

***Toronto's Outer Harbour  
A Report on Recreational Boating Uses***



**Toronto's Outer Harbour  
A Report on Recreational Boating Uses**

**Prepared by the Outer Harbour Sailing Federation  
*September, 2003***

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**Why this report:**

The Outer Harbour Sailing Federation (OHSF) which represents most of the organized recreational users of the Outer Harbour, has become concerned by the number of recent suggestions for the Outer Harbour water area that would either prevent some of the existing uses or adversely impact on them. The proposals vary from building a rowing course, to the storage of assembled pipes for the deep water cooling plant, to doubling the number of moorings in the Outer Harbour Marina, to the creation of new lagoons and further landfill, to increasing the number of dragon boats. These ideas have come from a variety of sources but they all suggest a lack of understanding of how the Outer Harbour is currently used and the finite capacity of this limited water area for recreational boating.

As planning for the waterfront takes place and as more people become aware of the Outer Harbour there will probably be more proposals that affect the water area and its users. The Outer Harbour Sailing Federation over the last few years has successfully informed the various agencies, stakeholders and the public about the existence of the various recreational boating clubs in the Outer Harbour and their need for a land base. This report is the beginning of a similar informational campaign about our collective water needs which are as vital as our need for a land base.

Over time the increased population in the GTA will increase the demand for existing types of water use and in addition new and emerging trends such as dragon boats, paddlers and motorized personal watercraft need a place for their activities. Planning is now required to accommodate the increased demand and these new uses elsewhere on the City's waterfront.

It is important that all planners recognize existing uses of the water as well as existing land use. The OHSF looks forward to working with planners as they consider water use study hand-in-hand with land use planning. We have limited spaces in the protected waters used primarily by dinghies and small recreational vessels, and safety of boaters is paramount to this report.

## What this report shows

This report illustrates:

- how and at what times the Outer Harbour waters are currently used for recreational boating;
- the diversity and increasing intensity of recreational boating use of Toronto's Outer Harbour;
- the uniqueness and suitability of Toronto's Outer Harbour for recreational boating use, particularly for small craft;
- that there is a capacity concern with use of the Outer Harbour on weekday evenings and weekends
- that new uses or major expansions of existing uses need to be examined in light of their impact on existing water users
- that losses have and are occurring in the area of water available for recreational boating in the Outer Harbour;
- a need to develop new areas on the Waterfront for small boat recreation
- the commitment of the nine clubs (see page 6) of the Outer Harbour Sailing Federation to work with the Toronto Port Authority and other stakeholders in the development of a water use policy.

## Next steps

As a result of this report, OHSF recommends the following:

1. The Toronto Port Authority undertake a water use planning process, similar to land use planning, for the Toronto Harbour in consultation with the existing users of the Outer Harbour.
2. Topics to be discussed should include:
  - Protection of the Outer Harbour for recreational boating use, with special consideration for non-motorized small boats
  - Development of a protocol to ensure viable access by all existing recreational users, including enforcement of existing speed regulations
  - Maintenance of the usable water area in the Outer Harbour
  - The capacity of the Outer Harbour to accept new and expanded uses including the possible expansion of the Outer Harbour Marina
  - Examining the appropriateness of proposed new water uses and land uses that impact on existing water users
  - Alternative locations that could be developed for new and additional small boat recreational purposes e.g. Ship Channel, Humber River stormwater diversion arm.

## **What is the Outer Harbour?**

The Outer Harbour is one of very few protected harbours suitable for small boat activity on the Canadian side of Lake Ontario between the Kingston and Hamilton harbours.

Just a few minutes drive from downtown Toronto, it is a body of sheltered water bordered on the north by Clarke Beach (a.k.a. Cherry Beach), on the south by the Tommy Thompson Park (a.k.a. Leslie Street Spit) and on the east by the base lands that attach the Spit to the Portlands. All of these lands are either parkland or are proposed in the new Secondary Plan for the Waterfront as future parkland. On the west the Outer Harbour is open to Lake Ontario; the shipping lane giving access to the Eastern Gap is generally considered its western edge.

It is important to recognize the Outer Harbour's uniqueness for recreational use; Toronto's Inner Harbour is now too congested with commercial and private powerboat traffic for intense use by smaller recreational boats.

Jurisdiction of the Outer Harbour is federal; regulatory issues are handled by Toronto's Harbour Master, through the Toronto Port Authority. The TPA publishes "Practices and Procedures respecting the Toronto Port Authority", pursuant to the Canada Marine Act and regulations.

## **Why is the Outer Harbour so suitable for recreational water use?**

Because it is a dead ended bay, there is a relative absence of larger vessels, which:

- Permits a full range of activities, including a safe training area for beginning sailors, windsurfers, rowers, and a limited number of dragon boats. The Harbour can also accommodate small boat regattas with 50 – 60 boats in each race.

Because it is enclosed and protected on three sides it:

- Provides shelter from strong winds (except westerly) and high waves, which is important for rowers. This natural condition generally ensures that windsurfers, beginner sailors and those in kids camps cannot be swept out into deeper, unprotected waters, or onto the rocks which constitute the base of the western end of the Spit. The shoreline of the Outer Harbour is primarily soft mud.

## **Why is the Outer Harbour so suitable for recreational water use, cont'd**

- Allows for proper observation and supervision of non-motorized boats in the area. Most clubs have well-developed self-rescue programs, including motorized club rescue boats.
- Provides good conditions for launching windsurfers and other small craft that can be launched from a beach
- Makes it easy to install ramps and docks for launching dinghies and rowing shells
- Provides protection for larger recreational craft seeking to escape weather.

