages, but much more needs to be done.

A third pressing environmental challenge relates to the progressive loss and fragmentation of natural habitats across the Greenway. As a result, many species have been lost in major sections of the waterfront, and many more are at risk. While a number of small-scale restoration projects are underway, they have only begun to address this problem.



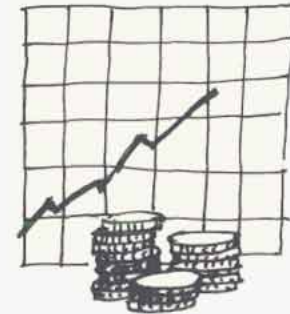
Economic renewal

The waterfront has long been a focus for employment, and communities and employers must adapt to changing markets and changing expectations to maintain that role. While water-dependent industries continue to be an important part of the economy, economic challenges are presented by the migration of traditional industries away from the waterfront and the increased competition to downtown cores from malls and superstores.

At the same time, these changes often create opportunities by freeing up sites near the water for other uses, and by prompting communities to chart a course that uses a revitalized, people-friendly waterfront as a lever for economic renewal. Encouraging private sector involvement in waterfront planning and stewardship is essential to its future.

In many cases, expanding tourism is seen as an important part of a renewal strategy. However, communities must grapple with how to create the necessary mass and quality of attractions to succeed in a very competitive tourism market, without reducing their own quality of life and sense of place.

Very often, that distinctive sense of place is an important part of the attraction for visitors as well. In the rush to modernize and to accommodate new businesses, communities can easily allow their individual distinctive character to gradually erode. The result can be a homogenous “geography of nowhere” which is of no interest to most visitors. Communities also need to understand the changing expectations and desires of potential visitors, and how to foster cooperation among neighbouring areas and agencies where competition has been a more frequent theme.





Improving decision-making

Part of the reason to move to an ecosystem-based planning approach is the clearly recognized need to improve decision-making processes. While recent initiatives such as Planning Act reform are underway, the challenge for many regulatory agencies and communities is to reach beyond traditional narrow mandates and to foster joint decisions that are more holistic and more timely. The degree of frustration with our present uncoordinated, fragmented system of responsibilities is palpable, both inside agencies and without.

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust and other agencies have begun to bring people and programs together in round-table settings, to provide mediation where appropriate, and to foster other creative ways to improve decision-making. However, other reforms are needed as well, especially in the overlapping layers of regulatory approvals governing changes along the water's edge.

There is a need to recognize that the art of ecosystem-based planning is in a developing stage, with considerable scope for innovation and improvements. The process of breaking down artificial barriers, recognizing the connections among decisions, and considering indirect and cumulative effects must become a part of future decision-making.

Balancing competing objectives

A frequently-heard refrain is the need to balance competing objectives for the waterfront, so that as many demands as possible can be met. Providing unlimited public access, for example, can all too easily result in sensitive natural habitats and quiet communities being over-run with visitors.

The danger, in part, is trying to meet every need everywhere along the waterfront. The challenge is creating a future waterfront that maintains its health and diversity by enhancing facilities for human visitors in some areas, enhancing habitats for other life in some areas, and enhancing opportunities to live or work in others. Reaching agreement on how this diversity is allocated, and designing with nature so that the environmental priorities of the waterfront are respected, are no small tasks.

In addition, each community will need to weigh its waterfront priorities against other important community needs, whether they are aging infrastructure, or health care facilities, or schools and police. This challenge of competing priorities, which is always at the heart of municipal government, is made more difficult by limited financial resources and fiscal restraint at all levels. Overcoming this challenge will require ensuring that waterfront projects bring a good return to the community, and planning creatively to achieve their implementation in an affordable fashion.



Guiding development

As Map 9 illustrates, a variety of large- and small-scale changes are taking place or being considered in many locations across the waterfront. Some of these represent significant changes in land use, such as the redevelopment of former industrial lands for housing, commercial and/or recreational uses; urban expansion into farmlands; or industrial development in rural landscapes. Others represent the revitalization of harbour areas, expansion of urban settlements, or infill in existing residential communities.

These developments present the challenge of ensuring that they occur in the most appropriate locations, respecting existing communities and environmental conditions. Often the most attractive setting for development is close to the water's edge, but this can result in the loss of physical and/or visual access, and can create future risks associated with shoreline erosion or flooding.

Some developments have already received approvals or are underway. Those that are still in the planning stages present opportunities for innovative approaches to location and design to address local environmental, economic and community needs. For example, public access to the waterfront can be improved, environmental restoration can be undertaken, and good design can create distinctive and enjoyable places.



Maintaining cultural values

As waterfront communities have changed over time, there have been widespread losses of cultural heritage resources and landscapes, divorcing many communities from their historic roots. These losses may be direct, such as the destruction of archaeological sites, historic buildings, bridges, streetscapes and other features. They may be the result of major physical changes in the landscape, for example by placing large scale buildings and widening streets adjacent to heritage structures, or by building electrical transmission towers within a scenic rural setting. The changes can also be more subtle. Often, unexpected cultural changes occur when rapid development brings residents with a new set of values into an area.

Allowing new development to proceed without careful consideration of existing cultural landscapes may mean that community identity and distinctiveness are diminished, links to the past are severed, and places lose some of the very qualities that make them attractive places to visit or live.



RAP area includes the Bay of Quinte drainage area containing the following watersheds:

- Trent River
- Moirs River
- Salmon River
- Napane River

Bay of Quinte RAP

Metro Toronto and Region RAP

RAP area includes the Metro Toronto Waterfront drainage area containing the following watersheds

- Etobicoke Creek
- Mimico Creek
- Humber River
- Don River
- Highland Creek
- Rouge River

RAP area includes Harbour only

Port Hope Harbour RAP

Hamilton Harbour RAP

RAP area includes the Hamilton Harbour drainage area containing the following watersheds:

- Grindstone Creek
- Spencer Creek
- Redhill Creek
- Rambo/Indian Creek
- Chedoke Creek

**MAP 9
REMEDIAL ACTION PLAN AREAS
AND AREAS OF CHANGE**

	Remedial Action Plan Areas		Niagara Escarpment
	Areas of Change (areas where residential, commercial, recreational or industrial developments are underway or being considered)		Oak Ridges Moraine
			Regional/County Boundary
			Landscapes Unit within the Greenway

0 5 10 15 km