

Presentation to the Panel on the Future of the Trent Severn Waterway

August 7, 2007 – Port Severn

Good afternoon. My name is Richard von Hagen and I am here with my wife Cindy. Our cottage is on Gloucester Pool, located between locks 44 and 45. We live there full time from May to October and keep our Cruiser at our dock. For the past 10 years we have been significant users of the Waterway, have transited every lock and enjoyed visiting the communities along the system. We are deeply concerned about the future of the Waterway and appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today.

In preparation for this meeting we have read the discussion papers, submissions and background material posted on your site. In addition, we spoke with many visitors and Lock Masters on our recent annual two week trip down the Trent Severn Waterway (TSW), traveling from Port Severn to Lakefield.

This year we met visitors from a variety of places including; the family that transported their boat from North Bay and were thrilled with their first trip on the TSW, the young couple from London traveling on a PWC across the Kawartha Lakes (they can teach you how to pack lightly for a trip!) , the steady stream of “Loopers” from places such as Maine, Rhode Island, Florida and San Diego, the crew of voyagers in rustic birch bark canoes who we first met at “Love Sick” lock and last saw heading out on Georgian Bay, the troop of Scouts camping and sailing along the waterway, the camera buffs from all over the world taking photos at “Big Chute” and the adventurous Vancouver couple in their 26 foot sailboat who sailed down the West Coast, up the East Coast and then finished their 9 month trip with a transit of the TSW. They said this last part was the highlight of their journey.

We are sharing our experiences because it’s important to remind ourselves that the TSW is a unique “world class” recreational destination. As you have noted in your discussion papers, the TSW provides a huge economic benefit to the communities connected with it. We are concerned that if a standard of excellence

is not maintained on the TSW we can easily lose “the health and vitality” of the system that makes it so attractive to people.

The Panel has been asked to look at a broad range of issues including economic development, water management and waterway jurisdiction. Based on the feedback you have received to date we decided to focus on the following 3 major points;

Point 1. The TSW Governance Model needs to change in order to address the many conflicting challenges facing the Waterway now and in the future. The model of “Special Purpose Agency – with Oversight Mandates and Ownership” appears to be the better choice.

Parks Canada is a respected organization which has made a significant contribution to the Waterway. However, the current breadth of challenges facing the TSW cannot be dealt with by a single government department. The Governance discussion paper outlines several potential models for consideration. Any option other than a “Special Purpose Agency – with Oversight Mandates and Ownership” appears to maintain the status quo or presents the potential for endless frustrating deadlocks between various interest groups. A “Special Purpose Agency”, properly structured and funded by the Federal Government, similar to the National Capital Commission, could be created with the cooperation of the major stakeholder groups , including federal, provincial and local authorities. It should have a broad mandate to address the needs of recreational boaters, and to maximize the economic, recreational, social and environmental aspects of life along the Waterway. In addition, a Special Purpose Agency would also have an “operational focus” to remain effective.

After reading the paper “Review of other Models of Waterway Corridor Management and Financing”, we believe the Panel should consider recommending a hybrid model based largely on the “Waterways Ireland” Special Purpose Agency (if the Irish can make it work it should be able to work here!)

In addition, it should incorporate the appealing capabilities from the following agencies;

- i. The water management process of the Tennessee - Tombigbee Waterway
- ii. The customer service focus of British Waterways
- iii. The environmental and recreational breadth of the Gota Canal.

It is important to design an effective “Special Purpose Agency” that can be accessible and work closely with the many stakeholder groups along the Waterway.

Point 2. We agree with the critical point raised in numerous presentations and submissions that the Waterway needs a major Capital Investment.

Our primary concern is safety. Secondary to this are esthetics and creature comforts such as refurbished bathrooms. We have seen crumbling lock walls, rotten wooden lock doors, rusted and missing bolts, insufficient blue line space and deteriorating dams and spill ways. The focus should be on preventing a major serious incident on the TSW rather than reacting after the fact. Recent tragedies such as the Minneapolis Bridge collapse show how critical it is to maintain aging infrastructure. Current and past federal governments have not fulfilled their responsibility to maintain the Waterway. We recommend that the panel advise the Hon. Minister of the Environment that he has a potential “time bomb” on his hands and should consider injecting some monies immediately to address urgent capital repairs. Further to this, the bulk of the capital improvements should be managed by the new Special Purpose Agency.

Point 3. Operational funding for the TSW has been squeezed for years and the visitors to the Waterway are seeing the negative consequences. Funding needs to be restored to sufficient levels to maintain the “health and vitality” of the Waterway. We suggest that improved operational funding be prioritized as follows;

- i. The backbone of the system is the lock staff. They are outstanding professionals who help boaters safely navigate their way through the system. In addition, they act as ambassadors to our visitors from around the world. Many of the staff are getting as old as the “locks” and will start to retire in the near future. Their salaries, benefits and training need to be reviewed and enhanced to help attract and retain the best talent possible.

- ii. Waterway maintenance needs to be restored to deal with issues such as overgrown vegetation along narrow canals, removal of fallen trees and dead heads, dredging of shallow canals to maintain operational depth and lastly the restoration of a limited number of buoys to aid navigation. On our most recent boat trip we heard numerous stories and complaints from boaters who had run into problems allegedly due to cut backs on the system. On this point, we acknowledge it is hard to separate fact from fiction.

In closing, the TSW needs to change in order to survive and prosper. By its nature, change is a difficult process that will bring fear and uncertainty to everyone involved with the system including TSW employees, cottagers, boaters and visitors. To support the change process, the panel will need to craft an implementation plan lead by a strong leadership group and a change management strategy that provides regular and effective communication.

We believe the TSW is a “Wonder of the World”, and that together we can ensure it remains healthy and vibrant for the next generation to enjoy.

Richard and Cindy von Hagen