**News Release**

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority

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# More than sixty people take part in workshop about rural stormwater model

*Project team explains how new computer model for rural areas could identify which projects will do best job to limit runoff impact on local water during storm events*

More than 60 people took part in a technical workshop in Clinton, Ontario on July 18 to find out more about a new computer model being built to better limit the impacts of runoff on local watercourses during storm events in rural areas along Lake Huron. Municipal staff members and representatives, rural landowners, engineers, contractors, computer modelers, and stewardship professionals were among the people who attended in person or who took part by web conference.

The Rural Stormwater Management Model (RSWMM) Project has already improved long-term monitoring of water quality, quantity, and weather in five priority watershed areas, or 'sentinel' watersheds, along Lake Huron. The computer model is to be ready in 2014. The model will help municipalities, stewardship professionals, and landowners to decide what kinds of projects work best to limit the impact of storm events on land and water, where those projects should be located, and what size those projects should be. The new computer modeling tools will help counties, municipalities, and conservation organizations to focus funds on those projects that will do the best job to limit erosion and to keep topsoil on the land and to keep bacteria, chemicals, and sediment out of creeks, drains, rivers, and Lake Huron.

The workshop was held at the Regional Equine and Agricultural Centre of Huron (REACH Huron). Alec Scott, Water and Planning Manager with Ausable Bayfield Conservation, is the manager of the RSWMM project. He provided an overview of the work to date. He said the model will give rural landowners and municipalities a clearer picture of what's happening on the landscape during a storm event and that can help them in their efforts to limit the effect of stormwater runoff on watercourses. The information from the model can show the benefits of projects to better prepare the land for extreme weather events. "Once the model is developed we will have a tool to show people the impact if they make a change," he said. If it's possible to show people the impact of a change in practices, or from the creation of a natural barrier to runoff, people will be more likely to consider that change or do that project, Scott said. The model will help provide information about what projects do the best job to protect water quality in different cases and that direction can benefit municipalities and local residents, he said.

The workshop had presenters in attendance from the two firms working together to create the model: Computational Hydraulics International (CHI) and Emmons & Olivier Resources, Inc. (EOR). The company representatives spoke about creating a model that has the features which are needed for rural areas along Lake Huron, the data required to make the new model accurate and effective, but also making sure it was easy to use and not require so much data and modeling knowledge that it is not practical or affordable for the user. "There are no current models that fully meet the needs of this project," said Cecilio Olivier, Chief Operating Officer of EOR. He spoke about the need for long-term practical outcomes on the land to achieve the project's goals. He said the cooperative work between the two companies on this project is a "perfect match" as CHI's PCSWMM modeling software is a powerful tool which can be successfully adapted for use in rural and agricultural areas.

Thomas Miller, Water Resources Engineer with EOR, said there are several existing models with different strengths and features but the new rural model will need to have features of several models to be effective and to give the best result. "We want it to be the most useful tool it can be," Miller said, whether it's used to identify the best management practices on a rural property or used by a municipality as they design storm sewers and culverts.

The Chief Executive Officer of CHI, Rob James, said the new RSWMM model will be designed so it can be used by many different staff people. "We want it to be user friendly," he said. "We don't want this to sit on a shelf."

People attending the workshop had more than 20 questions about how the model would work including questions about the data that would be needed to make the model work and how landowners and municipalities will be able to use the model.

The Rural Stormwater Management Model is a project of Healthy Lake Huron: Clean Water, Clean Beaches. The Healthy Lake Huron initiative has many partners including all levels of government; landowners and residents; community groups; and health, conservation, and environmental agencies. This Lake Huron Southeast Shores Initiative is working to protect and improve water quality in a largely rural area along the Lake Huron shoreline from Sarnia to Tobermory. For more information visit **healthylakehuron.ca**. The Healthy Lake Huron partnership identified the need for the rural stormwater project because no existing model had the detail needed to understand how water moves in a rural location during a storm event and how that stormwater can be managed well to limit impacts on water quality. A new computer model for rural areas may show which landowner projects, at what scale, and in what locations, can have the most benefit. New projects in priority areas could then do a better job of limiting the runoff that reaches watercourses.

The rural stormwater project is funded by a $700,000 grant from the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's Showcasing Water Innovation Program and in-kind contributions from other partners. Total investment is more than $900,000. For more information, visit **ruralstormwater.com**.

- 30 -

**CONTACT:** Alec Scott, Rural Stormwater Management Model Project Manager and Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) Water and Planning Manager, 519-235-2610 or 1-888-286-2610 or e-mail ascott@abca.on.ca