

Presentation by Dr. Elizabeth 'Betsy' McGregor

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Panel on the Future of the Trent Severn Waterway (TSW)

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Context:

Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on ideas and perspectives for your consideration. The Trent Severn Waterway holds great personal attachment for the McGregor family as a place where we grew up and where our Grandfather, with our Father, built our cottage. In the early years, we had to paddle by canoe to reach the property, with kerosene lamps and food supplies placed on the bottom of the boat. The water was clear then, and the shoreline natural. In town, we drove down to the Lift Locks regularly with our Father, an electrical engineer at Canadian General Electric, who would recount the history of the Locks and remark on the engineering marvel as we watched the locks in motion. We "tooted the car horn" each time we passed through the amazing tunnel under the locks.

Things have changed dramatically since then. The threat of aging infrastructure, warming of our climate and disappearance of natural environments need sustained and serious study, action and leadership. Peterborough Riding economy relies on a vibrant tourism industry sustained by the health and beauty of this remarkable waterway.

One 'Lockside Vision'

Imagine a Seniors Residence and Long Term Care home, co-situated with an Early Childhood Learning Centre, at the edge of Peterborough's Historic Lift Locks. Designed to celebrate the inter-generational model of St. Joseph's at Fleming – a spot where elder living styles mix with early childhood education.

Imagine tourist boats arriving and being met by trained 'Ambassadors' of the Lift Locks with a "downtown shuttle" service on hand to take visitors to local Art Galleries, Grocery Stores, Clothing Shops, Theatres, Restaurants and Banking services. A double-decker red bus, "rent-a-bike" linking bikeways to the lock 20-21 corridor, or student pulled rickshaws could take visitors on tours while their boats are moored at the Locks.

Imagine the proud heritage of our First Nations being honored on the land next to the Locks, where Chief Knott, during this summer's National Day of Action and Awareness, spoke so eloquently. A satellite outlet of the Whetung Gift Shop could sell the amazing art and artifacts of Curve Lake.

Imagine the museum being busy with educational and tourist visits in the Summer, and the canal bustling with skating events in the Winter. Imagine the Lift Locks joining the Rideau Canal as a national Heritage. Just imagine this one vision – and many more.

Perspectives and Ideas

1. Governance

Governance structures should represent the breadth of custodians and consumers. The shared responsibility for oversight and operation of the Trent Severn Waterway includes **federal** Departments of the Environment, Fisheries and Oceans and Parks Canada; the **provincial** Ministry of Natural Resources, **First Nations** and **local** Municipal and County Councils. It also should encompass **tourism, energy, the economy, conservation – and consumer representatives.** A “**dedicated water management agency**”, to achieve coherency among agencies, is recommended by the Chamber of Commerce and that this overarching agency be situated at the federal level. Effective and cost efficient stewardship will rely upon a **cross-cutting mechanism.**

2. Conservation of Wetlands, Water Levels & Water Quality

Fact-based evidence is needed to support public policy protection of the **Trent Seven’s fragile ecosystem.** Dryer seasons, the control of water levels and the monitoring of water quality need to be **documented in a systematic manner, analyzed and managed with modern technology.** A **hydrological study** should be undertaken and a systems approach supported. **Technical expertise** should be provided from all relevant federal and provincial Departments.

Private property owners and businesses along the shoreline must be held accountable for their part in protecting the health of the waterway. They also deserve predictability and good information to support a strong partnership. **Shorelines are being altered irreversibly as swamps and wetlands are backfilled and wildlife habitats destroyed. Enforcement with consequences for mistreatment of the land must protect shorelines.** Municipalities and provincial and federal levels are “letting the ball drop” between the cracks of various responsibility centres. There appears **little coordination of the various regulation, approvals and enforcement bodies. Site plan approval processes and coordination are essential.**

Enhanced TSW support should be given to groups like the “**Kawartha Lake Stewards Association**”, who are voluntarily working to try and find some of the answers to protect the ecological integrity of the system. KLSA research projects, in **partnership with Trent University and Fleming College, are identifying nutrient sources and weed growth in the Kawarthas to help develop strategies** for control of this current problem. Lake Plans, like the one being developed over a three-year period by volunteers with the Clear, Stony and White Lake Associations (in the absence of any other body taking the initiative) providing a vision for the Lakes in the face of unabated development pressure that has seen the **Lakes deteriorate from clear to zebra mussel-choked to weed-filled environments** Similar **Lake Plans should be developed throughout the TSW system.**

3. **Vibrant Tourism and Enhanced Communication**

Tourist awareness – locally, nationally and internationally – needs to be significantly strengthened to market the **unique historical, cultural and eco-recreational** features of the Trent Severn System. **Communication within and between governing agencies** involved in operations is also essential to prevent gaps and overlaps including the urgent need for coordinated and effective enforcement. **Communication to educational institutions and researchers** could lead to expanded opportunities for research and applied learning.

4. **Repair of Infrastructure**

The federal government commitment to **safe and secure waterways** should include sufficient funding for the **repair and upgrading of the infrastructure** of the Trent Severn Waterway now and in a sustained manner into the future. Safety should also be protected by **an adequate number of marker buoys** without assuming watercraft are supplied with GPS systems.

5. **Commercial Connection**

An **“Economic Impact Study”** should be conducted, supported by the overarching coordinating body. It should analyze **our water levels and quality - and their impact on tourism, business, employment, spin-off businesses/ employment and municipal tax bases** providing solid evidence to policy makers connecting stewardship, conservation and the economic health of the TSW. Chambers of Commerce and Business Networks could creatively connect tourists to businesses like galleries, spas, food stores, pharmacies and restaurants by providing shuttle busses, borrow-a-bike stands, taxi stands or student rickshaws.

6. **Special Needs**

Those employed along the system should be TSW “Ambassadors” trained in the historic and cultural background of the System, (bilingual is possible) and helpful in accommodating special needs visitors.

7. **Research, Education and Canada’s National Heritage**

Research on water quality, wetlands and climate change and water levels can support **evidence-based policy decisions** about the waterway and encourage **generations of youth to pursue careers in environmental law and protection**. Engineering of a Waterway first created in 1833 is an engineering feat worthy of study, apprenticeship, training and heritage status in Canada. Like the sister system of the Rideau Canal, the Trent Severn Waterway System could well be distinguished as a Canadian Heritage treasure.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the TSW Panel. Betsy McGregor.