

Rural landowners see importance of wetlands, according to CVC study

Nearly half of all rural landowners surveyed in the Credit River watershed have wetlands on their properties and have a strong appreciation for the ecosystem function they provide.

This is according to a new study by Credit Valley Conservation (CVC).

CVC, with funding from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, conducted a study of rural landowners (farm and non-farm) to determine how they manage wetlands on their properties. The study looked at their attitudes towards wetlands and the ecosystem services they provide, their willingness to take on wetland restoration projects and their preference for incentives to take on such projects.

"Rural landowners value the critical services provided by wetlands, such as water filtration," said Tatiana Koveshnikova, project coordinator for ecological goods and services for CVC, who coordinated the study.

Wetlands are known to improve water quality, allow water to collect and recharge into the ground, regulate climate; limit flooding drought and erosion; provide opportunities for fishing and hunting; and provide aesthetic, educational, cultural and spiritual benefits. The number and area of wetlands in the Credit River watershed is decreasing, threatening the ecosystem services they provide to residents. If past trends continue, 18 per cent of the remaining wetlands in the watershed could be lost by 2020. Despite these facts, most landowners surveyed felt that the current state and health of wetlands in the Credit River watershed was good.

"Our research found a gap between people's perceptions of wetland health and the actual facts on the ground," Koveshnikova observed. "There's a need for more outreach and education on the status of wetlands in the watershed."

Research indicated that farm and non-farm landowners share similar positive perceptions of wetlands and the services they provide, but their opinions on monetary forms of incentives to take on restoration projects differ. Farmers largely indicated that financial compensation would be required for wetland restoration to offset lost crop production or pasture land. About two thirds of non-farm rural landowners indicated they would not require additional payments if up-front costs to restore wetlands were fully covered by a third party.

Information on how wetland decline affects landowners personally was ranked the most important non-monetary motivator for both farm and non-farm rural landowners. Technical assistance was reported to motivate landowners more than public recognition of their work.

"Wetlands provide significant benefits to the public such as flood control and filtering pollutants," said Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation CEO Burkhard Mausberg. "This leading research, conducted in Ontario's Greenbelt, enables groups like CVC to engage more landowners in activities that have the biggest impact on restoring wetlands."

Overall, the study indicated that with the appropriate program design and incentives, a large number of landowners in the Credit River watershed would be willing to participate in a wetland enhancement or restoration program.

For a copy of the full report, *Landowner Views on Wetland Enhancement and Restoration in and Adjacent to the Credit River Watershed*, visit www.creditvalleyca.ca/egs