

Sustaining Life: Biodiversity as the
Foundation for Human Health and Well-
Being

2015 Ontario Biodiversity Summit

Workshop Report



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Protecting What
Sustains Us

Ontario Biodiversity Summit
Niagara Falls, May 19 to 22, 2015





Ontario Biodiversity Summit 2015 Niagara Falls

Workshop on Sustaining Life: Biodiversity as a Foundation for Human Health and Well-being

21 May 2015
10:30 am – 12:00 noon

Introduction

The *Ontario Biodiversity Summit* took place in Niagara Falls from 19 – 22 May 2015. Suzanne Barrett, Karen Morrison and Aryne Sheppard of EcoHealth Ontario (EHO) hosted this concurrent session on *Sustaining Life: Biodiversity as a Foundation for Human Health and Well-being*

Participants came from diverse backgrounds: universities, private consulting, MNRF, Ministry of Education, Ontario Nature, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Town of Richmond Hill and Ontario Power Generation.

The agenda and workshop evaluation is in the appendices of this report. Presentations are available on the EcoHealth Ontario website (<http://www.ecohealth-ontario.ca/index.php/resources>).

Objectives

The workshop objectives were to:

- Provide resources that connect human health and biodiversity
- Encourage networking with colleagues and diverse sectors
- Explore the use of health and well-being frames for future biodiversity campaigns and projects

Ecohealth Presentations

The workshop began with an introductory presentation on EcoHealth Ontario by EHO Coordinator Suzanne Barrett. Aryne Sheppard then led a 'Frame of Mind Activity' where participants were grouped in pairs to share a favourite experience in the natural environment.

Karen Morrison, Leader of the Ontario Node of the Canadian Community of Practice in Ecosystem Approaches to Health, gave a presentation on Biodiversity and Health. She provided definitions of health, and talked about five types of human health and wellbeing: physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual. Karen described some links between biodiversity and health, such as medicines, food, microbes, zoonoses, aesthetic qualities, recreational opportunities and spiritual meaning. She summarised two recent literature reviews undertaken by members of EcoHealth Ontario, on the Health Benefits of Greenspace and on Greenspace, Heat and Air Quality.

Case Study Challenge

Karen's presentation provided background material for a case study exercise. Participants worked in groups of 3-4 to address the following challenge:

It is your team's responsibility to restore a local park/green space and you must utilize human health as your rationale. How will you use human health arguments to sell your campaign?

Key ideas that emerged from the case study discussions included:

- We need multi-generational connections: engaging youth will not only support biodiversity and human health, but will also establish confidence, skills development and social connectivity
 - Scientific evidence supports need for more green space to benefit human health so we can elaborate on the direct connections between ecological functions and human health
 - Need to think through how the park can understand and enhance community values including park resilience and ecosystem services
 - Draw on statistics from Health Canada and link them to the environment
 - Measure park biodiversity and use it as an indicator of the park's ability to provide ecosystem services
 - Emphasize healthy recreation benefits such as biking, hiking, playing games, yoga etc.
 - Emphasize mental health benefits such as de-stress/calming, interpretive health
 - Emphasize social benefits such as opportunities to bring people together and create social bonds. Note that social equity is a key driver for health.
 - Emphasize emotional benefits such as reflection
 - Engaging many different organizations in partnerships can be used to educate the community, share costs and reduce the burden on any one organization
 - Incorporating green space and trails into development can enhance wellness of communities
- Municipal planning perspective can incorporate design for social health and safety of community
 - Need to establish guidelines through planning at municipal level
 - Food quality and water quality are important goals
 - Develop cross-functional teams (not silos), for example in Health/Science/Social sectors
 - Would wildlife photographs, donated to hospital recovery rooms, increase recovery rates?
 - Some hospitals provide bird books and binoculars to patients (e.g. Markham Hospital)
 - There is a trend towards courtyards and conscious design features to green hospital grounds
 - Encourage Medical Officers to speak at events
 - Can share the information in their own work and life communities
 - Increases credibility at a medical level
 - Incorporate aspects of health into EIAs (environmental impact assessments), using components of HIAs (health impact assessments)
 - 1st Nation communities are key and have knowledge of linkages between environmental and human health (intuitive)
 - Schools should be linked to local Natural Heritage Systems



- Make sure urban planners are part of the discussion
- A good example: ad placed in Queens Park subway station by Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, David Suzuki Foundation and Ontario Nature about pollinators and neonicotinoid pesticides

Presentation on Use of Ecohealth in Current Projects

Aryne Sheppard, Senior Public Engagement Specialist, David Suzuki Foundation showed examples of diverse ways that ecohealth is being used in projects and campaigns:

- Health as the vision for the United Nations Global Biodiversity Outlook 4
- Vital Sites campaign by World Wildlife Fund on the contributions of protected areas to human health
- Mood Walks hosted by the Canadian Mental Health Association, Conservation Ontario and Hike Ontario
- A Healthy Forests Healthy Communities partnership to plant trees in York Region
- Passages from the Peace – a communications strategy developed through a partnership between Saulteau First Nation and David Suzuki Foundation
- 30 x 30 Nature Challenge by David Suzuki Foundation to encourage people to spend 30 minutes a day in nature for 30 days

