

North Shore of Cumberland Coastal Workshop Summary

The Municipality of Cumberland hosted a Coastal Erosion Workshop for 2 hours on Saturday July, 22 in Pugwash. The purpose of the workshop was to build a better understanding of the scope of coastal erosion from Tidnish to Malagash, in particular the vulnerabilities. The intention was to build awareness both among the participants and within the Plan Cumberland Municipal Planning Strategy Review team. The workshop was also an opportunity to present potential ways of managing erosion, and get feedback on the options that will be used to develop policy solutions. There were 15 people in attendance, all long standing owners of coastal properties.

Coastline Changes

Based on the observations of the participants, the state of the coastline from Tidnish to Malagash varies considerably from place to place. Some stretches of coast remain vegetated and have vibrant natural beaches or slowly eroding but relatively stable cliffs that support habitat. However, other areas are experiencing major loss of habitat and recreation value, and serious threats to private property.

At least 5 sections of coastline were identified as heavily armoured, where the coastal zones have taken on an artificial quality. The material and composition of armour rock is often inconsistent from property to property, both in performance and aesthetics. Along some of the armoured shoreline, the beach is only accessible at low tide; the high-water mark comes very close to banks. Participants have observed habitat changes in most of these areas.

Many participants have noted that shorebirds, including seagulls and herons, are no longer present in places they used to be. Clams, periwinkles and crabs are also absent in some places. Fluctuations in jelly fish populations were also mentioned, with some areas having fewer than typical, and other areas having more. Crows and loons have become more common, replacing shorebirds, especially at Heather's Beach, however woodland and song birds remain stable.

In 2016 and 2017, "clumps of green and brown goo that come from tidal pools", likely algae blooms, have been observed for the first time at two locations along the coastline, along the Gulf Shore (participants felt this is associated to runoff from a farm and/or golf course) and at Heather's Beach.



Other Issues

Overland flow is as much a concern as wave action. Participants noted that during spring run-off or major storm events the flow is highly damaging to upper banks on some properties. This is contributing to slump on some properties.

Recreation vehicles or travel trailers are increasing along the coastline. In some ways this is a viable solution for enjoyment of coastal areas without the risk to built structures. However, participants also had concerns around impacts from this form of coastal use, such as waste water management, removal of vegetation, and shoreline stabilization.

Most of the participants have attempted to stabilize the shorelines of their properties, with mixed results. A few have had armour rock put in place at significant expense only to have it fail. One participant captured the frustration of this by saying they “might as well be dropping hundred dollar bills over the edge”. Some participants have also tried to re-vegetate eroding slopes from seed or with small transplants, but the plants did not “take hold” and were washed away. There was a sense among many participants that the methods of stabilization they are familiar with are not providing the desired outcome, and that they are worried about the future of their properties.

Solutions

In general, participants understand the nuanced complexity of coastal issues. There is a tension between the desire to protect property and the fear of damaging habitat, as well as the underlying instinct that any effort will not be very effective in the long-term. However, the participants were all very keen to learn more about solutions and try new approaches. A series of potential solutions were presented, all of which had some support, including:

- A toolkit of information, resources and best practice guidelines to help property owners better understand erosion and potential solutions.
- Training or certification for contractors who perform armouring.
- A larger setback for new development.
- A coastal buffer zone designation that will limit removal of vegetation.
- Community-based action to help neighbours work together toward re-vegetation.
- Conservation of undeveloped lands as habitat, perhaps through purchase by a government or non-profit organization.
- Research and trial of practices that are less common on this shoreline, including living shorelines and alternative hard materials.

