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The Panel on the Future of the Trent Severn Waterway:
185 King Street, Suite 100
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Brief to the Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway

Presented originally at Hastings, ON, August 15, 2007

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway. These comments are respectfully submitted on behalf of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, Inc. (FOCA).

FOCA is a Province-wide association of close to 600 community associations, with a collective membership of 51,000 private property owners, most located adjacent to Ontario's freshwater lakes and rivers. Our members contribute well over \$500 million in property taxes annually to rural Ontario communities. Our members are private landowners and the stewards of thousands of kilometers of ecologically important lands. Through our collaborations with government and non-government groups, including the Stewardship Network of Ontario for example, we collectively provide an important role on the landscape. Over 200 of our member associations and close to half of the property owners that we represent are directly or indirectly affected by the waterway, and its operations. During your consultations the Panel from a number of individual waterfront property groups, including some of the 50 FOCA members represented along the 41 "reservoir lakes", and 20 "flow-through" lakes in the Haliburton Sector of the Waterway.

The fact that many volunteer and community based volunteer groups have invested the time and their expertise to this process speaks to the importance of this undertaking.

Since 1963, the long-term interests of Ontario's freshwater legacy have been a staple of FOCA's Province-wide education and support programs for landowners, and a cornerstone in our regular and active participation in contributing to sound public policy.

FOCA has on-going and active interests with respect to supporting waterfront landowners and the community associations that represent them, and participates in the development of sound public policy as relates to land-use planning, water quantity and quality, the protection of biodiversity, the funding and provision of public services, and other important facets of life in Ontario.

We partner with Provincial and Federal agencies on programming related to shared interests, and have a long history of collaboration and involvement with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Ontario Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment and recently with Environment Canada.

Needless to say, we were encouraged by the universal support of Mr. Stanton's private members' bill 161 in the fall of 2006. We recognize the daunting task ahead for the Panel, to update the mandate of the waterway to productively address the expectations of the myriad stakeholders. Shoreline property owners expect that the Trent Waterway System will be managed to contribute to the quality of their individual and community interests, and also that the system will be managed to provide for the protection of the important natural values on and surrounding the system.

Fundamentally it is our interest as one of the major stakeholders involved, to:

- Ensure the on-going and future operations, oversight and planning for a thriving waterway be carried out in a manner which utilizes residential shoreline property owners as a resource and as a vested partner. While FOCA is a willing and useful conduit to this population, we strongly encourage enhanced, direct 2-way communication between TSW and local waterfront groups.

Some specific interests include:

- Improved communications between the Trent Severn Waterway and stakeholders, with content focused specifically on how the system is managed in practical terms as it affects landowners; we suggest the use of technology including a website that provides real-time and regularly updated information about: changing conditions, significant operations undertakings, and other important public notices.
- Regular public consultation on regional and local water management objectives and plans is an absolute must and is encouraged.

There is a real need to streamline and clarify the legal jurisdiction and responsibilities of Parks Canada relative to land use planning – the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, by way of example, delivered on their Fisheries Act obligations for many years by way of formal agreements with local authorities – a streamlined approach to private land

use matters along and adjacent to the Waterway could facilitate compliance and through this consolidation of authority would vest responsibility in a simplified process. One specific coordination opportunity exists with local fisheries managers (OMNR), to minimize the negative effects of water level changes with respect to fish spawning and other wetland/wildlife impacts, including breeding and staging for important local waterfowl.

Please note that any delegation of authority to other parties or level of government must only occur by way of mutual agreement between the parties, and under the condition there is an adequate provision of technical, and financial resources.

- In the short term, initiation of a meaningful infrastructure program to repair water control structures; the TSW must perform long-deferred maintenance on the dams and other infrastructure that create the conditions for safe and reasonable use of the region's waterways. We understand that here is a Public Works Canada survey in hand, which already identifies significant rehabilitation requirements on dams and other infrastructure across the system. Also requiring attention is the maintenance of nighttime lighting systems along the waterway, and many are currently not functional.
- Recognition by all stakeholders that climate change, differing precipitation patterns, extreme precipitation events and drought will particularly justify the improved integrity of the water control structures in the system, as well as the ability to adapt more quickly in terms of water quantity management.

With this in mind, we suggest that Environment Canada incorporate into future Parks Canada budgets, additional (adequate) investments in infrastructure, and human resources that would allow more proactive management of the water system, water levels, and in communications between the Waterway and stakeholders. Better communications will surely be the best route to the enhanced and shared appreciation for this resource, and buy-in from all involved.

In conclusion, FOCA and its members look forward to the continued opportunity to contribute to a thriving waterway, and we look forward to continued and improved dialogue between Parks Canada, Trent Severn Waterway staff and management, and the residential community so heavily reliant on this important community asset.

Thank you for your attention to our input to this important matter.



Terry Rees