



Ausable Bayfield **WETLAND COVER**



Wetlands temporarily store water from rain and runoff and help to mitigate the risk of flooding during wet periods and slowly sustain flow during drier periods. Wetlands also filter water, sequester carbon, provide habitat for wildlife including many species at risk, and provide us with recreational opportunities such as canoeing, hunting, fishing, and birdwatching.

Prior to European settlement, wetland coverage for Southern Ontario was approximately 25% (Ducks Unlimited Canada 2010). Environment Canada (2013) suggests a major watershed have at least 10% wetland cover and each subwatershed within have at least 6% wetland cover.

Methods

Wetland cover data was extracted from the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) natural heritage layer using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) digital mapping. For the purposes of this report, wetlands were defined as land seasonally or permanently flooded by shallow water, as

well as land where the water table is close to the surface.

Results

Wetland cover is low at 2% to 3% of most subwatersheds (Map 4), and just 2% of the entire ABCA area. This value is substantially lower than the 6.6% required for a B grade or 11.5% required for an A grade.

Wetland cover was lowest (below 1%) in the Ausable Headwaters and Little Ausable subwatersheds.

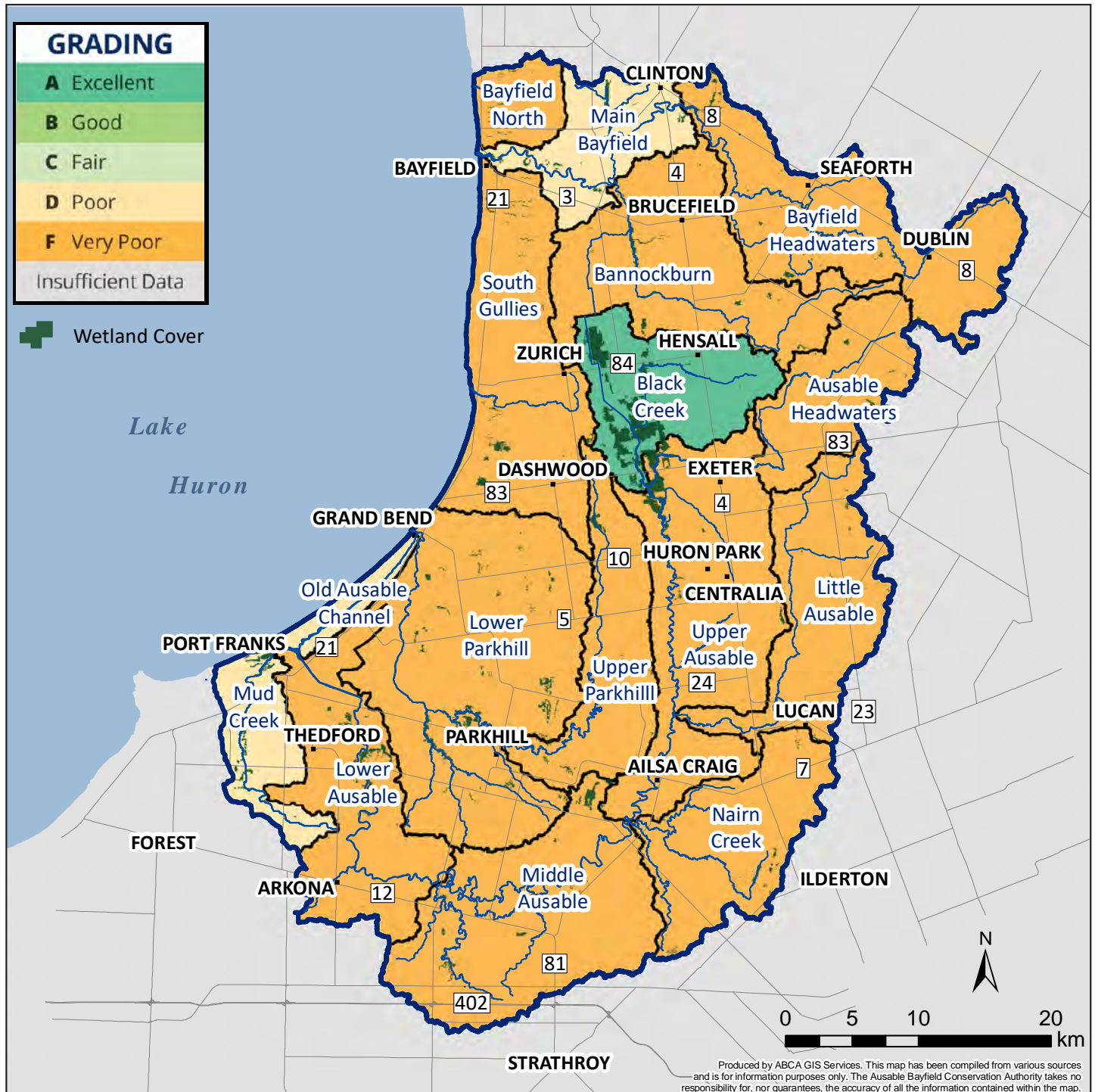
Wetland cover in most other subwatersheds ranged from 1% to 3%. The largest wetland in the ABCA area is the provincially significant Hay Swamp located in the Black Creek subwatershed. This subwatershed scored an A grade with wetland cover measuring 11.7%.

Relative to most subwatersheds, the Old Ausable Channel (OAC) also has a large percentage of wetland cover. However, it did not meet the definition used by the Ontario Wetland Evaluation system, resulting in a D grade.

Improving Wetland Cover

Wetlands are sensitive ecosystems, under pressure from development, pollution, and invasive species. Wetland cover is low in our area so existing wetlands need to be conserved and protected. Wetland restoration also benefits water quality and protects against flooding.

Most wetlands in our area are wet woodlands or swamps. Some people may see swamps as unproductive, but their ecological role must not be undervalued. Considering the critical role of wetlands for flood and erosion prevention, water quality and biodiversity, continued wetland loss is likely to have serious consequences.



Map 4: Grade distribution of wetland cover in the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority area.