How to Move Forward with the Ecohealth Agenda

Following a discussion in pairs about ways that participants could incorporate ecohealth ideas and messages in their own work and campaigns, they were asked to brainstorm in plenary to identify the key steps for moving forward with the ecohealth agenda in Ontario, with a biodiversity focus. Here is a summary of the recommendations:

1) Recognize links between biodiversity and the health and well-being of current and future generations

Make the links between human health and biodiversity more explicit in the work of diverse sectors. Provide information and training to expand environmental professionals' 'health vocabulary' particularly as it relates to ecosystems and biodiversity.

2) Incorporate human health and well-being in decision-making

Advocate for healthy design and 'health in all policies'. For example, add 'what are the health implications' to municipal checklists for decision-making. We should also incorporate human health and wellbeing indicators in environmental report cards.

3) Invest in health promotion and disease prevention

Ontario invests heavily in "sickness care." We should make a strong case for the health and well-being benefits of environmental quality and biodiversity, and invest more in preventative approaches that promote health.

4) Break down silos

'Cross pollinate' by inviting more people from health sector to environmental meetings and vice versa. Address fragmentation within government and pool resources to gain more value on all levels and for all sectors.

APPENDIX 1 - AGENDA

- ❖ Introduction to EHO and Agenda Review – Suzanne Barrett, Coordinator, EcoHealth Ontario
- ❖ Participant Introductions
- ❖ Biodiversity and Health – Karen Morrison, Leader, CoPEH-Ontario (Canadian Community of Practice in Ecosystem Approaches to Health)
- ❖ Case Study Brainstorming: How would you use human health as the primary rationale for developing a program to meet biodiversity outcomes for a local park?
- ❖ Use of Ecohealth in Current Projects – Aryne Sheppard, Senior Public Engagement Specialist, David Suzuki Foundation
- ❖ Applications to your Work: How could you use ecohealth information in your own projects or campaigns?
- ❖ Sharing of Best Ideas
- ❖ Ways to Move Forward in your Sector

APPENDIX 2 –Workshop Evaluations

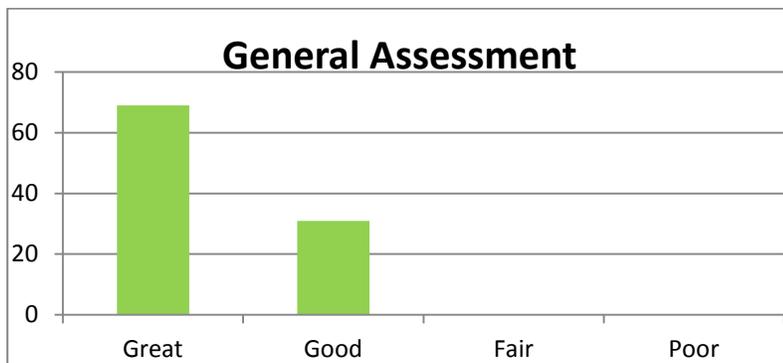
Thirteen people, representing 93% of participants at the EcoHealth workshop at the 2015 Ontario Biodiversity Summit, completed an evaluation of the workshop.

General Assessment

The majority expressed a positive opinion of the workshop. All sections of the workshop that participants were asked to evaluate were rated as “great” or “good” and none were marked as “fair” or “poor.”

When asked to offer a general assessment of the workshop, 69% of respondents selected “great” and 31% selected “good.”

Comments expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to share information across sectors and develop practical solutions for protecting biodiversity and human health. Additional comments indicated that participants were eager to explore how they might incorporate the literature on biodiversity and health into different fields such as housing and natural heritage systems.



Workshop Presentations

Biodiversity and Health (Karen Morrison)

Use of Ecohealth in Current Projects (Aryne Sheppard)

Both presentations were either rated as “great” or “good” by all participants. When the results for both presentations were combined, 70% of respondents responded “great” and 30% responded “good.”



Discussions on Case Study Brainstorming and Applications to Your Work

60% of participants responded that the discussions were “great” and 40% responded “good.”

The *case study brainstorming* received comments indicating that participants felt the session was a bit too short and would have appreciated more time for discussion. Another comment suggested that it would be useful to have a case study connecting ecohealth concepts to housing development.

Regarding *applications to their own work*, participants reported that the information provided by the workshop was useful. Specific suggestions were made for initiatives to encourage people to explore forests and to incorporate ecohealth into housing and community design.



Future Activities

When asked “do you anticipate changing any aspect of your work as a result of something you learned at this workshop?”, eight of 13 respondents indicated that they expected to change an aspect of the work as a result of what they learned, while four answered maybe, and one respondent said that they didn’t know.

When asked “do you think you will start a new collaboration as a result of this workshop?” four respondents indicated that they thought they would start a new collaboration as a result of the workshop, while 6 respondents answered “maybe” and one said they didn’t know.