## **Who uses the Outer Harbour for recreational boating?**

There are two core groups which use the Outer Harbour:

The first, are the nine non-profit clubs comprising the Outer Harbour Sailing Federation (OHSF):

- Aquatic Park Sailing Club           APSC
- Hanlan Boat Club (rowing)       HBC
- Outer Harbour Centreboard Club (sailing) OHCC
- Mooredale Sailing Club           MSC
- St. Jamestown Sailing Club       SJTSC
- Toronto Multi-Hull Cruising Club TMCC
- Toronto Windsurfing Club       TWC
- Water Rats Sailing Club           WRSC
- Westwood Sailing Club           WSC

Most clubs have been in place for 25 – 30 years.

The OHSF is unique in Canada; nowhere else has a community grown organically to provide low-cost, volunteer-based water recreation programs to a wide cross section of people without public funding. The clubs provide affordable entry into sailing, rowing and windsurfing. At a higher level, Olympic and international competitors have developed their skills, and continue to do so, by training on the waters of the Outer Harbour. For over thirty years the OHSF has provided membership fees at a fraction of the cost of a conventional yacht club. For example the Toronto Windsurfing Club membership is \$75, the Water Rats membership including dinghy storage is \$150, and Mooredale Sailing Club costs \$435 including unlimited use of the sailing boats and lessons. The clubs are open to all with many openings for new members every year.

## **Why is the Outer Harbour so suitable for recreational water use, cont'd**

Two of the nine OHSF clubs are comprised of larger sail boats (Aquatic Park Sailing Club with 100 moorings based on the Tommy Thompson Park) and multi-hull sailboats (Toronto Multi-Hull Club with 35 craft on swing moorings along the north shore of the Outer Harbour). Craft utilized by the seven other clubs include non-motorized small sailboats, rowing shells, and windsurfing boards. **All these craft are dependent on the sheltered waters of the Harbour, and represent the bulk of the users of the waters for recreational purposes**

Linked to the Federation is The Cabbagetown Youth Centre (CYC) which offers sail training programs for youth through the St. James Town and Westwood Sailing Clubs.

The second group represents craft (power and sail) docked at the Outer Harbour Marina. The Marina was built in 1988. Owned and operated by the Toronto Port Authority (TPA), the Marina is a 600 slip public marina used by larger sailboats and power boats. The Marina is located at the far east end of the Outer Harbour, protected by an arm extending out into the Harbour. A red/green buoyed channel is marked to the edge of the Marina's property; thereafter red buoys mark the shallow water along Tommy Thompson Park. The TPA has indicated the possibility of expanding the Marina to 1200 slips. Timelines for expansion are expected in a draft report by the end of September, 2003.

A relatively new and potentially significant use is dragon boating run by Great White North.

The third group is made up of other, non-organized recreational groups and commercial traffic. Smaller recreational groups include visiting power and sailboats; kayaks, canoes, and jet-skis. and private boats belonging to or visiting the cluster of yacht clubs and facilities found on the Toronto Islands and Toronto's Harbourfront. This traffic is expected to increase substantially due to the possibility of a fixed link bridge over the Western Gap to the airport. It is to be expected that many craft will choose not to navigate the waters around the Western Gap waiting for the bridge to open.

Commercial traffic in this group includes vessels traveling the western edge of the Outer Harbour in transit to the Inner Harbour. It includes lake freighters, cruise ships, tourist harbour cruise boats, as well as dredging barges and other working vessels. Under new legislation in 1999, the Toronto Port Authority has been building commercial shipping capacity into Toronto. Future plans may also include a fast ferry from Rochester to the Inner Harbour, mooring at Pier 52, on the edge of the Western Gap channel. All these activities will affect water use in the area."

## **What do the core groups do?**

The Outer Harbour Sailing Federation clubs provide access to:

- Dinghy sailing in cooperatively owned boats
- Dinghy and yacht sailing in privately owned-boats
- Windsurfing
- Rowing in club and privately owned boats.

For most of these uses the clubs provide:

- Learn to row/sail programmes
- Youth programmes
- Organized training
- Club racing
- Regattas
- Recreational sailing
- Organized social activities
- Comprehensive water safety training.

On-the-water recreational activity in the Outer Harbour generally starts in early April when floating docks are installed and for the most part ends in October when docks are removed from the water. However, some organized club programs run through to early November. Hanlan Boat Club (rowing) starts as soon as the ice is out and the “Frosties” (a small one-person sailboat) sail out of the Outer Harbour Centreboard Club for as long as the water is ice-free. When winter weather conditions permit, many individuals skate in the Outer Harbour.

The Outer Harbour Marina provides slips for motor boats and yachts that pass through the Outer Harbour on their way to cruising in Lake Ontario.

The Great White North provides training in dragon boats for competitive events held elsewhere on the waterfront.



## Weekly Events Chart:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
SJTSC Race training	SJTSC Learn to sail	SJTSC Social Sailing program	SJTSC Learn to sail	SJTSC Friday night race	SJTSC Regattas	SJTSC Harbour Masters series
WSC Learn to sail	WSC Social Sailing program	WSC Learn to sail	WSC Social Sailing program	WSC Friday night race	WSC Westwood Regatta	WSC Harbour Masters series
MSC Race training	MSC Learn to sail	MSC Social Sailing program	MSC Learn to sail	MSC Friday night race	MSC Regatta	MSC Harbour Masters series
Water Rats Social Sailing	Water Rats Laser races	Water Rats Social Sailing	Water Rats Laser races	Water Rats Social Sailing	Water Rats Club Regattas	Water Rats Laser races
OHCC Social Sailing	OHCC Mixed-fleet race	OHCC Social Sailing	OHCC Mixed-fleet race	OHCC Social Sailing	OHCC Social Sailing Regattas	OHCC Social Sailing Harbour Master series
HBC Learn to row. Recreatuional Race Training	HBC Learn to row. Recreatuional Race Training	HBC Learn to row. Recreatuional Race Training	HBC Learn to row. Recreatuional Race Training	HBC Learn to row. Recreatuional Race Training	HBC Learn to row. Recreatuional Race Training	HBC Learn to row. Recreatuional Race Training
Windsurfers Social Sailing	Windsurfers Social Sailing	Windsurfers Social Sailing Club Racing	Windsurfers Social Sailing	Windsurfers Social Sailing	Windsurfers Club Regatta	Windsurfers Social Sailing
APSC Social Sailing	APSC Social Sailing	APSC Social Sailing Race Starts	APSC Social Sailing	APSC Social Sailing	APSC Social Sailing	APSC Social Sailing
CYC Kids camp	CYC Kids camp	CYC Kids camp	CYC Kids camp	CYC Kids camp		
All Clubs Recreational sailing, windsurfing	All Clubs Recreational sailing, windsurfing	All Clubs Recreational sailing, windsurfing	All Clubs Recreational sailing, windsurfing	All Clubs Recreational sailing, windsurfing	All Clubs Recreational sailing, windsurfing	All Clubs Recreational sailing, windsurfing
OH Marina Recreational motor boating and sailing	OH Marina Recreational motor boating and sailing	OH Marina Recreational motor boating and sailing	OH Marina Recreational motor boating and sailing	OH Marina Recreational motor boating and sailing	OH Marina Heavy recreational motor boating and sailing	OH Marina Heavy recreational motor boating and sailing
Dragon boats Training	Dragon boats Training	Dragon boats Training	Dragon boats Training			

