



## 2023 Pre-Budget Consultations

### Muskoka Lakes Association

Deborah Martin-Downs, Past-President

Box 298, 65 Joseph St. Port Carling,

Ontario, Canada POB 1J0 Phone

(705) 765-5723

The Muskoka Lakes Association is a volunteer membership-based organization advocating for responsible stewardship and enjoyment of the unique environment of the Muskoka Lakes.

Our priorities are:

- To Monitor, communicate and advocate for Muskoka's natural environment,
- To Advocate on behalf of all Muskoka property owners for responsible land use and reasonable taxation,
- To Promote the Muskoka Lakes culture and give back to the greater Muskoka community, and
- To Increase partnerships with like-minded organizations throughout Muskoka to advocate and educate collectively on important Muskoka matters.



February 12, 2023

Ernie Hardeman, MPP, Chair  
Standing Committee on Finance and  
Economic Affairs  
Via Standing Committee website

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy  
Minister of Finance  
c/o Budget Secretariat  
via email [submissions@onario.ca](mailto:submissions@onario.ca)

Dear Sirs:

Re: 2023 Pre-Budget Consultations. Province of Ontario

**Recommendation:**

The Muskoka Lakes Association is requesting that the Province of Ontario **continue to provide 5 million dollars in annual funding** for the Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative supported by the recommendations of the Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group in their report *Interim Advice and Recommendations to Address Priority Environmental Issues in the Muskoka River Watershed June 2019* to continue the assessment, design and implementation of solutions to address flood risk in the Muskoka River Watershed. This funding will ensure the initial investment by the province delivers value for the people of Ontario.

**Background:**

In August 2018, Ontario announced a \$5 million Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative to better identify risks and issues facing the Muskoka Region. A year later it appointed the Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group (MWAG) to provide advice and recommendations to help protect and conserve the Muskoka Watershed and support the economic growth of the region.

Their report *Interim Advice and Recommendations to Address Priority Environmental Issues in the Muskoka River Watershed* was released in June of 2020. They identified priority geographic areas and issues in the Muskoka River watershed and recommended projects promoting integrated watershed management, flood mitigation and watershed enhancement.



This report identified serious concerns for the watershed, in addition to flooding, and highlighted the need for integrated watershed management.

### **Current Situation:**

Based on the MWAG report, the Province and District of Muskoka settled on 12 projects to be funded from the \$5 million pledge, while the Town of Bracebridge lead another.

These projects begin laying the foundation for a comprehensive approach to watershed management, encompassing land-use decisions, the environment, infrastructure and broader public policy options, and some projects support early action on flood reduction. The flood management projects provide an initial high-level analysis of possible actions which need further analysis, information, assessment, design, approvals and potentially construction. **The province has helped identify possibilities that without continued investment may result in some of the initial investment being squandered.**

The District of Muskoka has led the initiation of the first phase of the projects but continued progress will not be made without committed funding to allow for staffing, planning and execution. While some of the projects undertaken fall solely within the purview of the District and local municipalities to fund, many others specifically related to managing flood risk are the shared responsibility of the provincial and federal government.

Muskoka has experienced 3 floods in the past decade and time is of the essence to act. We are already experiencing the effects of climate change and flood prevention, mitigation and preparedness are the first three pillars of emergency management in Ontario.

### **Responsibility of the Government:**

“The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) is the provincial lead for seven hazards, including floods. While the MNRF plays a major role in flood response and response support, the MNRF’s current approach focuses on prevention—keeping people out of harm’s way and minimizing



loss of human life, injury, damage to property and the environment, and mitigation of economic and social disruption through a range of legislative, policy and technical mechanisms” (Ontario’s Special Advisor on Flooding *Report to Government: An Independent Review of the 2019 Flood Events in Ontario* O’Neill, 2019).

In the absence of a conservation authority in Muskoka, the responsibility for flood management falls to the Province. As the O’Neill report notes, “resilient infrastructure that helps communities cope with the intensifying effects of climate change and floods has become a key area for targeted investment for Ministry of Infrastructure in recent years’. Historic investment in flood mitigation infrastructure, such as dams, dikes, flood channels and shoreline protection, has delivered structural solutions to reduce flood risk to existing and new developments in floodplains. This broad approach has served the province well. While these policies and mitigative activities have made Ontario a leader across Canada, it is clear that Ontarians continue to be significantly impacted by flood events and the costs associated with these impacts continue to mount. “

“Flooding has emerged as a significant priority for all levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) in Canada, as evidence shows that existing efforts to reduce its growing social and economic impacts are proving insufficient. Government payments for recovery increased tenfold between 2005 and 2014, largely driven by flooding. Between 2017 and 2022, annual recovery costs for the federal government are expected to average CAD 902 million, with CAD 673 million attributable to flood events. This substantially exceeds the CAD 100 million budgeted annually for the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (DFAA) programme (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) 2016). Similar to public losses, insured losses have also increased substantially from an average of CAD 405 million annually between 1983 and 2008 to over CAD 1.8 billion between 2009 and 2018 largely driven by water damage. These losses substantially underestimate the total out-of-pocket costs of flooding in Canada, which were recently estimated at almost CAD 600 million annually.” (*Flood Risk Management in Canada*, The Geneva Association, Maryam Golnaraghi, The Geneva Association, Jason Thistlethwaite, University of Waterloo, Daniel Henstra, University of Waterloo and Craig Stewart, Insurance Bureau of Canada, December 2020).



Muskoka will benefit from an investment in watershed and flood management. The province will benefit from a reduced burden on disaster relief funds, interruptions to key services and impacts on infrastructure.

It is time for the province to invest in Muskoka, as it has in other regions of the province, with targeted and consistent contributions to complete projects it has already supported, to keep our communities safe and resilient. **Continue the \$5 million contribution annually for 5 years to allow for planning and execution of key flood risk projects.**

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Deborah Martin-Downs'.

Deborah Martin-Downs  
Past-President

c.c. Graydon Smith, MPP and Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry  
Jeff Lehman, Chair District of Muskoka