

**Presentation to
The Trent Severn Waterway Panel
on behalf of
The Catchacoma Cottagers' Association,
The Cavendish Community Ratepayers' Association Inc.,
and
The Beaver-Cavendish-Bottle-McGuinness Cottage Owners'
Organization Inc.
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Cavendish Community Ratepayers' Association Inc.



Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation to your Panel. I am here today representing the Catchacoma Cottagers' Association (CCA), as well as the Cavendish Community Ratepayers' Association Inc. (CCRAI), and The Beaver-Cavendish-Bottle-McGuinness Cottage Owners' Organization Inc. In preparing for today I have also consulted with executive members of the Mississauga Lake Cottagers' Association. Our associations have maintained open communications with the Coalition for Equitable Water Flow group (CEWF), based in Haliburton, and the CCRAI is contributing financially to the work of the CEWF.

Our associations represent five reservoir and flow through lakes (RAFT) in the Kawartha Highlands area of Peterborough County; Catchacoma, Mississauga, Beaver, Gold and McGuinness lakes; within the Mississauga River drainage system with level control provided by the Mississauga Dam. The Mississauga River joins the TSW system in Lower Buckhorn Lake. There are more than 1,000 properties on our lake chain of which 450 are on Catchacoma Lake and 90 on Beaver Lake. Our lakes normally experience a significant drawdown of about 5 feet over the period from early July until late October.

I am a cottager on Catchacoma Lake where my wife and I have been cottagers for the last 10 years. I am also familiar with the section of the Trent River above Healey Falls where my wife's family has had a cottage for the past 50 years. I am a Professor in Environmental Studies at York University. My academic background was originally in hydrology and I now work in the planning field. I am currently a board member of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Association (FOCA).

Recent Experience with Water Level Changes

In the last two relatively dry summers we have experienced early drawdown of our lakes to the normal late fall levels by August or early September. These **unannounced early drawdowns** almost always involve the removal of two logs from our dam with the resulting reduction of 24 inches of depth over a period of about two weeks.

By mid August in 2006 residents of our lakes experienced loss of use of their shorelines and damage to boats and docks which were left stranded on mud flats. The connecting channel which provides access between adjoining lakes became dangerous and eventually impassable because of shallow rocky conditions which limited access to the local marina and store facilities for many cottagers. In other areas our boat hazard markers that are put out by volunteer members of our associations needed to be adjusted because the navigation hazards that would normally only come into play with our lowest water levels in late fall were exposed in mid season.

This year, in 2007, we have had an even more extreme experience with unannounced drawdowns beginning in late June and normal late fall levels reached by the end of the first week of September. The connecting channels between lakes are dangerous and in one case impassable. Many docks are stranded in mud or on rocks because of the unexpected extreme drop in levels and many cottagers have pulled their boats out early because of the hazards coming into play early in the season.

Significant numbers of cottagers on our lake chain have **properties on islands or in other water access only locations** and therefore the maintenance of safe navigation conditions is a paramount concern for them.

Local water tables and well levels are directly impacted when lake water levels are drawn down. Year round residents on the lakes who use the lake as a source of water have seen their intakes threatened by ice conditions when the winter lake levels are left too low.

There are also important **ecological implications** of early drawdown of lake levels. This year we are experiencing increased and new weed growth as the early lower water levels allowed sunlight to penetrate to the inshore lake bottom early in the season. Shoreline vegetation has been stressed as a result of the early lowering of lake levels and water tables.

We also recognize that there are important fish spawning considerations for bass in the spring as well as lake trout in the late fall associated with water levels. There is serious concern that the drawdown at the end of June this year may have affected the bass spawn and that our extremely low fall levels, if not raised, may impact on the lake trout spawn in late fall. It had been our understanding that MNR and TSW had an agreement that levels were to be maintained until the end of June and from September 30 through the fall to protect fish spawning. This does not seem to have been the case in recent years.

A further complication this year with low levels appears to be more beaver activity on the lakes as streams have dried up partly because of early drawdown of lake levels.

While residents understand the reservoir function which our lakes provide we have been particularly concerned by sudden drawdowns and by a general lack of information and communications from the TSW administration.

It seems clear that the interests of the residents on reservoir lakes do not enter into the decisions made on drawdown activities. The lack of any warning from TSW that such significant water level changes were about to occur much earlier than normal has made the situations outlined above much worse than they needed to be and resulted in significant property damage and inconvenience for residents.

MAIN ISSUES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

I would like to identify several specific issues that concern members of our associations and where we believe changes are warranted.

Equitable Water Flow for All Stakeholders Under Changing Conditions

We endorse the position set out by the CEWF in their presentation to your panel that

The Coalition is seeking the implementation of an equitable water management policy for the TSW that accords equal consideration, along with fair and just treatment to everyone in the entire Trent River watershed. Reservoir and flow through (RAFT) lake communities should be considered equally with all other TSW communities where the policy applies to safe navigation, access to waterfront property, economic sustainability and the avoidance of negative environmental and economic impacts.

The above quotation from the presentation of the CEWF captures the core message from the RAFT lakes including those represented by our associations. **We want and expect to be considered as equal stakeholders in the management of the TSW. We believe we also have Navigation rights that the TSW must respect.** At present the navigation interests and environmental concerns on the RAFT lakes seem to not be a factor in the water management decisions on the TSW.

In a period of climate change with more extreme storm events and extended drought periods as we have seen in the last two summers it is essential that the interests of all residents in the basin be considered by TSW as they adjust their water management strategies to be equitable and fair to all property owners.

