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**Cc:**  
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**Subject:** Comments on the Future of the Historic Trent-Severn Waterway

**COMMENTS ON THE FUTURE OF THE HISTORIC TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY**  
Submitted by Ron Breckbill, for The Georgian Bay Township Historical Society

**Introduction**

Since the opening of the Trent Severn Waterway and specifically Lock 45 at Port Severn and the Marine Railway at Big Chute, these sites have been an integral part of our community. Much like the evolution of the construction of the Trent Severn Waterway system, both Lock 45 and the Marine Railway have undergone many changes and, in some cases, growing pains.

As a lifelong resident of Gloucester Pool, a founding member of The Georgian Bay Township Historical Society, and owner and operator of historic Severn Lodge on Gloucester Pool for over 30 years (family owned and run for over 75 years), I have had convenient insight into the operation of the Trent Severn Waterway in our community.

**Scope of Comments**

1. Big Chute and Port Severn physical sites
2. Operation of the TSW as a whole
3. TSW as a neighbour and partner

The Trent-Severn Waterway is, unquestionably, one of Canada's unique marvels and attractions. At the forefront of the waterway's sites are Lock 45, the western gateway, and Big Chute Marine Railway, one of the most unique structures on the system.

The locks at Port Severn are an integral part of the Port Severn community and its' tourist based economy. I think that it is fair to say that, after the heyday of the lumbering era, the locks and waterway and the commerce that was created as a result, have been responsible for the heart and soul of the community. Over the years, the lockmasters and their crew have been respected members of the community and were integral in the well being and maintenance of the area with regards to water control, fisheries, recreation and commerce. Many long time cottagers and businesses have their own "histories" that include the lock, lockmaster and docking at Port Severn.

The Big Chute marine railway and the colourful history that surrounds it could form a book unto itself. The uniqueness of the railway and the abandoned construction site that surrounds it are a rare, physically existing snapshot of the TSW's early history and growing pains. As with Port Severn, the Big Chute community consisting of the hydro facility (once a complete hydro community) and the marine railway were, and are, the centre of this remote, cottage community.

Both of these sites have been well maintained and "modernized" (perhaps too modernized for an Historic waterway) over their lives, and traffic at Port Severn and Big Chute is busy. The boating traffic, while outwardly seeming to be the raison d'etre of the canal, for those of us on the system, is only a minor part of the waterway's mandate. The numerous dam sites creating picturesque waterfalls, the water level maintenance which, once it was altered by the TSW, has become the normal expectations of the thousands of developed waterfront land owners constituting millions of dollars of tax revenue, the tourism the waterway attracts sustaining the economy of the area including the employment for many local area residents and students are just as much a part of the influence that the TSW has had on the community for the past, almost 100 years. Businesses and communities exist today as a result of the Trent Severn Waterway.

While the TSW grew for many different reasons over the vast period of its' construction, Tourism, the

current lifeblood of countless communities and whole areas along the system (including thousands of cottage properties) have come to consider the Trent-Severn Waterway a neighbour and friend along the way.

That feeling in our area was created in the past from contact with the local representatives (lockmaster, workers) at Port Severn and Big Chute, friends and members of the community who could give the help and advice that the local community needed. They had the authority to control the water levels, lock fish through during spawning season, lock a needy boater through "after hours"...basically fulfilling the needs of the local community that they were a part of. For whatever reasons, this is not the case anymore. The authority, along with all of the decisions regarding this historic waterway have become more centralized and isolated from the communities in which they exist. The "look" of the facilities, the operational decisions of individual sites, the policies that are implemented, no longer consider the individual communities in which "OUR WATERWAY" lives.

We all need to become one community again and TSW need to recognize the impact that the waterway has had on the history of the area and what impact it will have on the future and include LOCAL PARTNERS.

Some suggestions would be:

1. Have local, meaningful, participation in decisions that are made regarding physical care and development of the individual sites recognizing the significant part that the TSW has played in many local families histories and capitalize on their connection to these sites.
2. Delegate more operational and decision making authority to the staff at the sites who are more "in tune" with the communities' needs.
3. Publicize the sites along the roadways in a manner befitting the significance of the waterway. (many sites, including Port Severn are not well marked and can be difficult to find.
4. Coordinate yourselves with Provincial, Municipal and local organizations in the area to maximize the feeling of "ownership" and pride of these sites.
5. Streamline the bureaucracy of the TSW so that it becomes more approachable by all the stakeholders, especially landowners along the system.

#### In conclusion

We, as The Georgian Bay Township Historical Society are proud to have two wonderful TSW sites in the area we call home. We have even taken what was the original lockmaster's office from Lock 45 and moved it to our historic Bressette Homestead site (next to the municipal offices on Lone Pine Road) and restored it to its original condition. We hope to expand our TSW displays over time. There is no question that the building of the Trent Severn system as a whole, but specifically for us, Port Severn and Big Chute, has been hugely influential in the historic development of the area and will continue on to be a major driving force far into the future. This waterway is one of Canada's beautiful crown jewels and is unrivalled in the world. In today's hectic ways of the world, a "sense of being" and "establishment" are becoming a rare commodity. Historic sites and structures are being destroyed for the sake of progress at an alarming rate and we, as Canadians and stakeholders in this vast historic site can be very proud of its' existence. Actually being able to become a meaningful part of its' future direction and preservation can only be a good thing. Preserving visual history has not been a high priority in Canada as it has, for example, in Europe where preserved structures and sites have become huge tourist attractions. Combined with nature's beauty and our forefather's ingenuity and foresight in the construction of the waterway, we all have the opportunity to work towards this goal for the TSW in Canada by combining our efforts and presenting this wonder at its' historic best... comfort food for the eyes.

Respectively submitted,

Ron Breckbill  
The Georgian Bay Township Historical Society

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