



GEORGIAN BAY
ASSOCIATION

Your Voice On The Bay

GBA UPDATE

News and Information from the Georgian Bay Association

GBA Presses Minister for Action on Aquaculture

GBA Freedom of Information Request Reveals Need for Curbs on Fish Farms to Protect Water Quality

By Bob Duncanson,
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Vol. 28 No. 1, Spring 2018

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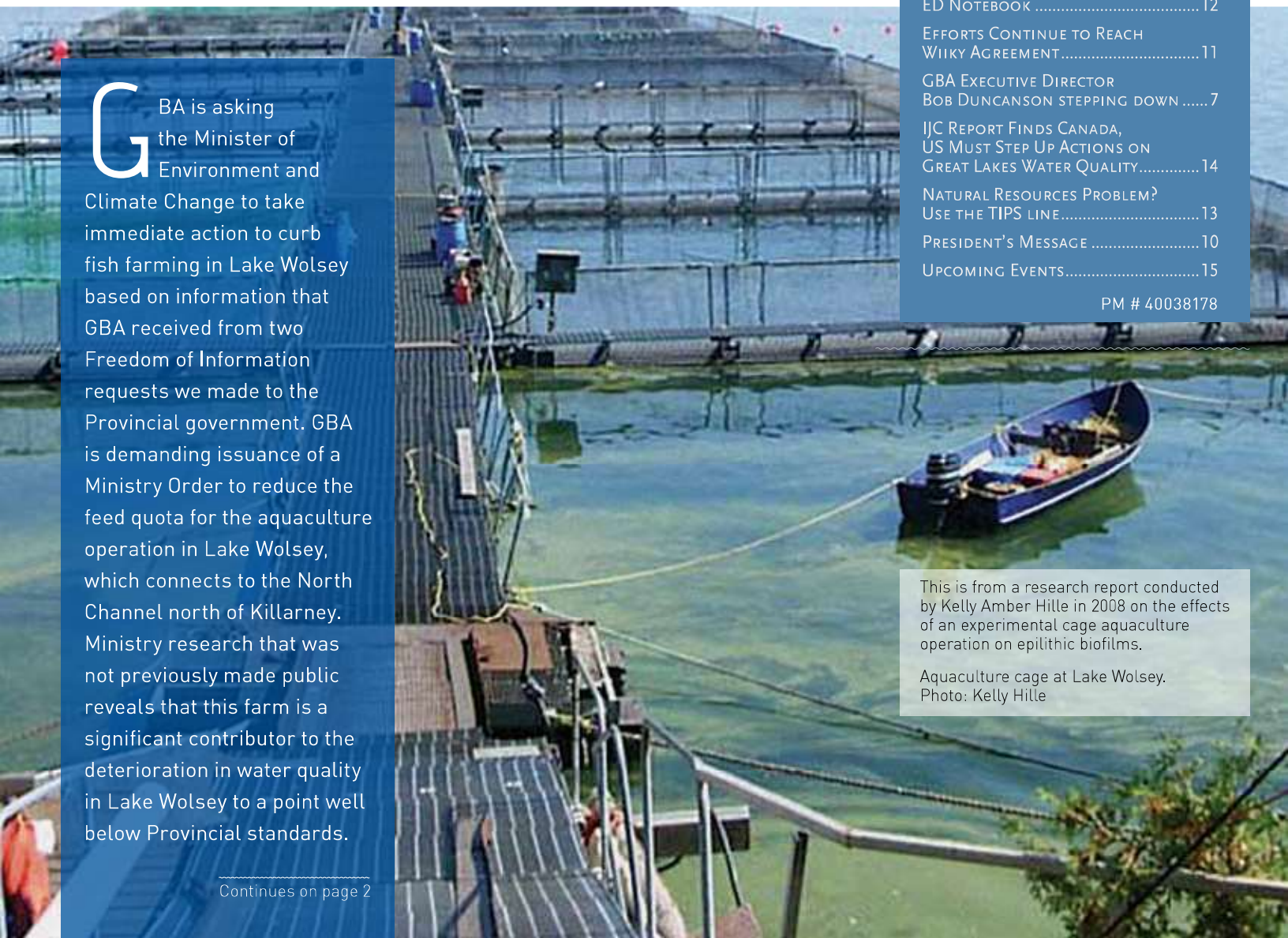
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PM # 40038178

GBA is asking the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to take immediate action to curb fish farming in Lake Wolsey based on information that GBA received from two Freedom of Information requests we made to the Provincial government. GBA is demanding issuance of a Ministry Order to reduce the feed quota for the aquaculture operation in Lake Wolsey, which connects to the North Channel north of Killarney. Ministry research that was not previously made public reveals that this farm is a significant contributor to the deterioration in water quality in Lake Wolsey to a point well below Provincial standards.

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This is from a research report conducted by Kelly Amber Hille in 2008 on the effects of an experimental cage aquaculture operation on epilithic biofilms.

