

**Submission to  
The Panel on the Future  
of the  
Trent-Severn Waterway**

**Presented by:  
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### **Executive Summary**

This presentation has been put together with two objectives in mind. The first objective is to lay out my vision for the future of the Trent Severn Waterway from the following five perspectives: Inter-Community Cooperation, Environment, Economy, Governance/Jurisdiction, and The Need for Clarity. Under each category, various points have been stated; some having come forward through other presentations and some are my own. Panelists may find grouping them as I have helpful to your analysis and prioritizing of the issues. The second objective is to focus in on a number of practical suggestions for actions that the TSW might undertake in the short term as it awaits the outcome of a complete review and possible far-reaching overhaul. Possibilities are identified under the headings of Operations, Planning, Communications and Public Safety.

Of all that is covered, the biggest single concern, in my opinion, is the need for a shift in attitude from the view of water being in unlimited supply to one of a resource that, if not scarce, will only manage to meet current and future needs through the implementation of water conservation programs. If this does not occur, I fear a growing bitterness on the part of reservoir and flow-through lake property owners who feel their interests are being sacrificed for the benefit of the communities along the Waterway main line. A dialogue is needed which brings all parties together enabling each to see the issues from the other's perspective and raising awareness of the need to develop ways to better balance the requirements of the various TSW communities.

### **Introduction**

Good evening, members of the Panel. My name is Stephen Foster. I have come forward to speak to you on matters pertaining to the Trent Severn Waterway as a citizen of Haliburton County and as a resident of Loon Lake, one of the 41 reservoir lakes in the County.

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to Panelists Dean Peters and Sandra Barrett for the encouragement they gave me to put together and present this statement.

I have read the Ecoplans Study, perused the Discussion Papers and listened to a number of the presentations that were made in Haliburton on July 28th and here today. Based on all of this input, I would like to offer you my ideas as to what to include in a vision for the future of the TSW. But visions are often expressed in somewhat vague terms that may take considerable time to define then translate into action. Accordingly, my vision statements will be followed by a series of practical suggestions that may be regarded as achievable shorter-term objectives.

As you read this report and hear my presentation, you will note a tendency for me to dwell on matters pertaining to the Trent Watershed. That is where I own property. Furthermore, the Severn has quite a different dynamic because its two major reservoir lakes, Simcoe and Couchiching are also direct beneficiaries of the economic activity generated by the Waterway main line because they are an integral part of it. This is not the case for the reservoir and flow-through lakes in the Haliburton Sector.

## **Vision for the Future**

### **(a) Inter-Community Cooperation and Respect Vision**

The communities along the main line of the Waterway have always been able to rely on their water levels being kept within a narrow range of fluctuation without concern as to the effect this might have on property owners around the reservoir or flow-through lakes in the Haliburton Sector.

Of even greater concern is the fact that the Province of Ontario has authorized the drawing off of water from the Waterway at well over 6000 locations including water to be processed and distributed through communities such as Peterborough. As those communities have grown, so has their need for more water. The TSW is responsible for the increase in water extraction from the reservoir and flow-through lakes to keep volume up in the lower lakes in the face of increased extraction by permit.

In the interests of lessening the prospects for future inter-community conflict, there is a need to engage the reservoir lakes, the lakes along the main stem of the Waterway, the TSW and the Province of Ontario in meaningful discussions about water resources. Recognition by everyone that the water supply is finite could and should lead to the roll out of water conservation programs which call for such remedies as low flow toilets and shower heads. By the same token, the Province should provide assistance to communities such as Peterborough to replace an aging network of pipes to stop leakage.

Finally, a TSW water management policy that favors one set of communities over another should give way to a new one that calls for sharing the pain and sharing the gain. When water resources are down, all the lakes and the canal draught should experience a proportional drop in depth. But, by the same token, if a study of terrain and water resources, in combination with a search for more sophisticated water management models is successful in increasing resource availability, then the bounty should be shared by all.

### **(b) Environmental Vision**

There are times when public safety is the paramount concern for the TSW such as when flood control is needed. But for most of the time, it is my impression that the economic concerns of the TSW, as expressed in the mandate to support boating by keeping the draught depth at 6 feet over the lock sill, dominates all other interests, including environment. I submit that both must be considered in equal measure if the qualities that attract boaters, property owners, vacationers and tourists alike to the entire Trent Watershed are to be maintained.

