

Press Release from the Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association – July 18, 2006

Re: Manure Spill in the St. Joseph Watershed

The Board of the Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association has expressed a deep sense of concern about the recent spill of pig manure and its impact on the health of the stream and on Lake Huron. The Association, known locally as BSRA, is an umbrella group for more than 50 community associations on the lakeshore from Highway 83 to Bayfield.

“BSRA has been working hard for many years to monitor and to help improve water quality in the ravines and in Lake Huron,” said President John Gillespie. “Now we are profoundly disappointed to find that the management of manure can continue to have such a devastating effect on the St. Joseph watershed. It is very unfortunate that the incident was not reported to the authorities until it was too late to contain the spill.”

Gillespie went on to say that the BSRA Board fears that the pathogens from such spills will reside in the streambed and in the beaches for a long time. “It is not sufficient to say that natural processes like sunshine and dilution in the lake will automatically clean up the damage.”

BSRA continues to be concerned with the frequency of spills across Ontario that contribute to the deteriorating health of our lakes. “One of our biggest fears is that the pathogens today are more virulent than they have ever been in the past,” said Gillespie.

In cooperation with the Huron County Health Unit, the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority and the Municipality of Bluewater, BSRA has been collecting and publishing data on contamination in the beaches and the ravines of Bluewater. The results are available on the BSRA website (www.bsra.ca). BSRA understands the increasing frustration and anger of the public who increasingly experience beach closures that occur when contamination causes the lake to be unhealthy for swimming.

BSRA has been working recently to improve the dialogue between lakeshore residents and farmers through a program of “circle groups” sponsored by Guelph University. “We think we have achieved a new level of understanding between lakeshore and inland people,” said Gillespie. “I think the lakeshore people have come to appreciate the fact that the economics of farming today make it difficult for farmers to prosper as they should. And I think that the farm community is increasingly recognizing that the public at large, including their lakeshore neighbours, consider the quality of the water in Lake Huron, and in the ravines feeding it, to be critical - for our health, for our local economy, including tourism, and for our legacy to future generations.”

The Board of BSRA has emphasized the view that there are several sources of water contamination that need to be addressed. BSRA supports compulsory septic inspections. It also urges the provincial government to help with the funding necessary to clean up the Zurich lagoons. But in the aftermath of the pig manure spill in the St. Joseph watershed, it emphasizes the urgent need to monitor agricultural practices and to ensure that the regulations are followed and enforced.