



## **Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway Commission sur l'avenir de la voie navigable Trent-Severn**

Minister of the Environment  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

March 2008

Dear Minister

On May 12, 2006, Parliament unanimously passed Private Members Motion 161 sponsored by the Member of Parliament for Simcoe North, Bruce Stanton. The Motion asked the government to “consider the advisability of evaluating the future of the Trent-Severn Waterway...”.

A year later almost to the day, we were appointed by the Government of Canada to carry out that evaluation. It is with pleasure that we tender our report.

The recommendations in our report are the product of conversations with many Canadians – more than a thousand of them. We held 30 public meetings in 16 communities throughout the waterway and its watersheds and witnessed the extraordinary interest, indeed the passion, our citizens have for this remarkable national historic site, and their concern for its future.

Our recommendations also reflect the thoughts of municipal governments, First Nations, Conservation Authorities, economic development facilitators, environmental and cultural organizations, boating alliances as well as associations representing industry – resort and marina operators, water power generators, private campground operators and others.

Several studies also contributed to our work. These included studies on how other waterways are managed and financed; examination of issues around the management of water; research on the economic contributions that the waterway makes to communities; and, finally, a broad examination of the condition of the \$1.4 billion in public infrastructure associated with the waterway.

What have we found?

We have concluded, Minister, that the future of the Trent-Severn Waterway “is all about the water.” The waterway is commonly thought of as a navigable channel from Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay. In fact, it is two large watersheds in Ontario that, over the course of nearly two centuries, have been materially altered through the construction of dams and other engineering works to support the settlement, economic endeavours and enjoyment of Canadians.

We have found that the economies of communities and the lives and lifestyles of millions of Canadians depend on effective management of that water and we are not certain that current management meets the standard that will most certainly be required in the future.

Citizens perceive that water quality in this vast system is deteriorating. They also believe that, due to increasing demand and climate change, there will be less water within the watersheds to equitably and effectively meet future needs and that an assertive conservation regime rooted in sound science and modern technology is required. We agree.

There is not great confidence, Minister, in the performance of governments with respect to management of the waterway system. Dozens of different government agencies – federal, provincial, municipal and First Nation – exercise some form of jurisdiction over waterway management with resulting duplication, overlap and gaps in accountability. These agencies appear not to communicate with each other and generally don’t provide effective mechanisms that permit the public to speak with them.

Many of our recommendations seek to address these challenges of governance in a practical way. There are some relatively simple actions that are required to clarify jurisdictional issues between the province and the federal government but, above all, governments at all levels must learn to work more effectively together and with citizens. We are proposing the designation of a Trent-Severn National Heritage Region and establishment of a Heritage Region Council as tools to encourage the setting of common goals and the advancement of common action.

The Source Water Protection Planning process in the Province of Ontario, if advanced with diligence and dispatch, offers a pathway toward an assured water quality future. We observe, however, that the Trent-Severn Waterway is and should remain a national treasure and suggest a higher degree of commitment in controlling use and occupancy of the federally owned beds of the lakes and rivers as an important tool in preserving water quality. We also urge federal support for hundreds of voluntary organizations that are the real stewards of these waters.

We also believe that it is no longer appropriate for one government to manage storage and flows of water and another to manage allocation. Nor do we think that Parks Canada is well equipped to be in the water management business. Accordingly, we propose that an independent agency with both federal and provincial participation assume responsibility for managing storage, flows and allocation of the water in the watersheds within the context of a modern, conservation-oriented model.

There is a growing recognition by Canadians that water is a finite resource. In fact, the presence of water is not enough; it must be water of quality. No fewer than six important reports on water management in Canada have been released during the past three years, including three during our mandate. They speak to the same issues we do – fragmented governance, outdated supply-oriented management models, declining supply and inadequate management.

It is our hope that this report will add to the developing conversation on the future of water in Canada – a conversation advanced by two Ontario Government Cabinet Ministers at the November 2007 Latonell Conservation Symposium, by the Ontario Environment Commissioner's 2007 Annual Report and by the recent renewal of the Canada-Ontario Great Lakes Agreement. And dare we hope that it will serve to encourage a sense of shared endeavour among all governments.

Although the Trent-Severn Waterway was accorded national historic importance in 1929, it is our view, Minister, that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada should revisit the designation. We believe that the Trent-Severn Waterway warrants recognition for more than its engineering achievements. These two watersheds should be recognized as a nationally significant cultural landscape – a landscape that has supported the lives, culture and aspirations of the people of the region for nearly 10,000 years.

We are particularly concerned that the historic resources under the stewardship of the federal government are not being adequately protected and urge that the government commit additional resources to this essential mandate of Parks Canada. This commitment should extend to an innovative science, education and interpretation program that reaches out to visitors, to residents along the shoreline, to the growing population of the Greater Toronto Area and particularly to our children through a creative schools program and partnerships with colleges and universities throughout the watersheds.

It is important, Minister, that all levels of government improve their ability to respond to the significant changes we have seen in how the waterway is used. Increasingly, citizens are choosing to live year round on the shores of its lakes and rivers often in condominium and fractional ownership developments. Traditional resorts are being replaced by more upscale facilities. Marinas are closing in some areas.

We are especially concerned about increasing demands on public open space coming in considerable measure from a diverse population in the Greater Toronto Area that is forecast to grow by 3.5 million by 2030. Increased demand and often-incompatible uses are already resulting in social conflict.

We urge governments to work together to develop a strategy to respond to these changes and have suggested the creation of a fund that will assist communities to undertake projects to enhance their sense of place along the water and assist them in responding to the new recreational and lifestyle realities.

We have found that there is interest in further developing hydro-electric generation potential along the waterway. We are very supportive of that development provided that it does not occur at the expense of important natural and cultural values. We have suggested a number of actions that could be undertaken by your government to realize that potential.

Above all, there is an urgent need to address serious deficiencies in the condition of waterway infrastructure much of which is more than a century old. Visitors depend on these facilities for their enjoyment of the waterway. More importantly, the nearly 160 dams are essential to community and individual water supplies, flood control, power generation and the protection of critical habitat including that of many species at risk.

Federal investment in the maintenance, repair and replacement of these built assets falls far short of any reasonable standard including guidelines provided by the Treasury Board.

We acknowledge, Minister, that our recommendations come with a substantial cost. We believe that these costs are modest, however, when compared to the extraordinary economic, environmental, cultural and social benefits that accrue to Canadians from the waterway.

It has been a great privilege to carry out this evaluation on your behalf and we commend the foresight of the Government of Canada and that of all Members of Parliament for commissioning this work. We trust that our report will reflect well on the government's confidence in us.

Yours truly,



Douglas Downey  
Chair



Thomas H. B. Symons



Sandra Barrett



Douglas Rollins



Greg Bishop



Dean Peters