## **Capacity and Right of Way Issues**

All users of the Outer Harbour are, under existing legislation, required to be accountable for proper navigation and operation of their craft.

However, at peak times there are conflicts between users although to date they have been manageable. Conflicts are considered to be situations where boats have to take avoiding action to prevent damage to another boat or its occupants. There have been potentially serious incidents between large boats under power and much smaller boats.

Most of the traffic in the Outer Harbour comes from the OHSF clubs which actively cooperate to manage potential conflicts and to promote safety. Our experience suggests that, at peak times (fine summer weeknights and weekends), the Outer Harbour is at or near capacity for recreational boating. Any further expansion of water use could exacerbate conflict issues and will need careful planning.

There are two different types of issues with regard to capacity:

- safety issues, and
- the ability to carry on the sport in the way it is intended to be practiced.

Both of these issues are becoming important as the intensity of use of the Outer Harbour increases. Existing use patterns and potential conflicts are shown in this report.

Beginners are intimidated by obstacles in terms of other boats (particularly ones that have right of way but the beginner does not have the skill to avoid), and new uses such as the dragon boats adversely impact other established users unless they can make use of parts of the Outer Harbour that are not already well used at the same time of day or in the same weather conditions.

Capacity and Right of Way Issues. cont:

The easiest way to understand the capacity problem in the Outer Harbour is to use the analogy of a ski slope. The more skiers there are at a given moment on the slope the more potential for accidents. Ski racing will only work with recreational skiing if the recreational skiers keep out of the way of racers. Beginners will lose confidence if too many obstacles are put in their way. The addition of new uses such as tobogganing or snowmobiling on the slope may be possible as long as there are very few participants but clearly the ability of the slope to provide a good ski experience will be adversely affected if the numbers increase, unless the new uses occur at different times or in a different area.

The same is true of the Outer Harbour and boaters. Due to the increasing number of boats, the new uses which have been added over time, and the decreases in usable water area, (See page 24 and Map 6 on page 26) the Outer Harbour is beginning to have difficulty both in terms of safety and providing a reasonable experience of the various sports for beginners, casual recreational boaters and for club racing and regattas. More boaters (of all types) increase the potential for accidents, and races are adversely affected if there are many non-racing boats on the racecourse. Beginners are intimidated by obstacles in terms of other boats (particularly ones that have right of way but the beginner does not have the skill to avoid), and new uses such as the dragon boats adversely impact other established users unless they can make use of parts of the Outer Harbour that are not already well used at the same time of day or in the same weather conditions.

Another analogy is with a sports field that can accommodate soccer games, baseball games, training, Frisbee playing and kids programs only if they take place at different times or on different parts of the field and in many cases more than one use cannot take place at the same time.



## **How the Outer Harbour is used**

The following maps and text describe how the Outer Harbour is used by recreational boaters of the OHSF and Outer Harbour Marina, indicating the type of use and when the activity occurs. The information is based on a survey of all OHSF clubs.