Aquaculture cage at Lake Wolsey. Photo: Kelly Hille

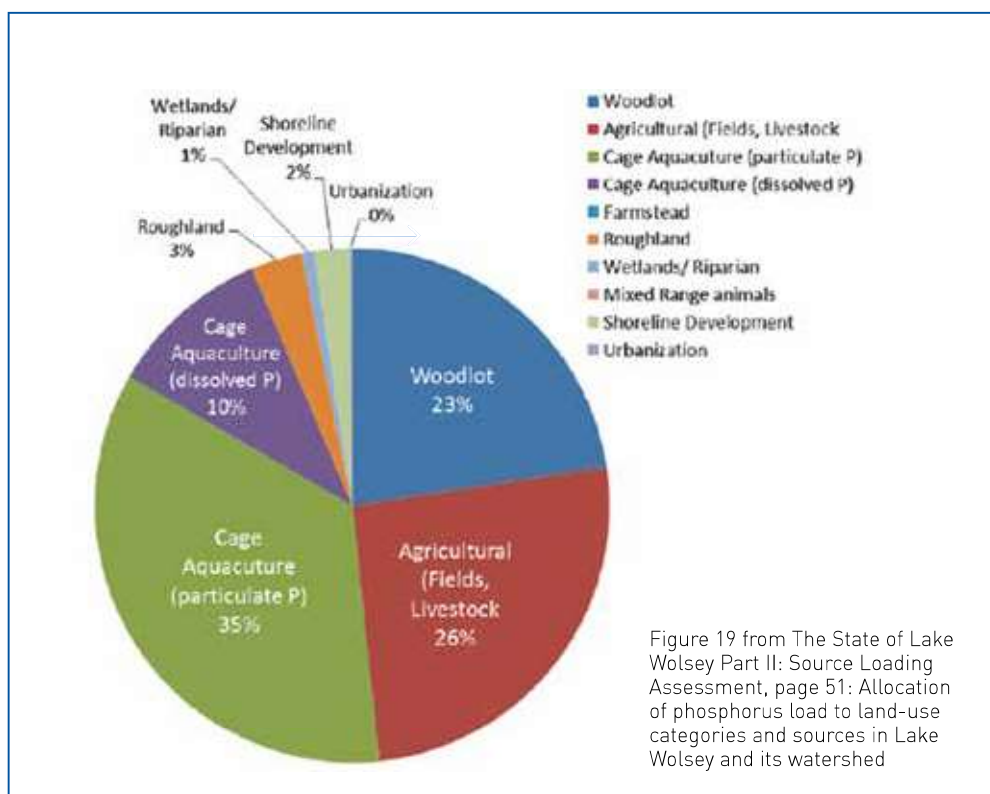
Background

Lake Wolsey, an embayment of the North Channel on the north side of Manitoulin Island, has been the site of a cage aquaculture operation (currently operated by Blue Goose) since the 1980s. Over the years there have been regular outbreaks of Blue Green Algae on Lake Wolsey (in 1999, 2006, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2016). Notably these outbreaks all occurred after the start of commercial fish farming in this Lake. GBA was aware that scientists from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) have done field research to determine the reasons for water degradation in Lake Wolsey. But the results of this research were never made public, so the GBA filed a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act.

Information Revealed

In February 2016 the MOECC issued two reports, *The State of Lake Wolsey Water Quality Dynamics* and *The State of Lake Wolsey Part II: Source Loading Assessment*. The bottom line of these reports is reflected in the following statements: "Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) are a regular occurrence (in Lake Wolsey) since 2006"; and "Lake Wolsey is identified as a Policy 2 site where the quality of water does not meet the Provincial Water Quality Objectives".

It is well accepted that phosphorous is a key nutrient that causes Harmful Algal Blooms and that HABs often release toxins such as cyanobacteria rendering the water unsafe and unusable by humans, native species and even pets. The MOECC reports conclude that 45% of the phosphorous input to Lake Wolsey comes from the aquaculture operation, as shown by this chart:



MOECC further states that, "(Lake Wolsey) shall not be degraded further and all practical measures shall be taken to upgrade water quality to the (Provincial) Objectives." Based on this, MOECC recommended that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR&F) reduce the biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) load on the Lake by 50% in 4 years. (BOD is the amount of oxygen it takes to degrade organic matter.) Reducing the feed quota that is issued by MNR&F to the Lake Wolsey fish farm is one way that this could be accomplished. Introducing technologies to capture and treat fish farm waste would be another way. MNR&F have resisted this and are contesting MOECC's science.

“ The MOECC reports conclude that 45% of the phosphorous input to Lake Wolsey comes from the aquaculture operation. ”

Given this impasse, GBA sent a letter to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, with a copy to the Minister of NR&F and the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, asking him to direct his staff to issue a Ministry Order to reduce the feed quota to the fish farm. We anticipate that the farm operator may challenge this Order (if issued), which is within their rights. If they do, the matter will be referred to Ontario's Environmental Review Tribunal. That process would delay action, but would at least result in an objective third party review of the science and a binding decision to break the impasse between the two Ontario Ministries.

MOECC's findings in Lake Wolsey back up GBA's longstanding contention that the nutrient loading from fish farms that use open net technology is environmentally unsustainable. GBA intends to form alliances with other environmental groups to pursue further action to curb this threat to water quality in Georgian Bay. Watch GBA's website www.georgianbay.ca for the latest news on this issue. ■