RETHINK DREDGING

Dredging (the removal of bottom sediment from the lake bottom) for boating access and for water supply intakes has become a common practice along the shoreline in response to lower water levels. However, these actions are not sustainable.

Alternatives exist such as communal boardwalks and docks, mooring boats offshore, using a public marina and/or marine railways. A smaller boat requiring less draft or water depth is also an option.

Municipalities may also need to consider options such as providing a municipal water supply, communal facilities for boat launching / boat storage and shared access routes to the lake.

The negative impacts of dredging are considerable:

Dredged Channel (S. Mackey)

(© Queens Printer for Ontario 2013)

Owen Sound Harbour (A. Mckee)

Bugs in the Mud (or 'Benthic Habitat')

Dredging modifies the lake bottom and disrupts or destroys benthic habitat and communities. It is difficult to compensate for completely altered bottom substrate habitat. This causes short and long term changes in the food chain impacting plant, fish and invertebrate communities.

Sedimentation

Sediment plumes from the re-suspension of sediment during dredging will cause short term changes to water quality. Toxic materials bound to sediments can be re-suspended in the water and ingested by filter-feeding organisms while sediments that settle to the bottom can smother bottom-dwelling organisms. Water chemistry can be altered, affecting animals and people.

Contaminants

Sediments with attached contaminants can be re-suspended and carried large distances from the dredging activity.

Habitat Loss

Nearshore and river mouth habitat can be affected by dredging associated with shoreline excavation, infilling and shoreline stabilization works. Being mindful of the life-cycles of fish species and working outside of the time they are most active is imperative so fish spawning and migration periods aren't disrupted.

On-going Costs – (since dredging is seldom done once!)

Expect to maintain the channel repeatedly over time as it continues to fill in.

If you have no other option and must dredge (i.e. for a water intake), make sure approvals are obtained which will stipulate proper erosion and sedimentation control measures, schedule work to minimize impact on fisheries (MNR timing windows), and expect continual maintenance costs.