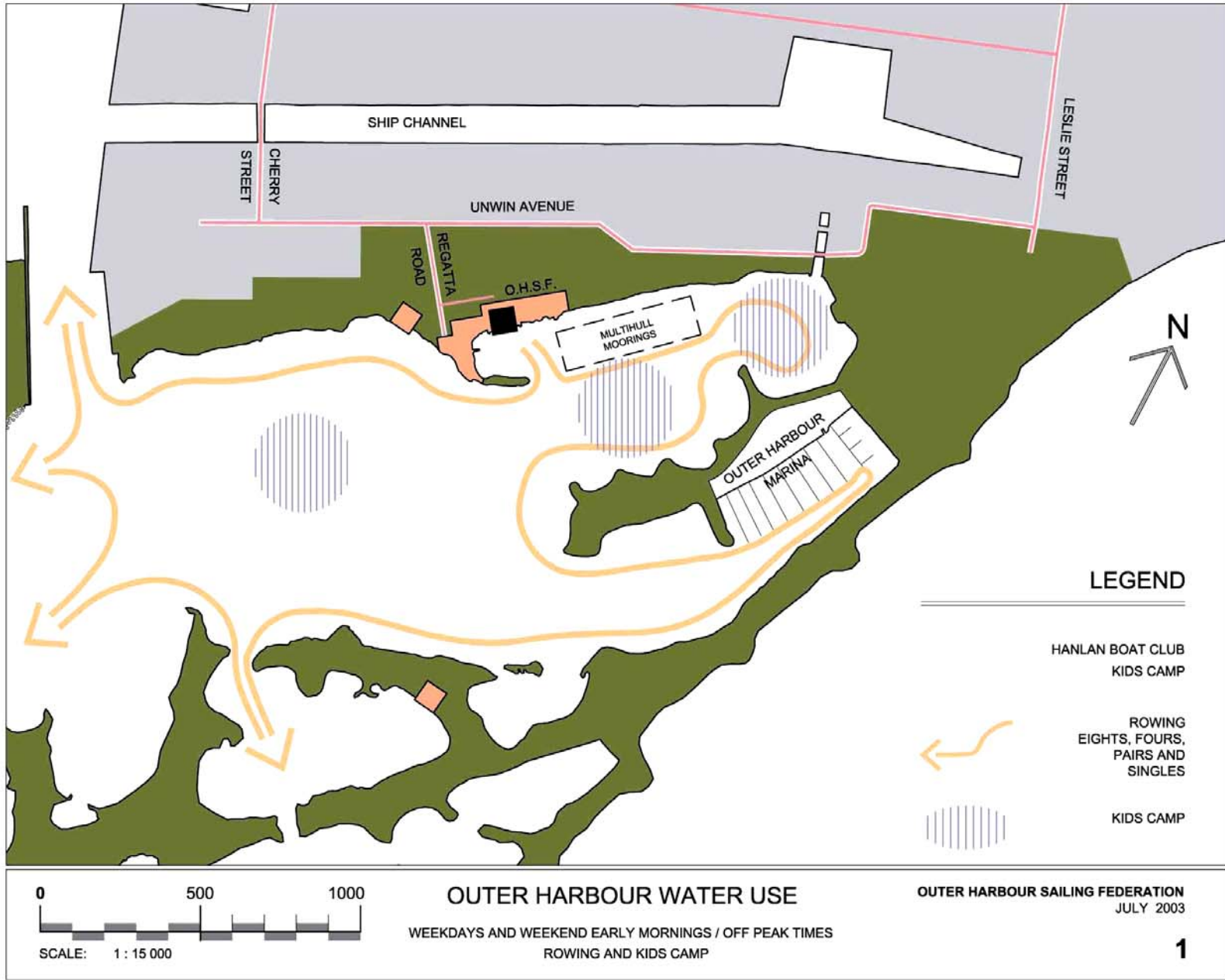
### **Map 1. Off Peak Times - Rowing and Kids Camp Weekday and Weekend Early Mornings**

Rowers need the calm wind and wave conditions most prevalent in the early morning when there is also a minimum of other activity. There is limited dragon boat activity at this time as well.

During different weather conditions, the rowers use different parts of the Outer Harbour: however they use all sections of the Outer Harbour at some time during the rowing season. Under certain conditions they also use the Ship Channel and Lake Ontario along the south shore of the Toronto Islands.

### **Kids Camps**

Weekday mornings and afternoons see light use of the water area by most clubs, but usage increases in July and August due to the Cabbagetown Youth Centre Sailing Camp.



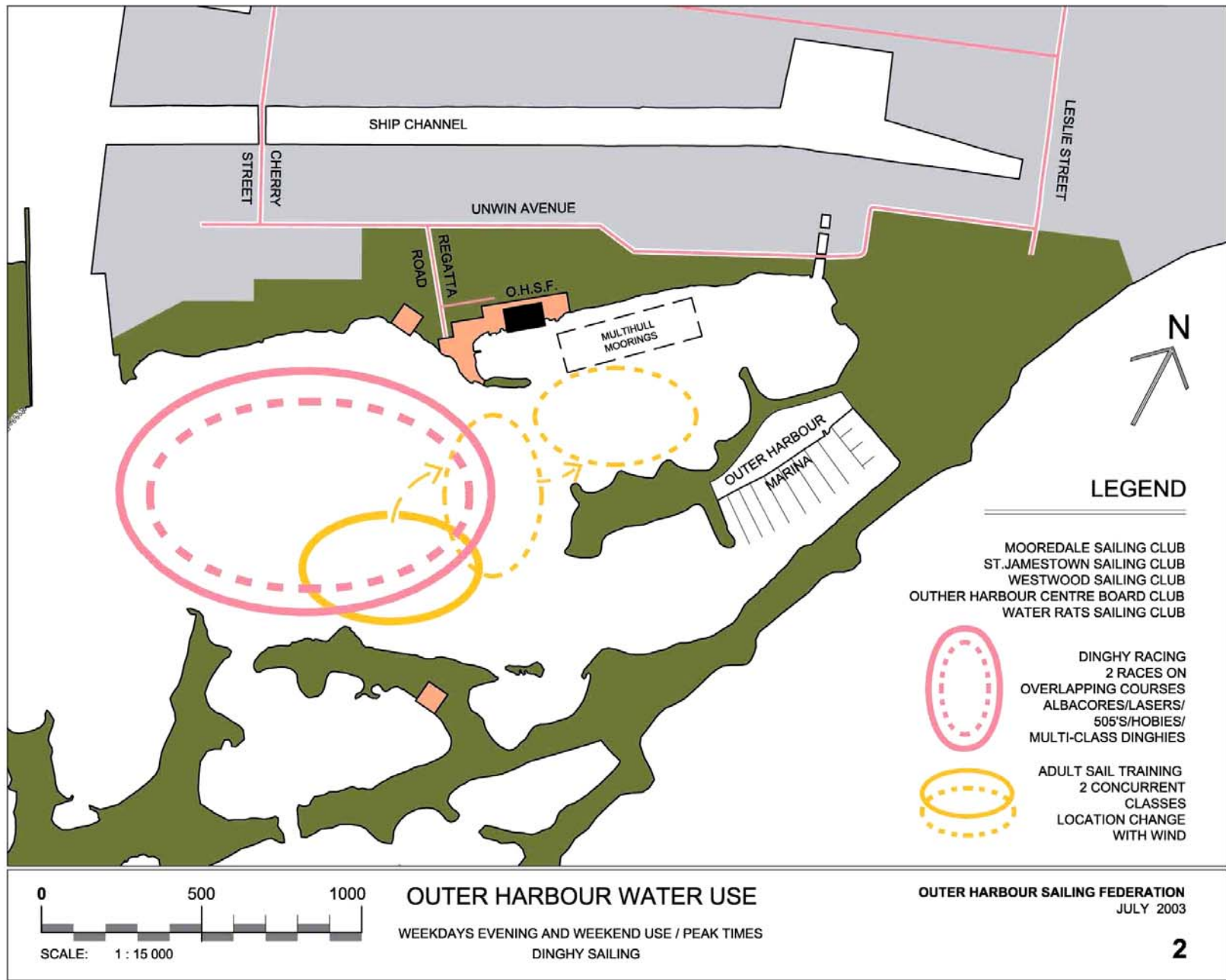
**Map 2. Peak Times Dinghy Sailing  
- Weekday Evenings and Weekends**

