



**Strategic Watershed Plan  
for the  
Lower Maitland River Valley**

**Prepared By:**

**The Lower Maitland  
Stewardship Group**

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## **Introduction**

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The Lower Maitland River Valley is a landscape worthy of protection. Surrounded by highly productive agricultural land, this area is one of few in the County, Region and Province with a continuous forest cover and numerous natural heritage features such as fish/wildlife habitat, productive woodlands, limestone outcroppings and the gorge itself. To date, the river valley has been relatively untouched by development, and the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group intends to protect and enhance the valley and its natural features.

Over the past year, the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group, consisting of landowners, stakeholders and agencies, has prepared a strategy for the Lower Maitland Valley. This strategy reflects the community's vision for the area, with a focus on protecting the valley while preserving landowner's property rights and allowing stakeholders continued use of the area.

Through proper use, management and education, it is our group's hope that the Lower Maitland River Valley can remain a positive example of a natural area that is both protected and enjoyed by residents.

## **What is this document?**

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The following document is a strategic plan for the Lower Maitland, created for the purpose of protecting, maintaining and restoring a healthy natural valley system, while balancing environmental, social and economic needs.

The plan was prepared by the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group, but with the needs of the entire community in mind. This Plan received input from all sectors - government agencies, residents, municipalities and stakeholders - creating a local initiative that exemplifies a truly cooperative effort. It is a work in progress, and is a document that should be reviewed on a regular basis to accommodate the changing needs and circumstances of the area.

This document is intended for any individual with an interest in the protection and enhancement of the Lower Maitland valley, including landowners, stakeholders, and decision-makers. The actions listed in this document can only be implemented through the co-operation and partnership of all sectors within the community. Public support and responsibility is essential to the fulfillment of this Plan's vision.

Group members and agencies prepared an information report in 2000 for all landowners and interest groups. This document is available to anyone with an interest in the river and valley. The report provides information about the area, including technical and scientific facts on the valley's features, as well as identifying the policies and legislation affecting it. The Strategic Plan builds on the *Lower Maitland River Report* document.

The previous report explains why the area is worthy of protection. This strategic plan provides a process for actions the community can take to protect these natural features.

## ***Why now?***

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The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group initiated the process for a Strategic Plan, recognizing the increasing development pressure taking place on, and adjacent to, the river valley. The need for a Plan also arose from the increased demand for natural areas to be used for recreational purposes. A Strategic Plan will work to ensuring the valley is managed in a sustainable manner. With local municipalities creating new Official Plans as a result of recent amalgamations, the timing was right to initiate this process and to protect this vital and unique resource.

The group has been active since 1998, and has held numerous community educational activities to educate people on the natural processes occurring on and within the Lower Maitland River Valley. These community gatherings continue to be a vital tool used by the group to increase awareness and support for the valley's protection.

Members felt that a strategic plan would give both direction and focus for the group's activities, to undertake actions necessary to maintain and enhance valley health. This document provides a list of issues and responses to those concerns.

## ***Purpose of the Plan***

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The intent of this Plan is to define a path. The vision and ideals for the valley have not changed as a result of this document. In this strategy, previous ideas have been further explored and directed into practical suggestions for protecting the valley. Actions may range from engaging in extensive studies of the valley, to simple tasks such as encouraging other organizations with similar interests and goals to continue in their endeavours.

Actions proposed in this Plan provide an opportunity for everyone with an interest in the environment to be involved in its protection at a local level. This concept was introduced in the County of Huron Official Plan to "think globally, act locally." This process also serves to protect valuable significant natural features in the Lower Maitland River Valley. The protection of natural heritage features and a healthy environment is the primary goal of this Strategic Plan.

Although this document has no legislative authority, the purpose of this Plan is to provide:

- direction for the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group;
- local Councils with direction to make decisions relating to proposed developments;
- and

- information on the valley and its significance for landowners and stakeholders.

## ***The Strategic Plan Process***

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The Strategic Plan will provide direction for the future of the Lower Maitland River Valley. The strategy is a tool to be used by the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group in helping achieve the goals and actions listed in this Plan, and to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the goals and action items. The Strategic Plan should be updated periodically. Listed below are the steps which were taken to complete this Plan:

- 1) Develop a Vision**
- 2) Brainstorm Advantages/Disadvantages and Issues**
- 3) Categorize the Issues into Common Themes**
- 4) SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) Analysis**
- 5) Action Items**
  - Develop for each theme / issue
  - Goals
  - Actions
  - Responsibilities / Leaders
  - Monitoring
- 6) Review the Plan - Public Consultation**

\* The notes and outcomes from this process form Appendix 1.

## **Mission**

*“To maintain and enhance the natural ecosystem of the Lower Maitland River Valley.”*

## **Vision**

The long term vision for the Lower Maitland River Valley is a healthy river system and valley which:

- sustains a natural ecosystem thriving on clean water and natural features and functions;
- supports limited human activities carried out with minimal impact; and
- is maintained by the cooperative efforts of the community, including landowners, users and governments.

