This page was exported from - The Auroran
Export date: Thu Mar 28 15:47:20 2024 / +0000 GMT

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Lake Simcoe and Climate Change

By Chris Ballard, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

My responsibilities as Minister of Environment and Climate Change and my job as the MPP for Newmarket-Aurora don't always intersect, but such was the case when I addressed the annual meeting of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) a few days ago in Newmarket.

We are very lucky to live in an area that has so many natural features such as the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Simcoe. I have lived my whole life in this region and both are very important to me, as I know they are to you.

The most important natural function of the Moraine is to sustain the health of the many watersheds and the diversity of species that live within them. Sixty per cent of the Moraine is in the Greater Toronto Area, (Peel, York and Durham Regions). It is rightly called the ?rain barrel of southern Ontario.?

For 66 years the Conservation Authority has been working to protect and restore the health and quality of Lake Simcoe at its watershed. Lake Simcoe is a key recreational playground for many of us in the GTA and beyond in winter and summer.

Clean water and beaches attract thousands of us each summer, whether we enjoy swimming, boating, fishing, cottages and other activities. In the winter, an entire economy is built up around the Lake Simcoe ice fishing industry. None of this would be possible without ensuring a healthy lake and surrounding area.

Farmers rely on clean water from the lake, and many more rely on Lake Simcoe's clean water to drink ? including the Indigenous nation of Chippewas of Georgina Island.

The province has worked with the LSRCA on setting more restrictive phosphorous levels and with municipalities in the area to modernize storm water management practices and encourage low impact development. We continue to work with farmers to limit fertilizer being washed of the land and making its way to the lake. Phosphorus is a major polluter. Combined with warmer water, phosphorus fertilizers encourage algae blooms and reduce the quality of the water.

LSRCA has also had tremendous success in bringing awareness on the need to limit the road salt that feeds into our waterways and is harming the lake. Shockingly, there are tributaries of Lake Simcoe that are saltier than the Atlantic Ocean, I'm told.

LSRCA has collaborated on the need to restore river and waterway shores that suffer from erosion. They have planted over 50,000 native species trees and they have surveyed and inventoried invasive species that threaten our forests and waterways.

Last year marked the 10th anniversary of the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, a piece of Ontario legislation that was the first water-shed based legislation in Canada. Under the guidance of that plan, the provincial government is working to help improve the water quality in Lake Simcoe and to restore a self-sustaining cold water fishery. It is our roadmap for success in achieving that goal.

Lake Simcoe is feeling the impact of climate change. The water is warming which threatens native fish species. Increased droughts and extreme rains contribute to the erosion of the shores and those heavy rains wash more contaminants into the water.

These are some of the reasons why Ontario chose to participate in the cap and invest plan. By capping the amount of greenhouse gas pollution businesses can emit and investing the proceeds from our carbon market into projects that reduce pollution we are making life better of residents and for the watershed in our community.

Through the plan, Ontario is moving toward a low-carbon economy reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and creating good, clean and local jobs in Ontario. Ontario has the fastest-growing clean tech sector in Canada. There are startup clean tech companies in our riding, like Innovative Hydrogen Solutions and Jhomi Solutions in Aurora.

We are also bringing our efforts right to you. With the GreenON program that my ministry is rolling out we are using proceeds from our carbon market program to provide steep rebates to help home owns fight climate change at home.

If you are considering replacing windows, ramping up your insulation levels or installing home geothermal units or air-source heat pumps, you can get rebates for significant portions of the cost. Homeowners can save money, and help fight climate change. Buildings and the energy they consume account for almost one-quarter of Ontario's greenhouse gas pollution.

You can do your part, reduce your ongoing costs and get money back for the initial outlay through the GreenON program.

Our climate is changing. Lake Simcoe is changing. We need to adapt. The LSRCA is ahead of the game by providing the Lake Simcoe Climate Change Adaptation Strategy ? a framework for local climate change adaptation. Thanks to the collaboration of the Authority, local municipalities, the province and others there is improvement in Lake Simcoe. Working together we can do much, much more.

Lake Simcoe may not be one of the Great Lakes but it is a G-R-E-A-T lake.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org.
I look forward to hearing from you.