Dinghy Sailing on weekday evenings and weekends is the most intensive use of the Outer Harbour and includes training, racing, recreation and social programs.

An example of the number of different activities on the water is a typical Tuesday evening when there are normally:

- Two sail training programs run by different clubs on separate training courses (St Jamestown Sailing Club and Westwood Sailing Club)
- A series of five to six Laser (small dinghy) club races on one race course which will move if the wind conditions change (Water Rats Sailing Club)
- A club race for a mixed fleet of small dinghies on a separate race course (Outer Harbour Centre Board Club)
- A social sailing program which pairs up sailors of different abilities for practice and fun (Mooredale Sailing Club)
- Recreational windsurfing
- In addition there is recreational dinghy sailing, keelboat sailing and motor boating.
- In July there may also be an evening kids sailing camp taking place (Outer Harbour Centreboard Club)

Weekend dinghy use of the Outer Harbour is at least as intense as weekday evenings with all the same types of uses but Regattas take place as opposed to club racing.



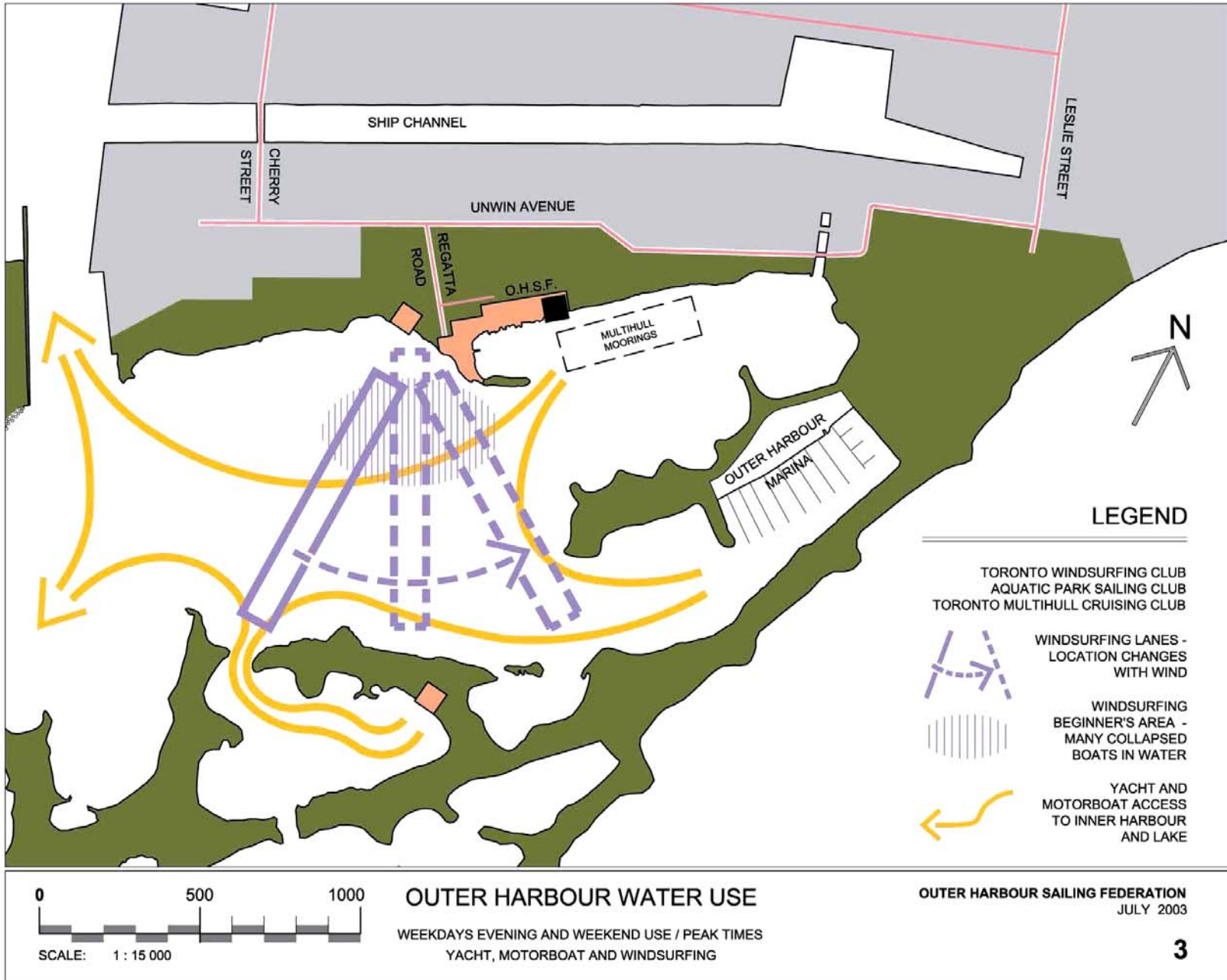
**Map 3. Peak Times - Yacht, Motorboat and Windsurfing  
Weekday Evenings and Weekends**

Windsurfing activity is highest when the winds are strong, and beginner sailors are less likely to be out. With changing wind direction the direction of the main windsurfing route across the Harbour shifts as do the layout of racecourses and training courses. In general the most intense activity is when the winds are high.

