

## ***The Identified Challenges to Implementing Stream and Wetland Restoration On Private Agricultural Lands in the Stoney Creek Watershed***

***Many rural landowners value active agricultural production above other uses of their land.*** There is a cultural heritage present in many rural communities which places great value on land that is in agricultural production, “working lands.” Even the loss of marginally productive land may be considered a loss to the community or the individual. Agricultural land is seen as orderly; whereas, unworked land can be seen as unkempt and undesirable. In addition, agricultural production has been present in the area for a long time, and as a result, many landowners may not see a need for any change. In addition, there is a natural resistance to change, which may increase the difficulty of convincing landowners to participate in restoration.

***Some rural landowners may not have an understanding of watershed or restoration processes and benefits.*** Many landowners do not know why conservation is needed. In addition, many do not understand the financial, recreational, agricultural, and environmental costs and benefits of private land conservation. There is also confusion about the permitted and excluded activities. The term “conservation easement” may have a negative connotation in some communities. Finally, many landowners are resistant to long-term commitments and contracts, especially perpetual agreements.

***The financial incentives to landowners may be inadequate.*** The restoration projects pursued during Phase IV will use the state property office procedure for appraising and valuing land, which may provide low monetary value to marginal or undevelopable land. Landowners have stated that the payment for land and the tax incentives are too low, and developers can sometimes offer them more for certain land. As a general rule, landowners do not have the cash available for cost share programs. There is a lack of proper public recognition for what the landowners are doing when enrolling land in conservation easements.

***There is confusion about the overlapping and competing government requirements and voluntary conservation programs.*** There are different government programs, each with its own rules to decipher, some of which compete for land, none of which are coordinated well with each other. Program staff are not always available to landowners and a general lack of trust of government can become an issue. The process of restoration can take many months to complete.

***Many rural landowners do not have farm or estate plans; and many local governments do not have detailed comprehensive land use plans or watershed protection ordinances.*** Local governments lack comprehensive land use plans that the community can use to help guide and steer development. Landowners often lack financial and farm plans that could help them and their families make informed decisions about the future of their land.

***Size requirements encourage larger projects, but coordinating with several landowners of adjacent or family property can be difficult and time consuming.*** Some programs require a minimum acreage before it is cost effective to include the parcel in a conservation easement. Compounding this is the fact that a certain parcel may be owned by more than one landowner, and larger projects often require participation by several adjacent property owners.