To give the environment its due calls for all of the following to be implemented –

- (1) Giving recognition to the entire Trent watershed as a single entity inside which environmental and economic interests receive equal treatment
- (2) The water management process must recognize and accommodate the environmental impacts of climate change such as rain falling as cloudbursts in localized areas rather than gentle rains over larger regions.

- (3) A major shift in attitude is required that stops looking at water as an unlimited resource and moves the emphasis onto conservation and wise usage.
- (4) In the same vein, the Precautionary Principle should apply when considering the issuance of Permits to Take Water because we don't have a good understanding as to how water needs measure up against water availability. Until that is determined, the issuance of new Permits along the Waterway should be severely restricted.
- (5) Recognition must be given to the Waterway as one of the natural wonders of Ontario to complement its recognition as a National Historic Site.

#### (b) Economic Vision

The TSW is currently a burden on the taxpayers of Canada. That there is reluctance to invest in the Waterway can be seen in the lack of sufficient capital funding to restore the infrastructure to good working order. A thorough evaluation of its current and future economic prospects, either direct or indirect, is required. It is anticipated that the current study underway into community economic sustainability will help to clarify the situation provided that it gives full consideration to each of the following –

- (1) the need to replace the aging system of dams in the reservoir and flow-through lake area with ones that can be operated remotely in response to local weather circumstances
- (2) recognition that there is considerable untapped wealth in the water given its potential for micro-hydro electricity generation. However it must be understood that revenue generated will be split three ways between Ontario Power Generation, the TSW and Haliburton for all the units set up in the County
- (3) that users of the Waterway should pay for carbon offsets with revenue flowing to Haliburton for programs such as large-scale tree planting or generating energy from a renewable resource such as wind. Tree planting will help to hold water in the thin soils and slow down runoff. Eventually, it will yield timber that is a partial payback for County support of downstream economies for the last 100 years
- (4) the prospects for the TSW to resume its role in the transport of goods into and out of Central Ontario well on into the future when oil supplies are dwindling and the cost of that oil becomes prohibitive.

#### (c) Governance/Jurisdiction Vision

The Ecoplans Report lays out, in considerable detail, the responsibilities exercised by the various levels of government that have jurisdiction in the area covering the Trent watershed. Does it make sense that the provincial government is establishing a large committee to look after Source Water Protection in the Trent Watershed while, independently, the federal government addresses surface water management in the same area? Why not share on research and other costs at the very least and avoid duplication of effort? I sympathize with Parks Canada whose Management Plan for the TSW acknowledges what needs to be done to operate the TSW effectively but falls short on its ability to implement the plan because of the need to get a consensus among many governing bodies.

The cumbersome nature of the current consensus-building process often results in limited or no progress. Thus, I support the call for a governance model under which the management of the TSW is undertaken by an independent water authority. Participants on the Board of Directors for such an authority should include representatives of the various levels of government, other institutions, NGO's along with representatives of property owners and the public at large. All must come on board with the willingness and the political backing to work collectively for the common good.

#### (d) The Need for Clarity Vision

As one delves ever more deeply into the subject of the TSW, one is struck by the number of questions for which getting hard and fast answers is difficult to do. Consider the following set of examples --

- (1) What government or agency is responsible for each component of a water body – water, waterbed, shoreline and shore road allowance, fish populations?
- (2) What rights did the Province intend to transfer to the Federal Government in 1905 and what ones did it retain?
- (3) Why is there so much focus by the TSW on the navigation rights associated with the main line Waterway but not for the reservoir lakes?
- (4) Why is the draught set at six feet over the lock sill?
- (5) Why does the list of existing control dams not match the list of structures in the 1905 Ontario Order-in-Council?
- (6) Why has the ownership of some dams associated with the TSW moved back and forth between the provincial MNR and the federal TSW?
- (7) Are there other bodies of water that could be developed to take on the role of reservoir lakes?
- (8) What logs have been removed from what dams today?
- (9) What navigation hazards can I expect to encounter in my lake now given the most recent log removals?
- (10) Why do both the federal TSW and the provincial Ministry of Environment issue Water Taking Permits along the Waterway?

The TSW is under no obligation to answer the questions posed by its stakeholders. However, it may have a moral obligation to so do. Consideration might be given to revamping its website to display questions and posted answers and then use the accumulation thereof to publish useful reference documents.