The windsurfing training is mainly confined to the water south of the windsurfers' club site. Windsurfing lessons are open to the public at weekends all day, which also sees the heaviest recreational windsurfing from the Toronto Windsurfing Club site. This training area frequently sees novice windsurfers who have fallen in with their sails resting flat on the water, that are obstacles to other boaters and sometimes difficult to see.

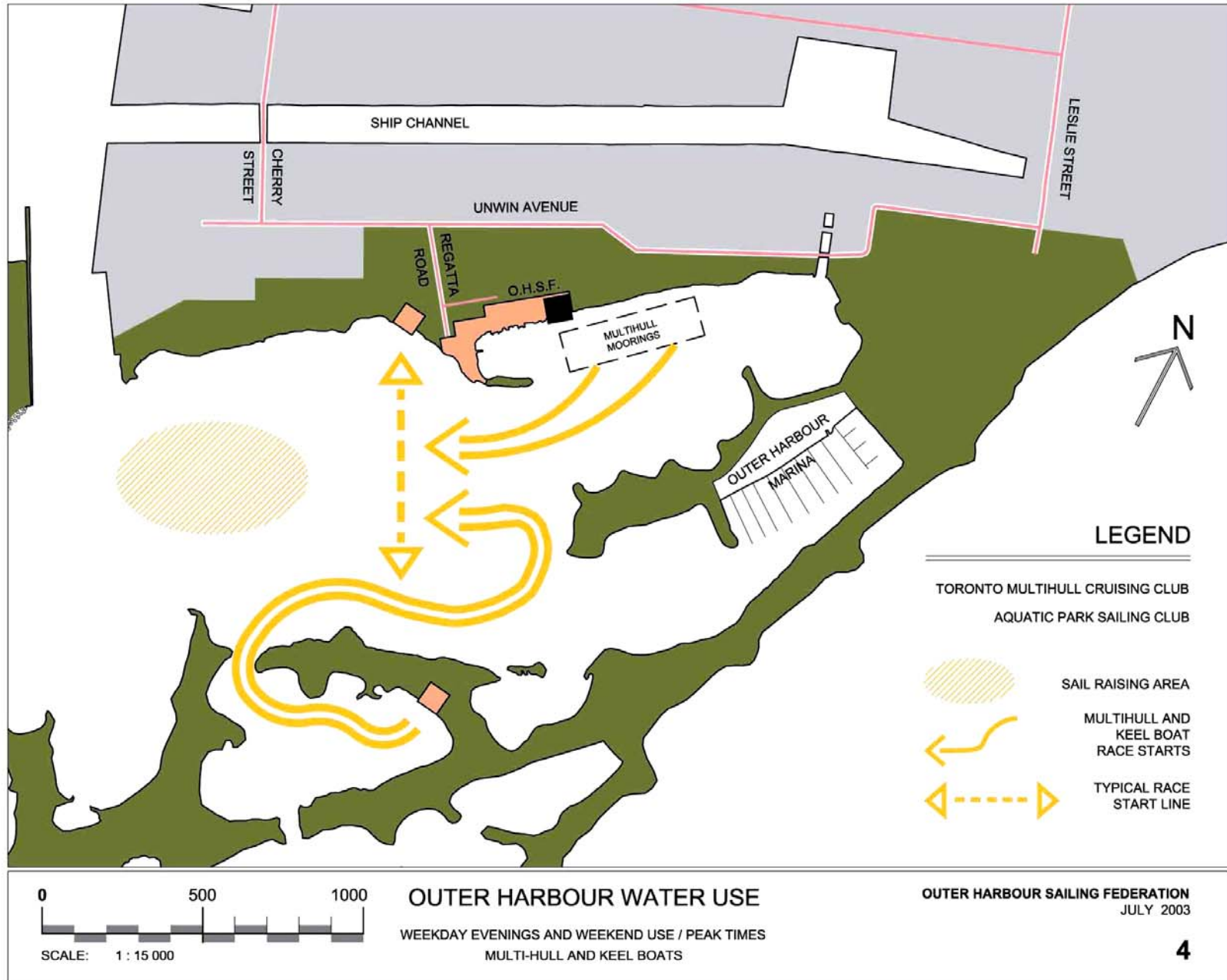
Map 3 also indicates routes taken by yachts from both the Outer Harbour Marina, Toronto Multihull Cruising Club, and the Aquatic Park Sailing Club on their way either to Lake Ontario or Toronto's Inner Harbour. On the weekend there are more larger boats going out to the lake for a half or full day of cruising. In addition, a number of motorboats from the Outer Harbour Marina track across the Outer Harbour.





**Map 4. Peak Times - Multihull and Keel Boats  
Weekday Evenings and Weekend Use**

Both multihull and keel boats from the Toronto Multihull Cruising Club and the Aquatic Park Sailing Club use the Outer Harbour for race starts as shown. In addition to this activity, boats from these two clubs are joined by sailboats from the Outer Harbour Marina in raising their sails in open water wherever they can find it.



