

Chapter 1

Introduction

On 12 May 2006, the Member of Parliament for Simcoe North introduced Private Members Motion 161 in Parliament.

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should consider the advisability of evaluating the future of the historic Trent-Severn Waterway, one of Parks Canada's National Historic Sites, and its potential to become: (a) a premier recreational asset; (b) a world-class destination for recreational boaters; (c) a greater source of clean, renewable electrical power; (d) a facilitator of economic opportunity and renewal in the communities along its 386 km length; and (e) a model of environmental sustainability.

In the ensuing debates, all parties spoke in support of the motion recognizing, as Mr. Stanton had, that the Trent-Severn Waterway was one of Canada's jewels with the extraordinary potential to serve Canadians and the people of Ontario in many ways. The Motion passed unanimously on October 18, 2006.

Almost a year to the day after Mr. Stanton introduced his motion, the Honourable John Baird, Minister of the Environment and the minister responsible for Parks Canada, appointed us as an independent six-member panel to carry out the evaluation: Douglas Downey (chair), Sandra Barrett, Thomas Symons, Dean Peters, Greg Bishop and Doug Rollins.

Minister Baird reminded us that "the Trent-Severn Waterway has become much more than locks and canals to move boats." He spoke of nearly 50 communities along its shores and the hundreds of thousands of people who rely on it for drinking water, flood control, tourism and recreation. It was, he said, a showcase of human history and an important contributor to the protection of wildlife, wetlands and conservation areas.

Mr. Stanton's motion and the Minister's announcement were recognition of both opportunity and challenge. Since 1833, the dream and reality of a navigable waterway from Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay have been part of the fabric of Ontario. Constructed between 1833 and 1920, the waterway was designated to be of "national importance" in 1929 by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The waterway is an engineering marvel that has 44 locks including the world's tallest hydraulic lift lock, 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 expanded needs, numbers and expectations of modern stakeholders. It is, geographically, Canada's largest national historic site with more physical assets than any other. It serves a regional population numbering many millions and supports the economies of more than 100 communities throughout its watersheds.

As a National Historic Site, the waterway must be managed for the protection and presentation of nationally significant cultural resources. Beyond that, however, government agencies and environmental organizations expect that the system will be managed to provide for the protection of natural values including species at risk and the integrity of the shoreline.

Cottagers, shoreline owners and visitors expect that it will be managed such that it contributes to the quality of their lifestyles and recreational interests. Municipalities and individuals throughout the watershed expect the

system to be managed to ensure water supplies of adequate quality and quantity. Governments, business organizations and individual business owners expect the system to contribute to economic well-being. There are many other interests.

The physical infrastructure that makes up the system is deteriorating due to age. The waterway has more than 1,500 assets with a replacement value in excess of \$1.4 billion. It is estimated that essential maintenance and recapitalization over the next 15-20 years will require hundreds of millions of dollars.

The jurisdictional, governance and regulatory framework of the waterway does not appear to be well suited to its emerging roles or indeed to its current needs. The range of responsibilities far exceeds the mandate of Parks Canada, the Agency that manages the waterway. The Historic Canals Regulations are outdated and largely unenforceable as Parks Canada's primary management tool. There is also uncertainty about the legal and jurisdictional responsibilities of Parks Canada compared to those of the province and adjoining municipalities, particularly in land management activities.

We were asked to recommend a new vision for the waterway that would ensure its long-term effectiveness and sustainability and optimize the full range of contributions that it makes to Canada and Ontario. (Please see Appendix G for the Panel Terms of Reference.)

Specifically, we were asked to look at:

- How to protect and present the waterway's cultural heritage;
- Ways of assuring the future of the waterway's natural environment;
- How the waterway can contribute to the present and future outdoor recreational needs of Canadians and particularly the growing and diverse population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe;
- A water management regime that is seen to meet the demands and expectations of a diverse array of stakeholders and needs;
- A framework for jurisdictional and inter-agency coordination and governance along the waterway corridor;
- How the waterway can contribute to economically sustainable communities, including the role of renewable energy; and,
- A sustainable funding framework.

Over eight months, we listened to people in public forums to hear their perspectives and understand their vision for the future of the waterway. We held 30 public sessions in 16 different communities throughout the watershed. Nearly 225 formal submissions were received and more than 1,100 individuals attended these sessions and 85 per cent of them participated in open discussions. We received nearly 225 formal submissions at the meetings, by mail and through our website.

The submissions came from municipal governments, conservation authorities, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, property owner associations, non-government organizations, businesses, historical and cultural organizations and individuals.

As part of the process, we also talked with First Nations and met with industry associations related to camping, power generation, resorts and marinas. Meetings were also held with Parks Canada staff including senior officials, a representative sample of waterway staff and staff at the Rideau Canal.

The panel also drew information from seven original discussion papers and three studies that were conducted to augment this process. In addition, panel staff reviewed and drew liberally from the research and initiatives of others. A study on other waterway models was supplemented by direct discussions with canal experts from Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom. The Panel Project Manager also visited a number of sites in western England and Wales to observe reconstruction of canals and waterfronts being undertaken there in the context of larger community regeneration programs.

Once the Panel developed some general directions about where the recommendations were headed, it went back and spoke again to some key stakeholder groups to get feedback and test its ideas. These stakeholders included conservation authorities, municipalities that had already provided input, First Nations and Parks Canada.