## **Values (Key Principles)**

- We envision a community that enables owners to manage their land for the mutual benefit of themselves and the community.
- We believe that most landowners holding valley lands do so because they appreciate the beauty and natural features of the valley and the adjoining landscape.
- We believe that many non-landowners have an interest in actively preserving and enhancing the valley’s natural vitality.
- We believe that landowners and non-landowners coming together as a community will assure the integrity of the valley for both their interests.

## **Goals**

1. To advocate responsible stewardship of resources by landowners and valley users through:
  - encouraging a sense of community and cooperation among landowners and valley users through providing a forum for them to interact, share ideas and develop an understanding of each other's viewpoints;
  - provision of information on natural features, their, presence, status and management options; and
  - provision of educational opportunities to learn about and develop an appreciation for the valley resources.
2. To encourage and direct research on natural features of the valley.
3. To profile existing protection measures, e.g. legislation, and encourage their appropriate enforcement.
4. To investigate other opportunities for protection, e.g. recommendations to regulators, special designations and learning about approaches taken in other areas.
5. To foster sustainable use of the valley and its resources.

## **Themes**

Group attendees began the process by listing the positives and negatives of a variety of land uses in the Lower Maitland River Valley. The initial meeting succeeded in introducing and identifying relevant issues and concerns. Issues were then grouped together to form themes or general categories; this provided the basis for focusing discussion in all subsequent meetings. The topic areas and the principal thoughts relating to these themes are summarized below.

### **Agriculture**

Farmland can positively influence the valley since it restricts other forms of development from occurring. Agricultural parcels are often owned as large pieces of land, thus preventing fragmentation of the land base and more intensive development. If farms do not implement best management practices (BMP's), the health of the river valley may be threatened. Proper management of farmland can prevent water quality concerns, soil erosion, the clearing and drainage of natural areas, and the loss of natural habitat.

### **Development**

Development provides homes, business opportunities, and areas of recreation in the community. The primary goal of this Plan is the protection of natural heritage features.

Improper development must not occur at the expense of environmental features or other uses and interests. The cumulative impact of growth along the river valley must be considered for every development application.

### **Fish and Wildlife Habitat**

The Lower Maitland River Valley is an area of significance for fish and wildlife habitat since it is a major corridor containing a large remnant of the County's natural area. These habitats are vulnerable to certain activities and should be protected. Significant uses of these natural features include activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and other recreational activities.

### **Forest Cover**

Forest cover provides a number of benefits for landowners and the ecosystem. Bank stability, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, the production of forest products, and travel corridors for animals are just a few of the benefits of forest cover. To maintain healthy and productive forests, existing areas should be properly managed and enhanced. Fragile and marginal lands should be reforested to enhance the health of the ecosystem.

### **Monitoring and Management**

The Lower Maitland River Valley should be inventoried to determine what development already exists, and subsequently as a tool to properly manage the area. An ecological land classification (ELC) inventory is the first step in this ongoing process. Methods are needed to measure change and to determine whether the health of the valley has improved or declined. Accomplishments of landowners and stakeholders involved in improving the valley's health should also be monitored.

### **Other Resources**

Other resources are available within the Lower Maitland River Valley aside from forestry, fish and wildlife. Sand and gravel extraction is an important resource within the County, as well as water taking. This area in particular has significant potential for aggregate extraction, but should not be developed at the expense of natural heritage features.

### **Recreation**

Recreation is an important use of the river valley. Stakeholder groups and landowners have taken a keen interest in the area's protection and in the continued enjoyment of the Maitland for all community members. Certain recreational uses can be incompatible with other uses and may create negative environmental impacts. A *Recreational Code of Ethics* could minimize potential conflicts between users, and protect the rights of property owners.

### **Views and Vistas**

The Lower Maitland valley is an area of natural beauty. Any improper development will take away from the view of the river valley. The scenic landscape adds to the quality of life for all County residents and is one of the primary reasons people visit the area. The

valley's aesthetics is another indicator of a healthy river system, and should be protected.

### **Water and Landscape (Geomorphology/Hydrology)**

The topography and landforms that make up the valley contribute to the uniqueness of the landscape. Areas of the Lower Maitland constitute one of the most deeply cut river valleys in the Province. Human impacts on the valley are not likely to dramatically change the area's landforms. Water quality and quantity, however, can be impacted as a result of human-induced activities. The protection of water is a fundamental goal to ecosystem health.

### ***Actions and Strategic Directions***

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The actions were developed from the themes identified by the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group. These actions represent responses to the activities that threaten the current or continued health of the river valley. Actions and the themes related to them are shown in Figure 1.



