



WHITE LAKE PRESERVATION PROJECT

White Lake Preservation Project
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Hon. Rod Phillips
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
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On November 9th 2018, Randy Hillier, MPP for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston wrote asking you to repeal Section 21.1 (3) of the Conservation Authorities Act, the part of the Act that allows Conservation Authorities to enter into a memorandum of understanding with a municipality to provide programs and services on behalf of that municipality. The services provided by the Conservation Authorities include advice to municipalities related to “natural heritage (wetlands, woodlands, and valley lands), hydrogeology (potable water and surface and groundwater quality and quantity), stormwater management (flood and erosion control and water quality with respect to aquatic health) and in some cases sewage systems.”

We are writing on behalf of the White Lake Preservation Project (WLPP) to provide you with a perspective in support of Section 21.1 (3), based on our experience. We believe that lake and watershed stewardship is greatly enhanced through Conservation Authorities, especially in situations where a water body requires remedial and immediate action and where it crosses governance boundaries. Consequently, we fully support the observations highlighted in the responses from the Rideau Valley and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authorities and the Friends of the Tay Watershed to Mr. Hillier’s correspondence.

White Lake is within the boundaries of 2 counties, Lanark and Renfrew, and 4 Municipalities, Mississippi Mills, Lanark Highlands, McNab Braeside and Greater Madawaska. White Lake is not within a Conservation Authority. The counties and municipalities do not communicate regarding development decisions that impact the Lake. The following are some of the issues on the lake that are not being addressed adequately at any level of government.

1. Significant Deterioration of White Lake

White Lake, one of the largest lakes in Eastern Ontario, has experienced significant deterioration in the last 5 years. This conclusion comes from data collected over the course of 5 years by our ambitious volunteer program of sampling and observation. Our data and reports are carried out by scientific experts, reviewed by scientific experts and are available on our website. (www.WLPP.ca).

2. White Lake is at Capacity for Development

The 2 indicators for a body of water at capacity are high phosphorous levels and algal blooms both of which are common on White Lake.

3. Significant Algal Blooms since 2013

The years 2013, 14 and 15 witnessed Lake-wide blue-green algal blooms at least one of which was highly toxic (verified by MOE). In 2018 we had 3 separate green algal blooms and 2 toxic blue-green blooms, the latter tested by the province and the presence of a toxin (microcystin) confirmed at levels 20 times the accepted provincial standard.

4. Rapid Changes as a result of the Introduction of Zebra Mussels

In 2015 zebra mussels were identified in White Lake for the first time and since then the population has exploded. As a result, the lake water has become much clearer, and phosphorous is being redistributed from the water column to the near shore sediments. This has led to a significant change in both the timing and nature of algal blooms between those of 2013 - 15 and 2018 and the species of toxin-producing algae. The impact of clear water and redistributed phosphorous on vegetative growth is covered in number 5 below.

5. Increase in Aquatic Vegetation Growth

The changes in the lake resulting from the zebra mussel invasion include much denser aquatic plant growth, (both native and introduced) in the parts of the lake favoured for swimming and fishing. As this is a shallow lake it includes a very significant proportion of the Lake.

6. Threats to Wildlife Stemming from Introduction of additional Alien Species

In addition to zebra mussels there are at least 2 other introduced species, spiny water flea and Eurasian water milfoil, in the lake. This lake supports an active sport fishery. It is threatened by the potential introduction of round goby and rusty crayfish both used by fisherman as bait and illegally released. No government has introduced any measures to protect the lake from further invasions.

7. Uncontrolled Use of Boat launches and Unsupervised Campsites

We also have a problem with public boat launches, now unsupervised by MNRF, and unsupervised campsites. Some groups have taken to camping at launch

sites with tents and trailers. It has made it extremely difficult to launch a boat, or to park trailers and vehicles for a day of fishing. There are also individuals who take over these unofficial camp sites for long periods. There are no toilet facilities at these sites which is making them unpleasant, and an environmental hazard.

8. Ice Fishing

Ice fishing is becoming an issue with more and larger huts. There has always been a problem of garbage, and human waste being left on the ice by some fisherman, but it is now becoming of real concern.

9. Intensified Sport Fishery

White Lake is experiencing a greater number of sport fishing derbies with corresponding greater enrolments. It is not unusual to experience an onslaught of 60 or more high speed sport fishing craft. On several occasions multiple competitions have occurred on the same day. Multiple forms of stresses are introduced to the lake including the increased risk of invasive species being introduced to the lake. These activities are in practice unsupervised. There is no evidence that those who organize, host or participate in these events put any effort into prevention measures.

Some changes to the lake are undoubtedly partially resulting from global warming but the situation is greatly exacerbated by a lack of oversight and meaningful planning on the Lake.

The White Lake Preservation Project has on many occasions tried to engage your Ministry (Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry with little success. In our experience the scope of engagement of these Departments was superficial, limited largely to policy and little to actual research, data and site evaluation, decision making and enforcement. The net effect is that without the oversight of a Conservation Authority a watershed becomes more vulnerable to irresponsible development.

We have also found that municipalities, especially those that do not have the benefit of the expertise of a Conservation Authority, interpret their By-laws very broadly, allowing too much continued intensification, too close to water bodies and too much destruction of riparian zones, allowing for substantial run-off resulting in pollutants entering the water and the changes we have noted above.

The importance of preserving the integrity of wetlands, lakes and rivers is addressed at great length in the Provincial Policy Statement and even in the individual county and municipal Official Plans. The municipalities we have dealt with are not convinced that there is merit in protecting what in some Townships is their main source of tax income.

Mr. Hillier's Riding encompasses one of the richest and most ecologically diversified ridings in the province. The close proximity to the US border and the major cities of Ottawa, Kingston and also to the Kawarthas make it one of the most important recreational tourist attractions in the province. It therefore is regrettable that Mr. Hillier would propose weakening the only authorities whose role is to protect the viability of these important resources.

Recently we received an invitation from a group on the Madawaska Watershed, which also does not have a Conservation Authority. They have asked us to participate in a coalition to tackle environmental issues in our common water-shed. They also speak with firsthand knowledge of the consequences of poor and uninformed decisions that wreak untold damage. In the case of their Muskrat Lake it is now impossible to swim or to use its waters for household purposes. Fishing is restricted to catch and release as the fish are too toxic to eat.

Mr. Phillips, we strongly appeal to you to have your Department do more to protect lakes and shoreline from poor development, by ensuring stricter adherence to the Provincial Policy Statement, and to Official Plans and By-laws, and to not weaken the small amount of protection left.

Sincerely,

Janet Taylor, Director WLPP

cc

Randy Hillier, MPP, Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston

Hon. John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority

Friends of the Tay Watershed

Lanark and Renfrew Counties

Municipalities of Mississippi Mills, Lanark Highlands, McNab Braeside, Greater Madawaska