We appreciate that the *Ecoplans Study* has recognized the significance of the interests of the reservoir lakes.

We look forward to your Panel ensuring that in the future the interests of our reservoir lakes as well as the interests of the canal lakes are considered together as water level management decisions are made.

Water Management Improvements to Increase Water Supply

We believe there are many opportunities for improved water management in the TSW system. While the TSW may use relatively sophisticated approaches to modeling the system on the monitoring and forecasting side, the operational side of the process is fairly primitive in its approach. We recognize that lack of staff resources and the design and condition of many of the dams now limit the operational control on water levels exercised by TSW staff, but we believe this is not an acceptable approach to future water management on the TSW. There are both short term operational changes which can be made to better manage the available water and longer term changes which must be considered as infrastructure is renewed.

In the short term we believe a number of operational changes and adjustments should be made implemented:

- **The removal of one log at a time from dams would ensure a more gradual drawdown of RAFT lakes.** The current practice of removing two 12 inch logs at once without any warning creates rapid damaging drawdown in levels and is unacceptable.
- **TSW staff must be available to replace logs in response to significant precipitation events to store additional water rather than just spilling water in response to summer storms.** More of the dams need to be operated on a real time basis to manage available flows. For example in July this year our section of the watershed received more than 2 inches of rain over a 3 day period but no effort was made to capture that flow which could have at least temporarily offset the early drawdown we had already experienced and provided more flow available for the drought period that followed. If TSW does not have staff available this kind of time sensitive local level management, it could be subcontracted out to properly trained municipal workers or possibly to volunteers.
- We believe that management of winter levels is also important and **winter levels need to be adjusted in response to the latest information on snowpack water content.** It is hard to understand the low winter and early spring holding levels of early 2007 given the fact that all local residents knew that the snowpack was far below normal. As noted above winter holding levels are also important with respect to well levels and water intakes below the ice.
- We believe it is **time to consider operational options to increase the storage capacity of the system including the possible use of the canal lakes through allowance for slightly higher and lower holding levels depending on weather conditions.** If the canal lakes were used to store even 4 or 6 inches more water in spring and after storm events there would be much more water available in the

system. Maybe it is also time to review the guaranteed minimum depth of the lock system and lock operating protocols and schedules during drought periods given that few boats draw anywhere near the full depth which we believe is significantly greater than in other North American canal systems.

In the longer term as dams are repaired and replaced

- More facilities need to have automated gates to allow for real time level management to maximize the storage of available water.

Climate Change and Extreme weather Events

We recognize that climate change will mean more extreme events and the water management of the system must respond appropriately. As we face new trends in weather and climate patterns including extreme storm events, it will be necessary to have clear widely understood strategies in place to deal with prolonged droughts as well as extremes of precipitation as we have experienced in the last few years within the basin. **We believe all parts of the system, both the RAFT and canal lakes, need to share the painful impacts of these trends.**

Expanded Hydro Electric Development

Further if under Provincial energy policies hydro power production on the Trent system is expanded we will have an additional major operating factor governing decisions on lake levels. Such new hydro developments must not be detrimental to existing navigation rights.

The Provision of Appropriate Funding and Staffing Levels for Maintenance, Repair and Operations of the TSW.

The federal government must invest in the capital infrastructure of the system by repairing and upgrading the water control structures. The federal government has surplus revenue and some of it must be invested in the TSW in the same way there have been recent investments in the Rideau Canal system. Ontario does not have many national parks and investment federally in the TSW is one way to rebalance the flow of funds from Ottawa.

On the operational side the federal government must provide funding for significantly higher levels of operational staffing to allow for a more responsive operation of the system. The base operating budget of the TSW must be brought up to an appropriate level to ensure the safe and effective operation of the system. The TSW is a national heritage resource and deserves appropriate levels of national funding.

Governance options

We would support the development of a new governance structure for the TSW that would recognize the interests of all stakeholders, including the property owners on the RAFT lakes, and which would ensure better coordination among the three levels

of government . The *Ecoplans Study* has provided an excellent 9 point review of governance issues which warrant close study.

However a new governance approach is not the solution if the financial resources are not made available up front by the federal government and if it turns into a scheme to download costs to the province or the municipalities. We all fear another cost downloading experience that results in tax cuts at the federal level without making funding available for essential work. **The TSW is a federal asset like all the other Parks Canada sites and parks and it needs direct federal investment now and on a continuing basis.**

Communications

Most important there is a need for ongoing public consultation and real time information sharing by TSW with all residents of the basin to ensure everyone can understand in advance the water management decisions that are being implemented. There is no reason that residents of the basin should be surprised by sudden water level changes except in the most extreme storm events.

Unfortunately the TSW has a reputation of not always being forthcoming in providing requested information. At your September 13th consultation in Lakefield your Panel was told first hand about the "gag order" on TSW staff to not discuss issues with the public while your Panel is sitting. We have experienced difficulty getting hard copies of analytic reports that we know exist. For example, last fall after an excellent presentation by a TSW official at the Lakeland Conference in Buckhorn we were refused access to a copy of his presentation for circulation to our members. Unfortunately this response reflects the experience that many local residents and associations have had in the past that it is hard to get information, even public information, from TSW.

There is a real need for a real time communications network through a website as well as through marinas and associations providing up to date information on water levels and planned water level adjustments. Such a network would give shoreline owners some advanced warning of the kinds of sudden and abnormal water level adjustments we have experienced over the last two summers.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with your panel and to file a written copy of our presentation.

We look forward to your report and to having an opportunity to work with the TSW in developing and implementing strategies which take account of the interests of all waterfront property owners in the entire TSW system.