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

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*Submitted by Paul Russell, Crystal Lake. Township of Galway-Cavendish
Harvey.

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Crystal Lake is one of many RAFT (Reservoir and Flow Through) lakes in the TSW (Trent-Severn Waterway) watershed region. The TSW's primary focus has been on the economic benefits generated through a tourism economy and on the navigational needs of recreational boaters on the TSW system but this Panel provides an opportunity to re-assess the TSW's mandate and to expand its focus to include the environmental, economic and social needs of the residents of RAFT lakes that supply the TSW system. My concern is that the economic and navigational concerns of the TSW system should not take precedence over the environmental, navigational and economic concerns of a much larger user population on the RAFT lakes that supply the TSW. Residents of RAFT lakes have purchased properties and shoreline allowances with an expectation that they should have some degree of legal right, or control, over external

* *Thank you for providing the opportunity to make submissions to your Panel.

Yours sincerely,

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September 28, 2007

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Crystal Lake is one of many RAFT (Reservoir and Flow Through) lakes in the TSW (Trent-Severn Waterway) watershed region. The TSW's primary focus has been on the economic benefits generated through a tourism economy and on the navigational needs of recreational boaters on the TSW system but this Panel provides an opportunity to re-assess the TSW's mandate and to expand its focus to include the environmental, economic and social needs of the residents of RAFT lakes that supply the TSW system. My concern is that the economic and navigational concerns of the TSW system should not take precedence over the environmental, navigational and economic concerns of a much larger user population on the RAFT lakes that supply the TSW. Residents of RAFT lakes have purchased properties and shoreline allowances with an expectation that they should have some degree of legal right, or control, over external policies that affect the local environment and impact upon the use and value of their property. At present there are uncoordinated and overlapping jurisdictions that govern the TSW system and the most affected "stakeholders" – the residents of RAFT lakes – are excluded entirely. There does not appear to be an overall management plan that takes into consideration the environmental, economic and social impact of on reservoir lakes and it is essential that residents of these lakes have some degree of input and control over TSW policies and decisions as our lakes are integral elements of an environmentally contiguous watershed region.

I have outlined a few examples of how the TSW's operations affect our lake adversely in order to give support to the claim that the focus of the TSW must undergo a review in order to address the needs of RAFT lake residents.

Environmental Concerns

1.) Shoreline Habitat

Our lake's ecology is impacted adversely in its function as a reservoir lake for the TSW system. On our lake there is no permanent or stable shoreline riparian zone. These zones between lake and land can serve to minimize the effects of rainwater and spring run-off, wave erosion of the shoreline, and serve as transitional ecosystems that are essential to the health of a lake. Run-off, erosion, ice-damage and silting in areas without a stable and healthy riparian zone can diminish fish, bird, reptile and insect habitat, quality of drinking water etc. Contrary to the Ministry of the Environment's initiatives, there is no opportunity for RAFT lake residents to naturalize shorelines and create viable, stable riparian zones since no stable shoreline areas can exist when lake levels drop 5 - 6 feet over the course of the summer season. RAFT lakes have no permanent marshland, wetland areas/ecosystems – essential for water purification, animal habitat and flood/erosion control. In late fall, the "dead zone" that exists between lake and shoreline only serves to present a greater opportunity for residents to build breakwaters and shoreline retaining walls – further contributing to the destruction of a naturalized shoreline.

The methods used by the TSW to modify the flow of water into the system contribute to this problem. Adding and removing logs from a dam is, at best, a crude method for adjusting water levels – the smallest increment of change involves an 8 -10 inch drop in lake water levels - but this year the effects were amplified. Water levels were raised in the spring, then dropped, then raised again. The lake environment is impacted when water levels fluctuate so rapidly and unpredictably - marshland and fish spawning areas in particular - but residents also risked damage to moored boats and docks. The effect was more severe in August when several logs were removed at once resulting in more than a two-foot drop in lake levels in a one-week period. Shallow bays in the lake that support heron, frog, snake and turtle habitat became mud-flats overnight. Some cottage residents who left their boats safely moored on a Sunday night returned the following Friday to find their boat's hull or engine resting on rocks. There does not appear to be an overall water management plan to ensure that lake levels from all RAFT lakes are drawn-down in a consistent and co-ordinated fashion to minimize the impact upon the environment of the lake.

2.) Wetland Habitat

The rapid lowering of lake levels can produce temporary flooding and unseen damage to downstream creeks, streams and waterways that feed into the TSW system but the rapid drainage of RAFT lakes can also have a siphoning/drainage effect on inland wetland areas and local water tables that supply the lake. Walking along a logging road that connects to Crystal Lake Road we have noticed that creek beds and marsh areas along the roadside are largely dry and the logical conclusion is that the lowering of lake levels has had an impact on a regional, extended water table - resulting in the further destruction of inland wetland habitat. The fact that this damage is not immediately visible or apparent to the majority of waterfront residents is even more worrisome as it is less likely to provoke concern and a demand for water conservation efforts.