Strategic Direction	Theme	Actions	Timeline	Delegation/Responsibility
<b>Information and Education</b>				
Public information and consultation process for strategy	Ag, Dev, F/W, For, Wat, Mon, Rec, Res	deliver a series of landowner, interest group gatherings along the river		LMSG
Promotion and distribution of existing information materials	Ag, F/W, For, Wat, Rec, Res	summarize information available and sources		Partner (HSC)
	"	develop packages on specific topics for distribution (as needed and could be part of periodic communication below)		LMSG and Partners
	"	periodic communication through mail or other means to maintain profile of LMSG and raise or maintain interest and awareness of Natural Heritage issues and topics by landowners and interest groups		LMSG
Develop educational and information items	"	develop series of educational posters on natural heritage features (need to identify possible topics, cost, number)		Partner (Jack Imhoff)
	"	other information products that need to be developed (identify need and develop strategy to produce)		To be determined as needs are identified
Profile responsible stewardship activities, projects, etc.	"	encourage local press to feature		LMSG
	"	access other opportunities such as the Ontario Stewardship Demonstration Catalogue, CWS awards, etc.		
	"	develop an award and recognition system		LMSG
	"	establish and profile demonstration sites that illustrate BMP's (e.g. erosion, etc.)		
Encourage responsible management through educational opportunities, partnerships, etc.	For	support MWP efforts towards promoting responsible forest management		Support Partner (MWP)
	For	support local Woodlot Association efforts to promote responsible forest management		Support Partner (Woodlot Assoc.)
	For	look into delivering workshops for forestry companies to encourage minimal impact logging		Support Partner (Woodlot Assoc.)
	For	develop a code of practice to recommend during logging activities (use OWA code - distribute during communication activities)		LMSG
Emphasize the need for wildlife habitat protection and enhancement	F/W			LMSG & Partners
Emphasize significance of the valley in all activities	Ag, Dev, F/W, For, Wat, Mon, Rec, Res			LMSG & Partners

**THEME:** Ag = Agriculture; Dev = Development; F/W = Fish and Wildlife; For = Forest; Wat = Water and Landscape (Geomorphology/Hydrology); Mon = Monitoring; Rec = Recreation; Res = Other Resources

Strategic Direction	Theme	Actions	Timeline	Delegation/Responsibility
<b>Community Development</b>				
Continue with community based social and educational events along the river to continue to develop and maintain networking as well as a sense of community and cooperation among valley landowners and users	Ag, Dev, F/W, For, Wat, Mon, Rec, Res	several events per year (number topic, location, speakers, etc. to be developed annually)		LMSG
	"	sponsor or promote "Community Clean Up Days" or other community participation activities along the river		LMSG & Partners
Actively look for opportunities to work with other organizations or agencies having similar goals or interests	"	identify potential partners and initiatives that may be appropriate		LMSG
	"	investigate options, potential and benefits of designation (e.g. Heritage River, Exceptional Waters, etc.)		LMSG
Work with partners and local landowners to reduce potential for conflicts and address land use conflicts as they arise	"	options may include identifying needs for additional signage, dealing with issues over garbage, etc.		LMSG & Partners
	"	work with other interests to develop a "Code of Ethics" addressing use of the valley (recreational use, land management, etc.)		LMSG
<b>Restoration</b>				
Encourage reforestation and/ or restoration of marginal or fragile lands	Ag, F/W, For, Wat, Rec, Res	promote existing programs to landowners and interest groups		LMSG as part of communication efforts
	"	investigate funding opportunities to support existing and new initiatives		LMSG
	F/W, For, Wat, Rec	involve local groups and youth in annual tree planting days		LMSG & Partners (e.g. Ginn Creek Adopt a Creek initiative)
	F/W, For	foster rescue of native woodland plants where disturbance is to occur		
Encourage maintenance and creation of buffer strips along the river	F/W, For, Wat, Rec	Same as above items?		

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Strategic Direction	Theme	Actions	Timeline	Delegation/Responsibility
<b>Influence Policy</b>				
Influence "Decision Making" through political processes (e.g. Official Plans, Bylaws, management plans, etc.)	Ag, Dev, F/W, For, Wat, Mon, Rec, Res	input into Official Plan policies to encourage recognition and protection of natural heritage features and prevent excessive/non-compatible development		LMSG & Partners
	"	ensure Municipal Council members are provided opportunities to learn about the valley, its features and their role in protecting them		LMSG & Partners
	"	foster an ecosystem approach to planning		Partners (Huron County)
	"	influence content or development of bylaws (e.g.Zoning Bylaws to ensure building is kept back from the river, Forest Conservation Bylaw to maintain or enhance forest cover, etc.)		LMSG & Partners
	"	input into the Master Plan for Falls Reserve		LMSG
	F/W, Wat	ensure new development addressess water quality issues		Partners (Huron County)
	"	ensure adequate surface water management in residential settings and on agricultural lands		Partners (Huron County)
	"	check the current regulations to monitor water taking		LMSG & Partners
Promote development of, or facilitate access to, grants / incentives that promote responsible stewardship	Ag, F/W, For, Wat, Rec, Res			LMSG
<b>Study / Research</b>				
Examine or research similar river based community efforts (case studies)	Ag, Dev, F/W, For, Wat, Mon, Rec, Res	investigate initiatives from other rivers		LMSG
	"	obtain reports, study materials, web site information		LMSG
	"	access speakers or attend events in other jurisdictions		LMSG & Partners
Assess carrying capacity of the valley	"	determine environmentally acceptable level of recreational use		Partners (agencies)
	"	level of acceptable use for other activities?		Partners (agencies)
Keep up to date on local natural environment / resource studies	"			LMSG & Partners

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