

Brian Jones, farmer, chair of The Severn Sound Environmental Association

Fifth-generation farmer Brian Jones has a 122 hectare farm that has been part of the landscape in Severn Sound on Ontario's Georgian Bay since 1821. When they started to farm, Brian's ancestors could not have predicted that Severn Sound would be identified as one of the 16 Canadian Great Lakes' 'Areas of Concern' - or know that their descendant would take such an active role in working to improve its condition.

The Sound's environmental problems have developed over generations. Fish and wildlife habitat were lost as shorelines were developed - first for mills and factories of the logging era, and later for homes, cottages and marinas. Farms along the rivers and streams were sources of nutrients and sediment, and urban development contributed loads through sewage treatment plants and stormwater. In 1987, Severn Sound was listed as an 'Area of Concern' due to the nutrient enrichment and habitat loss, and soon afterwards the Severn Sound RAP program began working on restoration projects.

Brian Jones was one of the first farmers to participate in the Severn Sound RAP Tributary Rehabilitation Project. To restore valley lands on the Hog River, he voluntarily retired seven hectares of pasture and planted 10 000 trees. Several of his neighbours also took part in the program.

"We drew attention to the fact that something could be done," says Brian.

Brian was elected councillor of the Township of Tay in 1991 and was appointed to serve on and later chair the Planning and Development Committee. In 1997, the Severn Sound Environmental Association was established to continue implementation of the RAP and to sustain the restoration of the Severn Sound ecosystem. Brian was appointed to the SSEA as the Township of Tay's representative, and in 1998 was elected Chairperson. The Association is an innovative partnership involving Environment Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Environment, seven municipalities (the towns of Midland and Penetanguishene and the townships of Tiny, Tay, Oro-Medonte, Severn and Georgian Bay), as well as the Friends of Wye Marsh (a non-profit environmental organization).

The Severn Sound Environmental Association supports the RAP Implementation Office, which in turn, coordinates RAP projects in five categories: phosphorus control, habitat restoration and protection, pollution prevention, planning and environmental monitoring. One project, the Severn Sound Rural Non-Point Source Control, helps farmers improve water quality through better manure handling methods or switching to no-till equipment. "The farming community is actively managing runoff, and water quality has been measurably enhanced," says Brian. Upgrades to sewage treatment plants and septic systems have further cut back phosphorus supply and a stormwater strategy is now being implemented to reduce loadings from urban areas.

Another Severn Sound RAP project has a mandate to restore shoreline habitat. The Natural Shorelines Project provides practical advice and materials to shoreline property owners. For example, it has "drafted planting designs for homeowners, including

advising them not to cut grass right to the shore, to plant hardy native species that will withstand wave action, help control erosion and act as natural filters, and to get rid of exotic species such as purple loosestrife which crowd out native plants," Brian explains.

The Severn Sound Environmental Association assists member municipalities in the planning, design, funding and implementation of environmental projects. For example, RAP targets for phosphorus levels have led to sewage treatment plants (STPs) in the Severn Sound area upgrading or optimizing their operations to meet the target levels. Funding was arranged for the Midland, Penetanguishene, Elmvale and Port Severn STPs, and most recently Port McNicoll was promised \$5 million from the Water Protection Fund for an upgrade.



While Brian's farming operation is now run by one of his sons, he remains active in promoting the RAP through his work with the Severn Sound Environmental Association. He estimates that by the year 2001 - with the continued support of the community and the Association partners - environmental targets will be met and Severn Sound will be removed from the list of Canadian Great Lakes "Areas of Concern". The road to success has combined the efforts of environmental groups and three levels of government working in partnership with members of the Severn Sound community.

The work being done through this partnership will have direct impact on the future well-being of Severn Sound. Brian says, "Whatever we do throughout the watershed effects the water downstream. Even if we don't see the benefits right away, we're really doing this to improve conditions for future generations."