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Gifford Causeway Natural Environment Assessment

A non-fisheries natural environment assessment was undertaken of the James A. Gifford Causeway (CR 17) corridor from Robinson Road to Ward Street, Peterborough County, as part of an Environmental Assessment for the upgrading of this roadway. In concert with consultation with Otonabee Regional Conservation Authority and Ministry of Natural Resources specialists, field and off-site investigations were conducted along the corridor. All field and off-site non-fisheries inventory and assessment work was conducted by Daniel F. Brunton.

Reflecting the limited potential indicated by the severely transformed nature of the landscape in and about the study area, a single site visit was conducted. Particular attention during on-site investigations was paid to the potential presence of designated Species at Risk (SAR). Field investigations were undertaken on 6 June 2012. Subsequent review and discussion was largely related to SAR west of the study area and to the single non-fisheries natural environment feature of note observed to occur within the study area corridor.

The following summarizes and illustrates the findings of the natural environment assessment.

Existing Conditions

The vast majority of the study area condition and supports no intrinsic of vegetation along the causeway, dominated by non-native weedy shrubs, Lilac, with some representation of Eastern Cottonwood and White Ash developed on artificially created land environment value.



At the western end of the corridor, a block of land confined by CR 17 to the north and Joplin Lane to the south supports a scrubby low Green Ash woods (see figure). It is otherwise a regenerating agricultural field, dominated by coarse pasture grasses and other, mostly non-native weedy meadow species of plants.



A narrow fringe of cat-tail with associated emergent aquatic vegetation has developed along the edge of the causeway fill. This is too small in extent within the study area corridor, however, to constitute a habitat.

Little native wildlife is evident. The flora is representative of the predominantly non-native vegetation described above. Fauna are similarly dominated by common species of edge habitat and open ground, such as Song Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Eastern Chipmunk, Northern Cardinal and American Redstart. An active Osprey nest is also present within the study area corridor (see figure, Significant Features, below).

Small populations of two designated SAR are present west of the study area corridor. Several pairs of Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark occur in active agricultural lands south of CR 17 between Joplin Lane and Peregrine Road. One Eastern Meadowlark was observed north of CR 17 close to Joplin Lane but none of these animals were noted in the study area, nor is there habitat here suitable to attract these animals into the corridor.

Significant Features

No provincially or regionally significant non-fisheries natural environment features are present in the study area corridor. Designated SAR occur in transformed agricultural land to the west but are unaffected by any proposed construction activities within the corridor.

No shoreline areas indicate nesting activity by turtles. This presumably is because of the very large diameter of the boulders used as fill for the causeway. These shorelines likely provide attractive basking opportunities for common species such as the Painted Turtle and Snapping Turtle, however.

No representation of natural vegetation exists here, rendering no potential for the study area to provide even locally significant representation of native habitats.

The single natural environment feature of note appears to be the Osprey nest atop a power pole at the intersection of CR 17 and Robinson Road. Although Osprey does not receive designated protection, more secure protection of this raptor nesting opportunity would provide a locally beneficial enhancement of natural environment values here. The present nest site (see figure) is vulnerable to negative impacts from the considerable human activity at the busy intersection below.



Roadway upgrading provides an opportunity for enhancing the long-term security of this active nest site and reducing potential transportation complications. Relocating the nest to the lakeshore across from the Robinson Road intersection would be desirable. Following fall dispersal of the Ospreys, placement of all or portions of the existing nest onto a support platform on a new shoreline pole and removal of the existing pole should result in successful nesting the following spring at the desired location.

Conclusions

Non-fisheries natural environment values are minimal in this largely artificial and transformed landscape. Relocation of the active Osprey nest to a more secure and less intrusive shoreline site would be the only action likely to provide a conspicuous natural environment benefit.

Even if potentially suitable nesting sites for turtles were evident along causeway, it would not be desirable to encourage such activity. Nesting sites along the busy corridor would likely lead to unnecessary turtle mortality.

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