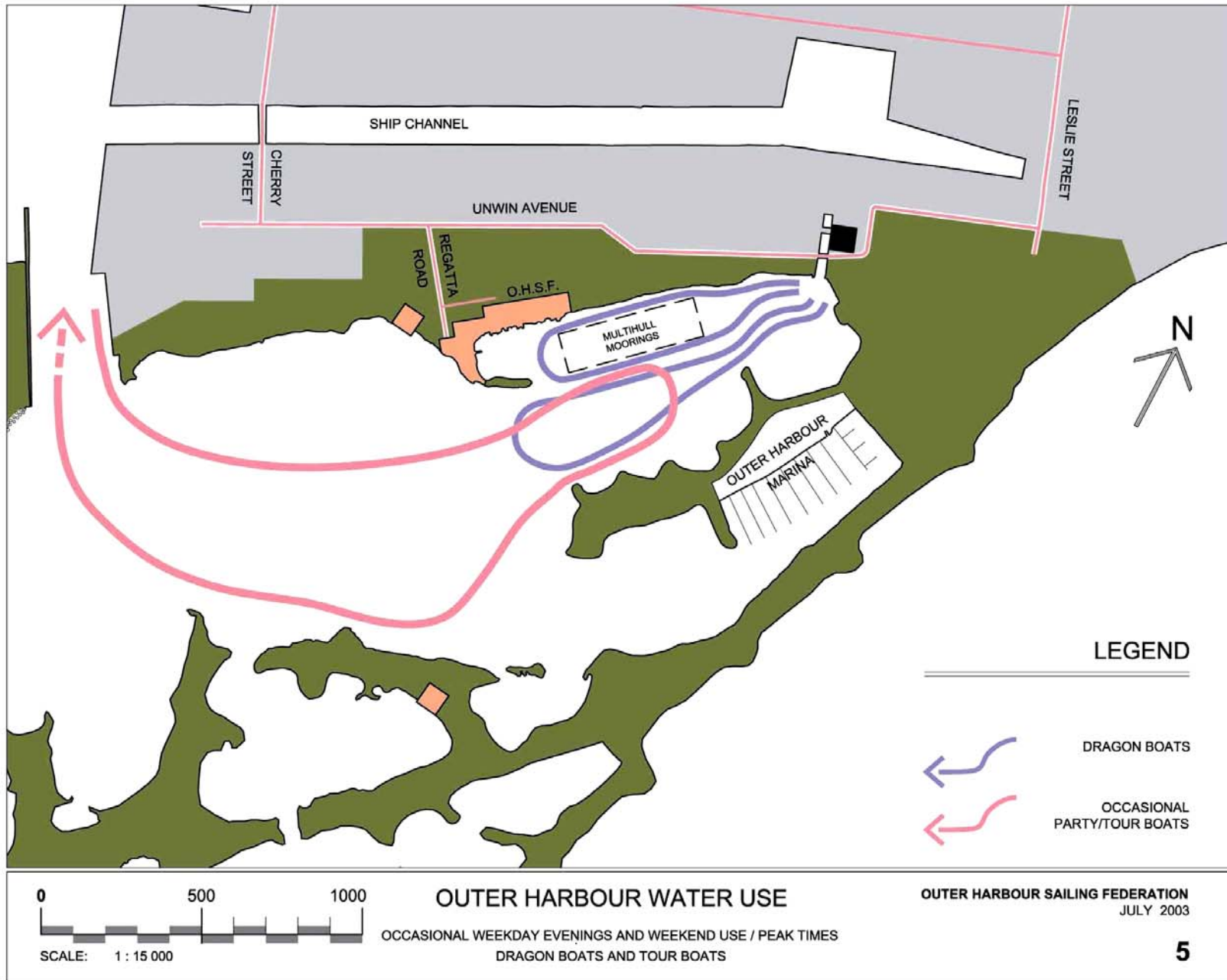
**Map 5. Peak Times - Dragon Boats and Tour Boats  
Weekday Evenings and Weekend Use**

Recent additions to the mix are Dragon boats, a few of which have started using the Outer Harbour for training, as well as tour and party boats.

Dragon boats, currently moored in the former Hearn Generating Station water channel at the east end of the Outer Harbour, paddle out from there and back. Because of the size and weight of the dragon boats, they usually hold to straight courses without any sharp turns and have difficulty in changing course. Last year and the beginning of this year there were some problems for more established users due to the courses that were followed including going straight through races, and near launching areas. However, since being approached by representatives of OHSF they have revised their courses to minimize conflicts and now use the less intensively used water closer to the Hearn.

Tour boats, seen infrequently in the Outer Harbour, appear to be unaware of sailboat training or racing programs. Sailors and windsurfers must give way to these large commercial vessels.





## **Conflicts**

The patterns of use illustrated on Maps 2, 3, 4 and 5 show overlapping use of the Outer Harbour on weekdays evenings and weekends. Inevitably, there are conflicts between different users, which within the nine OHSF clubs, have been well managed to date. The more serious conflicts occur between the OHSF club boats and other users of the Outer Harbour. The following conflicts are found:

### *Between windsurfers and other craft*

Beginner windsurfers are often down flat in the water and are difficult to see, causing a safety concern. As described, windsurfer and sail training and race courses overlap. Experienced windsurfers often travel at high speed across the harbour and may have to stop or change course frequently to avoid other boats.

### *Between all non-motorized boats, motorboats and motorized sailboats*

Some larger, motorized boats are hampered by weeds and shallow water, so their route out of the Harbour is often right through areas used for windsurfing and dinghy training and racing. Some of the motorized boats do not observe the speed limits or appear to know the right-of-way rules. The impact on smaller boats can be quite disruptive, both due to taking evasive action and from the impact of high speed wake.

### *Between dragon boats and other small boats.*

Dragon boats began to use the Outer Harbour in 2002. They are adding a new concern due to the fact that they go in a straight line across racing and training areas but must attempt to avoid other users, who, in turn, have their activities disrupted.

### *Between party or tour boats and smaller boats*

These boats currently are relatively infrequent during daylight hours when the Outer Harbour is very crowded. However, when they do come through the harbour they are very disruptive to all the other non-motorized boats since they are very large in comparison to most of the boats in the area. They also travel right across the windsurfing lanes and through race and training courses disrupting the main activities in the Outer Harbour. At present the low frequency of their visits has meant that the disruption they cause is relatively small, but if they become more frequent visitors to the area their impact on other uses will be substantial.

