

Ministry of Natural
Resources and Forestry

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Muskoka Lakes Association
Box 298 Port Carling ON
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February 28, 2017

Attention: Bob Ensor, President

RE: Request to Adjust Target level for Lake Muskoka/Muskoka River Water Management Plan.

Dear Mr. Ensor,

Thank you for your letter of February 8, 2017 in which you suggest a proposal for mitigating observed changes in regional climate with the objective of lessening the amount and duration of high water exposure for shoreline structures.

I understand that your proposal suggests an earlier start date for winter drawdown of controlled lake levels; a lower drawdown target water level for Lake Muskoka; that your proposal acknowledges it would only be applicable to 'normal' spring snow conditions. I appreciate the thoughtful and collaborative approach the MLA has taken to provide this proposal and can report that I have met with our technical experts and operational staff to discuss the proposal.

At the time of our meeting on February 21, Lake Muskoka water levels were at an elevation of 225.0 and trending down as we target an elevation of 224.9 on or about March 15. These lake levels are in response to the watershed conditions and accumulated snowpack. Additionally, we must consider impacts of low water beyond targets such as natural values, including lake trout, hydro power production obligations and near shore critical infrastructure including water intake lines.

As was discussed in our meeting last August and summarized in my August 24, 2016 letter to Lawton Osler, Chair of MLA's Water Level Task Force, in an average or 'normal' spring, high water levels and flooding are not a concern within the watershed. It is the unpredictable "extreme" conditions such as an unseasonable warm spell causing sudden melt, alone or in combination with significant rainfall which can increase the potential for high water or flooding. In these circumstances, in a cascading watershed such as the Muskoka River system, there is a certain threshold at which point there is simply not enough storage space in the watershed to prevent high water or flooding. While dams may provide limited relief from flooding, ministry dams were not built to be flood control structures and do not have the capacity to store or hold back flood waters.

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When known abnormal winters or watershed conditions exist, the operating plans for MNRF controlled lakes include provisions to adjust the March drawdown timings and levels. MNRF staff monitor a variety of indicators including: snow and rain accumulation, snow moisture content, ground conditions, river flows through the winter, long-range and seasonal weather forecasts. When watershed conditions dictate, MNRF has adjusted operations to provide for lower drawdown levels. However, this is only done if conditions warrant as there can be significant negative impacts as stated earlier.

In closing, we are committed to continue to work collaboratively and encourage the MLA to work with municipalities to address municipal planning and approvals processes, as they apply to development on properties within flood hazard lands (flood plains, flood fringe and shorelines).

I continue to commit my staff to assist the MLA in your effort to share information with your members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Duggan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dan Duggan
District Manager