Having completed my series of Vision statements, I will now move on to provide you with a number of practical suggestions whose implementation need not await completion of the process of rethinking the what, when, where and why of the TSW.

### **Practical Suggestions**

The Trent Severn Waterway is large and it is complicated! Critics and detractors are quick to declare that it does not run well. I suggest that a comprehensive review by a qualified agency

would bring to light various policies and practices that could be changed in the interests of achieving operational improvements now rather than later. Such an undertaking is something the Panel might consider as one of a set of recommendations it makes to the Minister of the Environment in December. In the meantime, I offer the following examples for your consideration.

(a) Operational Suggestions

- (1) How well water management is done depends partly on having adequate staff resources available to perform tasks at the right place and time. For instance, if shorter intervals between visits to dams mean better water management for the reservoir lakes but more manpower is needed to achieve it, then it should be evaluated.
- (2) Staff retiring after long years of service take with them a wealth of knowledge and experience. Careful consideration should be given to succession planning to ensure there is as much transfer of knowledge from older to younger staff as possible. In the next few years, there will be a surge of retirements from the TSW by aging baby boomers.
- (3) There is evidence to suggest that water management is increasingly difficult to do with so many stakeholder interests to consider. A return to having two water control engineers would put more knowledge and experience to work to balance multiple water usage objectives and allow one to relieve the other from time to time. Furthermore, one engineer could be dedicated solely to management activities in the summer months while the other interacts with stakeholders.
- (4) Letting the length of the operating season be driven, in part, by the desire to lay off staff in the fall eliminates opportunities for increased use of property by cottagers and the associated benefits to the economies of communities in the Haliburton Sector during the fall shoulder season. This should be re-evaluated.

(c) Planning Suggestions

- (1) Inspections by Public Works, Canada suggest that a growing number of the dams require considerable maintenance work. When repairs are extensive, consideration should be given to outright replacement with new structures having sluice gates that can be raised and lowered remotely in response to local weather events.
- (2) It is hard to correlate the list of lakes and rivers that are available for development as reservoirs by the Federal Government with what appears on schematic diagrams of the Waterway. Even taking into account changes in names over the years, there appear to be discrepancies. If some components of the system are lost, why not track them down? If ownership transfer to another agency has occurred perhaps restoring them to the Waterway might open up a new storage and management possibilities. Nothing ventured; nothing gained.
- (3) The existing reservoir system is based on an evaluation of landscape and topography that was undertaken over 100 years ago. Another analysis, following a major data collection effort and an evaluation with modern sophisticated modeling technology, may reveal new reservoir opportunities.

- (4) None of the Studies prepared for the Panel spells out the reason for the draught in the Waterway to be set at six feet over the lock sill. Nor is data provided that breaks down the current boat population by the draught required for them to travel unimpeded through the Waterway. It would be of great benefit to know what the real draught requirement is of the boats using the locks and by how much water extraction from the reservoir lakes would be reduced if the draught was lowered to the prevailing draught level.

(d) Communications Suggestions

- (1) Waterfront property owners frequently become upset with the TSW as it has shown no willingness to provide information regarding log insertions and removals at dams on almost a real-time basis. For its part, the TSW finds its ability to offer such a service denied by the Federal Government because it violates their rules. Perhaps a workable alternative is to use text messaging or emails sent directly to the computers of property owners who sign up for such a service.
- (2) While it may seem that water is in short supply, a more accurate depiction of the situation may be to say that not enough effort is being made to avoid wasting what we have. Perhaps the TSW can be convinced to launch a communications program to advocate for water conservation with programs directed at water users throughout the watersheds.

(e) Public Safety Suggestion

- (1) The TSW states that its first priority is public safety. As a manifestation of this mandate as it pertains to navigation, all the hydrographic charts for the main line of the Waterway depict navigational hazards in the sure and certain knowledge that the draught will be maintained under all but very rare circumstances.

Despite its stated commitment to public safety, the TSW does not issue maps for the reservoir lakes that clearly depict where the navigational hazards will be found as logs are removed in sequence from the dams. It is neither terribly complicated nor expensive to do so. A combination of GPS, sonar and cartography is enough to satisfy the need. The public relations value alone would justify the project in my estimation.

In conclusion, may I state that I do not envy this Panel the task of generating a Report on the Past, Present and Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway in a relatively short time span. Nevertheless, you have all committed to the undertaking and you are to be commended for your willingness to do so. I will eagerly await the outcome.

Thank you.