3.) Water Conservation

There is a strong possibility that the extremely low levels of lake water that we experienced this year on Crystal Lake are not just part of an historical cycle but a warning of things to come. Low water levels in the Great Lakes and other watershed regions of Ontario may place further demands upon the RAFT lakes and lead to progressively lower levels of water in future years. Climate change, commercial development and population growth in the TSW region will lead to an increased demand for water and the possibility that lake levels will decline further in the future if water management policy changes and/or conservation measures are not developed and implemented now. Water levels affect the immediate needs of cottage property owners and not just in terms of accessing the lake for recreational usage, which can be an issue when water levels change drastically. Water levels have an immediate impact on the environment and local ecosystems and can affect the quantity and quality of the water supply.

Environmental concerns and water conservation policies, rather than economic concerns, must become the focus of the TSW's efforts but this focus must be extended to include the RAFT lakes that supply the system. There is a need for an overall conservation policy and water management plan that serves the needs of the entire watershed region.

Economic Concerns

1.) Lack of Compensation

All RAFT lakes provide a valuable resource to the TSW system through their supply of water and the TSW benefits economically from this resource through the extraction of user fees from recreational boaters, issuing of water permits for water extraction etc. This represents a "one-way" flow of economic resources to the TSW by RAFT lakes with no commensurate compensation or economic return. Water permits are possible only because of the draw-down from reservoir lakes but no money returns to the local municipalities that provide the water. Why are large numbers of residents on RAFT lakes providing subsidization (via a valuable resource and a diminished local economy) to a recreational waterway that benefits a substantially smaller number of users? Why are our local municipalities receiving no compensation – which could help to support municipal budgets - while local residents are feeling the pressures of increased municipal taxes?

Apart from the lack of compensation, there is also "spin-off" economic damage to RAFT lakes resulting from the lowering of water levels. There is a loss of income to local businesses on reservoir and flow-through lakes that experience a "restricted" season caused by a rapid and "early" (mid-August) reduction of lake water levels. Most local marinas and businesses are affected adversely by a shortened boating/fishing/construction/tourism season.

2.) Equity

Even if a tourism economy, rather than environmental concerns, were the sole rationale for the TSW's current water management policies, it would be difficult to defend the heavily "subsidized" tourism economy along the TSW system at the expense of a reduced tourism season and "restricted" local economies in a much larger watershed region that includes hundreds of RAFT lakes, rivers and streams. I doubt that the economic benefits that the TSW system accrues from its users outweigh the losses incurred by the much larger number of RAFT lake residents whose local economies are affected by an artificially "reduced" tourism season.

Safety Concerns

1.) Navigation

The rapid changes in lake levels this year created unpredictable navigational hazards for residents and users of our lake. Hydrographic and navigational charts of the lake would be possible with regulated, controlled changes to lake levels over the course of a season, improving the safety of boat travel on the lake but this is not possible currently with inconsistent and rapid fluctuations in lake water levels. The decision to raise or lower a lake's level is made by the TSW but it can have legal repercussions for cottage associations if accidents occur when lake levels change. It is a federal responsibility for marking waterway hazards but cottage associations often become liable when accidents occur resulting from unmarked lake hazards. The TSW takes no responsibility for marking navigational hazards despite being the main force behind the rapidly fluctuating water levels in RAFT lakes.

2.) Access

Some public access boat launches become unusable at low water levels midway through the summer. Access to water-access cottages therefore becomes restricted/eliminated when water levels decline.

3.) Damage to property

There is a very real potential for damage to private property caused by rapid fluctuations in lake levels. Docks, and boats moored to docks, are particularly at risk. There is also the potential for damage to water, power and telecommunication lines - all of which exist in our lake - when lake water levels are reduced rapidly.

4.) Lack of Consultation/Information

No information is provided by the TSW to lake residents regarding daily/weekly/monthly changes to water levels although it would be extremely easy to provide this information to residents via the Crystal Lake Cottagers' Association webpage or via C.L.C.A.'s email updates. An advance notice of impending changes in water levels would increase the level of safety in navigating the lake. At the very least it would be possible to mark islands and rock outcroppings with buoys if it was known that water levels would be dropping at a specified time and would allow residents the opportunity to take measures to prevent damage to docks and boats.

I believe that there must be a balance established between the needs of the TSW and the needs of a very large population of RAFT lake "stakeholders" who have, until now, been excluded from the TSW's decision making process. In particular, I believe there must be a focus on water conservation measures to ensure a healthy environment for all lakes in the TSW's watershed region. This may require the implementation of new water conservation practices and/or a reduction in the amount of water that is drawn from RAFT lakes in order to serve the needs of a seasonal tourist population and the commercial, industrial and residential interests along the TSW waterway. My hope is that there will be a re-thinking of the TSW's authority, function and mandate and that an overall regional watershed conservation agency will be created that includes all levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal – giving priority to environmental concerns and water conservation practices ahead of purely economic concerns.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make submissions to your Panel.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Russell