

BACKGROUND

Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway

Since 1833, the dream and reality of a navigable waterway from Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay has been part of the fabric of Central Ontario. The Trent-Severn Waterway was constructed between 1833 and 1920 to facilitate navigation between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay. Designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1929, the waterway is a complex array of 44 locks including a marine railway and approximately 160 dams and water control structures. Forty-one reservoir lakes in the Haliburton Highlands provide supplementary water to ensure that navigation levels are maintained.

After nearly 180 years, the original waterway mandate of navigation is now challenged to meet the widely varying needs and expectations of modern stakeholders. As a national historic site, the waterway must be managed for the protection and presentation of nationally significant cultural resources. Government agencies and environmental organizations expect the system will be managed to provide for the protection of natural values including species at risk, while business organizations and individual business owners strive for contributions to the economic well-being of the area. Municipalities, cottagers and shoreline owners expect it to contribute to the quality of their lifestyles and recreational interests, while ensuring water supplies of adequate quality and quantity.

Many other factors contribute to the complexity of managing the Waterway into the future. The physical infrastructure that makes up the system is deteriorating due to age. With more than 1,500 assets, the replacement value is in excess of \$1.5 billion. Essential maintenance and recapitalization over the next 15-20 years could require hundreds of millions of dollars. In addition, the jurisdictional, governance and regulatory framework of the waterway may not be well suited to its emerging roles, with the range of responsibilities far exceeding the mandate of the Parks Canada Agency, which currently manages the waterway.

Recognizing a need to address how Parks Canada will manage the waterway in the future to achieve its mandate and how the waterway can contribute to the broader goals and expectations of Canadians, Mr. Bruce Stanton, Member of Parliament for Simcoe North, introduced Private Members Motion 161 in the House of Commons. The focus of Motion 161 is to engage an independent expert panel in an evaluation to determine the future and potential of the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada. The House passed the Motion unanimously on October 18, 2006.

The Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway will undertake a major consultation program to define a future vision for the Waterway – a vision that will ensure all contributions it can make to Canada and Ontario are realized. The Panel will examine how best to engage a diverse array of government and stakeholder interests in the management of the Waterway. A full report of their findings and recommendations will be submitted to the Honourable John Baird, Minister of the Environment and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, in December 2007.

The Trent-Severn is a remarkable piece of Canadian history and public infrastructure. For 200 years, its designed purpose of supporting commercial and recreational boating and community economic development continues. Through the years, it has evolved into an essential provider of outdoor recreational opportunities; a source of clean, renewable energy and an important protector of the natural and cultural heritage of the region.