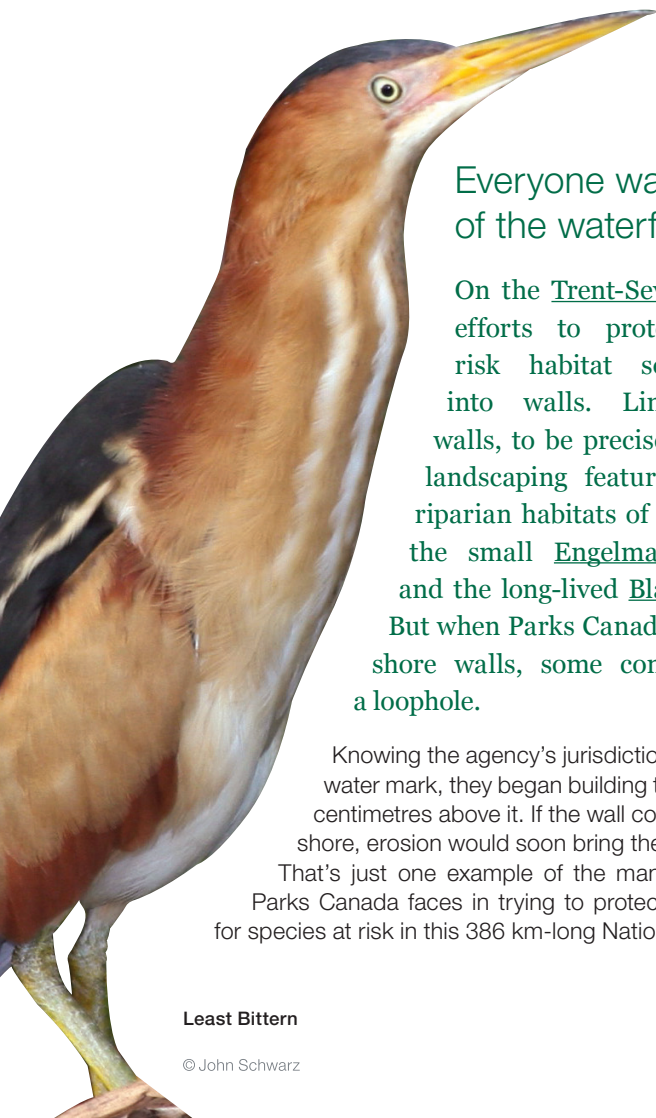




Northern Map Turtles

© Michael Butler

Banding Together to Protect Shoreline Habitat



Least Bittern

© John Schwarz

Everyone wants a piece of the waterfront

On the Trent-Severn Waterway, efforts to protect species-at-risk habitat sometimes run into walls. Limestone shore walls, to be precise. These trendy landscaping features destroy the riparian habitats of species such as the small Engelmann's Quillwort and the long-lived Blanding's Turtle. But when Parks Canada moved to ban shore walls, some contractors found a loophole.

Knowing the agency's jurisdiction ends at the high water mark, they began building the walls just a few centimetres above it. If the wall couldn't come to the shore, erosion would soon bring the shore to the wall. That's just one example of the many challenges that Parks Canada faces in trying to protect sensitive habitat for species at risk in this 386 km-long National Historic Site.



© Parks Canada

Many owners, many jurisdictions

The Waterway is a series of rivers, lakes, wetlands, and canals that connects Trenton on Lake Ontario to Port Severn on Georgian Bay. More than 300,000 boaters and one million land-based tourists visit the Waterway every year. It counts 120,000 private waterfront landowners, yet it shelters more than 40 federally-listed species at risk, including the threatened Eastern Foxsnake and Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake.

"There's a lot of jurisdictional overlap and confusion. But on the other hand, it's a great area to interact with people," said Joan Chamberlain, the Waterway's manager of resource conservation. "We have this constant audience along the waterway that we can influence."

With waterfront properties being snapped up ever-faster by cottagers, retirees and condominium developers, the natural landscape is under increasing development pressure. Yet protecting sensitive habitat for species at risk is complicated. The Waterway's 4500 km of shoreline pass through the jurisdictions of seven First Nations communities, 28 municipal governments, six conservation authorities, and five federal and provincial agencies. That's why Parks Canada is taking a leadership role in collaborating with partners to find solutions.



Parks Canada
Parcs Canada

Canada



Mapping the treasures of the waterway

From shipwrecks to scenic vistas, from Northern Map Turtle nests to archaeological treasures – there are many special places along the Waterway. But government agencies can only protect them if they know where they are.

© Parks Canada



Eastern Foxsnake

That's the impetus behind a leading-edge mapping system that Parks Canada is developing as part of its Leaders on the Landscape – Integrated Aquatic Habitat Conservation Program. The Heritage Values Mapping System will identify areas of natural value, such as endangered species habitat and provincially-significant wetlands. It will also pinpoint places of cultural importance, scenic areas, outdoor recreation spots, and places of particular importance to communities.

Creating the Mapping System won't be the work of Parks Canada alone. Instead, through a series of meetings, the agency will seek input from many stakeholders: landowners, First Nations, conservation authorities, municipalities, provincial and federal government agencies, community groups, land conservancies and other conservation groups.

Using the Heritage Values Mapping System to plan development

The map alone can't compel shoreline owners and developers to think ecologically when building along the waterfront. But it will provide a valuable tool to government agencies that do wield regulatory power. *"It will provide information for planners of the Waterway in terms of reviewing development proposals,"* said Chamberlain. *"It is a practical tool for priority setting, although not binding in any way."* For example, if municipal governments know the locations of critical Channel Darter habitat, they could require buffer areas along the shoreline before giving site approval to new developments.

Similarly, the Mapping System will enhance Parks Canada's review of permit applications for in-water and shoreline works within its jurisdictions. Through inter-agency coordination, the mapping system will ensure, for example, that docks are placed away from sensitive areas such as nesting sites of the Least Bittern.

© Dan Brunton



Engelmann's Quillwort



Channel Darter

© George Coker



Trent-Severn-Waterway National Historic Site of Canada

The Mapping System is still in the early stages of development. The first meetings with stakeholders in the southern part of the Waterway took place in early 2011. It's expected to take another three years before the entire 386 km of the Waterway is mapped.



Partnership Workshop

Planning together to save the shoreline

Meanwhile, in a separate initiative, Parks Canada has banded together with other levels of government to create the Trent-Severn Watershed Planner's Forum. The forum aims to lay down common planning policies and development principles, and to co-ordinate the way shoreline changes are managed, in order to enhance habitat protection.

The knowledge provided by the Mapping System will help inform the forum's discussions. That way, the scientific knowledge gathered, synthesized, and disseminated through the Leaders on the Landscape program will contribute to good governance all along the Waterway, protecting precious species at risk and their habitats.

For more information, contact:

Joan Chamberlain, Manager, Resource Conservation, Trent-Severn Waterway
Telephone: 705 750-4941 Joan.Chamberlain@pc.gc.ca