

# Chapter 2

## What We Learned

When the Minister of the Environment appointed us in May of 2007, our first challenge was to learn more about the waterway and how it operates. Most of us had some understanding of the waterway and the services it provides, but we rapidly realized that the waterway is an extraordinarily complex operation.

One of our priorities was to get a sense of the Trent-Severn from the water. We spent several days on the water looking at different sections. We visited the section between Campbellford and Hastings in the company of the crew and passengers of the Kawartha Voyageur – a ship that provides some 40 or so passengers with six-day cruises on both the Trent-Severn and the Rideau.

We visited the Gamebridge and Kirkfield section on a Parks Canada workboat. This part of the waterway has been designated of national historic significance because, unlike many other parts of the waterway, its historic infrastructure is largely intact. We were able to spend a day with Parks Canada staff looking at the scenically stunning section of the waterway from Port Severn to Swift Rapids.

John Mackey, a Port Perry marina operator, was kind enough to provide us an opportunity to see part of Lake Scugog on one of his boats. This enabled us to see first-hand issues with aquatic vegetation and shoreline development. During the public consultation process we visited many other parts of the waterway and its watersheds. Each area was very different from the others, with its own unique history, scenery and environment.

### The Public Consultation

We also talked to more than a thousand people in public forums to hear their perspectives and understand their vision for the future of the waterway.

Throughout the process, everything we heard and received was posted on our internet site as quickly as possible, so that even if people couldn't attend a session, they could find out what had been presented, and send in their own comments.

At the beginning we wondered if anyone would care enough about this process to get involved. We needn't have worried. From the very first meeting in Bobcaygeon to the last meeting in Lakefield, we saw first-hand the tremendous passion that people have for their own part of the waterway. In fact, the Lakefield session had to be extended, both in hours and number of days, to accommodate the large number of presenters.

People were eager to share their feelings about the waterway. We heard stories that had been passed down through family history. Childhood memories were related. Many expressed the hope that their grandchildren would be able to enjoy the waterway in the same way they had experienced.

The comments we received covered a wide spectrum and did not always reflect a consensus. Divergent views were often expressed on the same topics. But while the words and specific concerns were often different, all presenters did agree on one thing: The waterway is important, and it profoundly affects the lives of those who live, work and play nearby.

And over time a larger theme began to emerge: ***It's all about the water***. Repeatedly, we heard concerns about deterioration of water quality, preservation of natural beauty, its importance as a home for fish and wildlife, its importance for recreation, competing demands for its use, how to stop it being wasted, and how to use it responsibly as a source of green power.

## **An Overview of Public Comments**

At the public forums, we heard comments on all aspects of the Trent-Severn Waterway and its operations. While the comments were diverse and wide-ranging, they fell into three general categories: the state of the waterway; funding for the waterway; and governance of the waterway.

### **State of the Waterway**

We learned that the public believes that the Trent-Severn Waterway is really two large watersheds, that over nearly two centuries, have been substantially modified by engineering works and now include a heritage and a recreational waterway.

Here are some of the most frequently expressed comments we received on the state of the waterway.

- Water quality is deteriorating and the future environmental sustainability of the lakes and rivers that make up the system is at risk;
- Falling water levels, increasing weed growth, threats to fish from invasive species and disappearance of wetlands are all being noted by waterway users;
- Water management is problematic, including inequities in allocation and threats to future availability, particularly in the light of climate change;
- The condition of locks and dams is deteriorating, waterway staffing has been reduced and there is general underfunding of the waterway;
- Development along the waterway is not well controlled and there is a need for more rigorous planning controls and enforcement;
- Public safety, public health, environmental health and the economic health of communities must be protected; and,
- The values that have been drawing people to the waterway for many years must be preserved.

### **Funding of the Waterway**

Although there were many and sometimes conflicting suggestions about how the Trent-Severn Waterway should be financed, one message repeatedly came through loud and clear – taxpayers already pay enough and someone else should provide the funds.

Here are some of the comments we received about funding of the waterway.