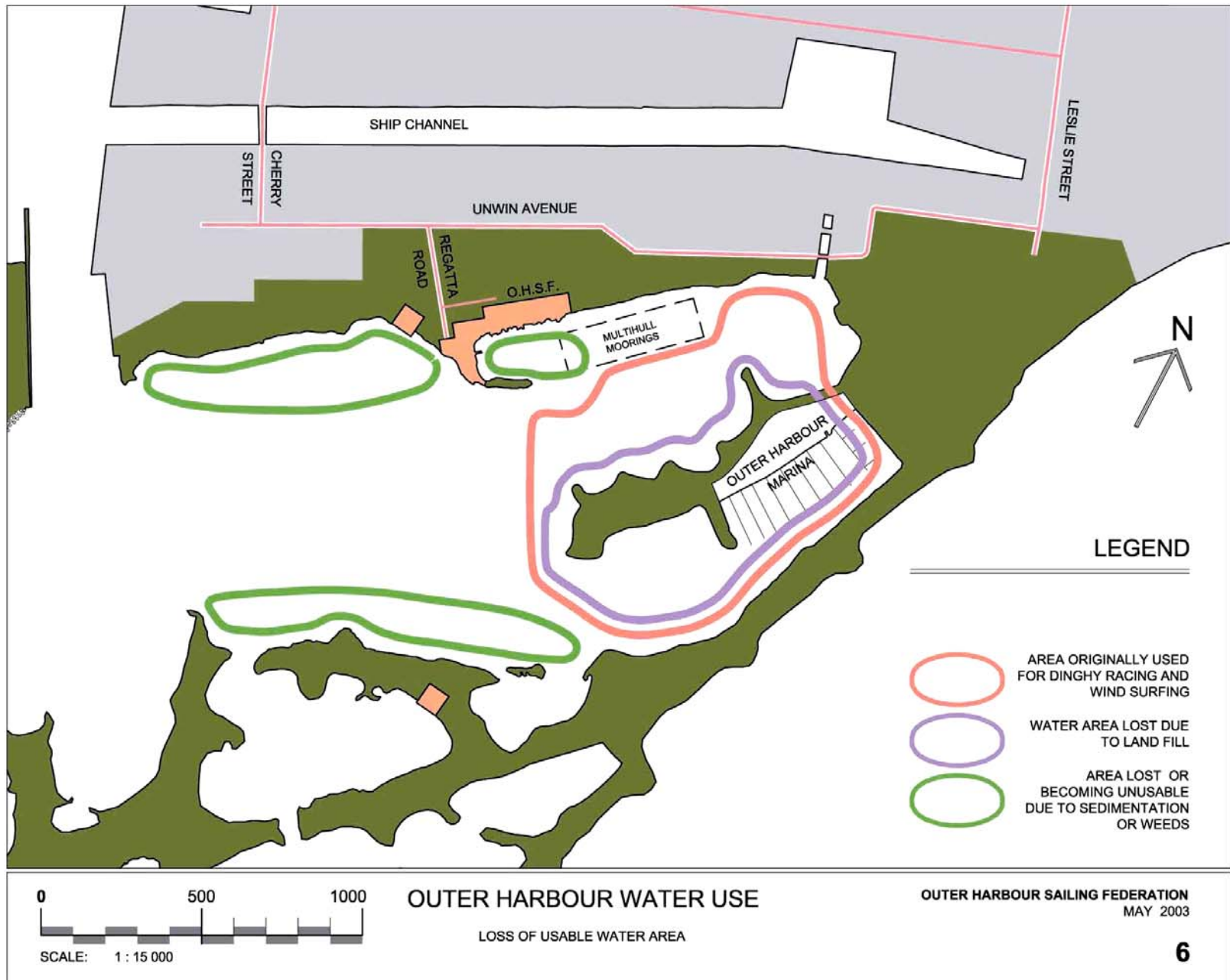
## **Map 6. Loss of Useable Water Area**

Map 6 indicates the areas of water lost to landfill (Outer Harbour Marina) and areas where gradual sedimentation and weed growth is reducing the useable water area.

Since the Outer Harbour began to have dinghy sailing and rowing clubs on the North Shore in the early 1970's there has been a continual reduction in the area useable by dinghy sailors and also, to a lesser extent, rowers. The building of the Outer Harbour Marina has substantially reduced the area available for small boat use.

Silting and weed growth are also reducing the area available for recreational boating in the Outer harbour Marina. Lake currents coming around the end of the Leslie Street Spit have led to considerable sand and other material being deposited in the Outer Harbour and a serious reduction in water depth over significant areas.

The shallower water encourages weed growth in these areas. In addition, the Toronto Port Authority no longer dredges in the Outer Harbour. For the recreational boaters in the Outer Harbour it is very important that there be no further reduction in the usable water area in this already very congested basin.



**OUTER HARBOUR WATER USE**

LOSS OF USABLE WATER AREA

OUTER HARBOUR SAILING FEDERATION  
MAY 2003

## ***Contacts – Outer Harbour Sailing Federation***

For additional Member Club information see our Web Site: [www.outerharbour.net](http://www.outerharbour.net)

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Al Osatchoff, Treasurer:      [treasurer@outerharbour.net](mailto:treasurer@outerharbour.net)

Aquatic Park Sailing Club: <http://www.aquaticpark.com>  
Hanlan Boat Club: <http://www.hanlanboatclub.com>  
Outer Harbour Centreboard Club: <http://www.sailohcc.ca>  
Mooredale Sailing Club: <http://www.runningtide.com/msc>  
St. Jamestown Sailing Club: <http://www.sailtoronto.com>  
Toronto Multi-Hull Cruising Club: <http://www.interlog.com/~jhallman>  
Toronto Windsurfing Club: <http://www.torontowindsurfingclub.com>  
Water Rats Sailing Club: <http://www.waterrats.ca>  
Westwood Sailing Club: <http://www.westwood.on.ca>

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