- The waterway is a federal responsibility, so the funding should be federal;
- The gas tax from the fuel sold at marinas along the waterway should be dedicated to supporting the system;
- An annual boat registration fee, similar to that applied in many American states, could contribute to maintenance of the waterway;
- Revenue from existing and new waterpower facilities could generate funds for the waterway;
- Lock fees should be eliminated to increase tourism in waterway communities;

- Lock users believe that all users of the system, and not just those who use the locks and pay lock and mooring fees, should contribute to the financial sustainability of the waterway;
- Shoreline owners believe that they are already contributing to the waterway through high municipal taxes on shoreline properties and that governments are not protecting their interests in and enjoyment of the water; and,
- Waterway communities are concerned that the costs of operating the waterway not be downloaded.

## **Governance of the Waterway**

At the sessions we heard repeatedly about the high level of frustration with the performance of governments in managing the Trent-Severn system. The 2007 summer carp die-off in the Kawartha Lakes focused both the public's and the media's attention on the lack of coordination among different levels of government and the various ministries and agencies within governments. Presenters expressed concern about unnecessary duplication and confusion among government agencies, and an absence of accountability.

Here are some of the comments we heard about governance of the waterway.

- Government agencies don't communicate or work together well, or in some cases, at all;
- Government agencies are not communicating with the public;
- Property owners are frustrated by a lack of communication about the reasons for and timing of changes in water levels – most understand that their property is on a reservoir system, but would find it easier to adjust to changes if they were given advance warning;
- A "one-window" approach for the waterway would make it easier for the public to get in touch with the right people;
- A new governing body for the waterway, one that is free from government red tape and can "just get things done", should be formed; and,
- Many responsibilities should be shifted to the province, or at the very least waterway and provincial staff need to work more closely with each other.

By the time we heard the final presentation and received the last submission, it was abundantly clear that no matter what the issues, activities or experiences associated with the waterway, the system is vitally important. It is important to the people who live in the region, to the communities along its shores, to the wildlife and fish that rely on its wetlands and natural areas to survive, as a source of clean water for a large portion of southern Ontario, and as a site of significant historical importance for all Canadians.

## **Research Review Results**

Our review of three commissioned studies as well as other existing research on the Trent-Severn Waterway added to our understanding of the issues at hand.

The *Study of the Sustainable Economic Contributions to Communities along the Waterway*<sup>1</sup> examined the nature and magnitude of the contributions the waterway makes to the economic vitality of the communities along its route and throughout its watersheds.

---

<sup>1</sup> TCI Management Consultants & EDP Consulting. 2007. *Trent Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada: Study of its Sustainable Economic Contributions to Communities Along the Waterway.*

This study produced some findings that changed our perceptions of the waterway economy. It identified management of the water levels and flows as the single biggest contributor to economic value associated with the waterway corridor and the reservoir lakes. This is measured by how much revenue is generated by property taxes and spending by seasonal and permanent residents.

This study also identified recreational fishing as another surprisingly large economic contributor. During the public consultation, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and representatives of fishing organizations confirmed the importance of the Trent-Severn Waterway as the most important recreational fishing resource in the province.

The *Review of Other Models of Waterway, Waterway Corridor Management and Financing*<sup>2</sup> study looked at operation of the Okeechobee Waterway in Florida, the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, the New York State Canal System, Waterways Ireland, British Waterways and the Gota Canal in Sweden.

This study found that, in general, waterway mandates are broad, vary widely, and extend beyond the water. Most are dedicated organizations with a relatively high degree of autonomy, funded mainly through government. None are expected to generate a profit, but rather to provide economic, social and environmental benefits to a wide array of publics and governments. Intergovernmental cooperation and partnerships are common, and most agencies practice open, inclusive governance that includes stakeholder engagement.

A *Study of the Past, Present and Future of Water Management on the Trent-Severn Waterway*<sup>3</sup> suggested that management of water levels and flows should be governed by an independent agency that includes representatives of Canada, Ontario, First Nations and conservation authorities. This agency should include a formal stakeholder advisory committee, have access to government technical expertise, and be adequately funded by the federal and provincial governments.

The study recommended that the waterway needs clear goals and objectives set out in an integrated management plan developed through an open consultation process and that partnerships could help build data and models. Above all, the study emphasized the importance of comprehensive stakeholder and public communications.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Canals Group. 2007. *Review of Other Models of Waterway, Waterway Corridor Management and Financing*.

<sup>3</sup> Ecoplans Limited. 2007. *A Study of the Past, Present and Future of Water Management on the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada*, for Parks Canada.