

The Honourable John Yakabuski,
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

October 4, 2019

The Honourable Jeff Yurek,
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks

Dear Ministers Yakabuski and Yurek:

Re: Muskoka River Water Management Plan Update and Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative

As you are both aware, the Muskoka region has suffered an unprecedented 3 significant flood events over the past 6 springs. The impacts to our communities and waterfront property owners have been substantial and repeated. The Muskoka Lakes Association, representing over 2500 families on the Muskoka Lakes, has been urging the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to take action since 2016, without success. We were encouraged when the new government, through the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks, announced shortly after being elected, that \$5 million dollars would be invested in a Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative. Maybe our concerns for water level management had been finally heard.

We are writing to you both today as you both have role to play in the future management of the Muskoka Watershed.

Water levels in the Muskoka Lakes are controlled under the Muskoka River Water Management Plan (MRWMP). The MRWMP had an expiry date of 2016. We were advised in early 2016 that it would be renewed for a further 5 years and then a decision for no update (*"Maintaining Water Management Plans Technical Bulletin"*). Despite repeated requests from the MLA, one of the stakeholders of the MRWMP, MNRF has steadfastly refused to initiate an update to the plan.

It is clear now that the Muskoka River Water Management Plan needs to be revised to reflect our new climate reality and to incorporate the Bala Falls Hydroelectric Plant.

The base model for the Muskoka River plan was set up to simulate the period 1970-2000 and much of the data used in the model was current as of late 1990s, over 20 years ago. Much has changed since then. Climate conditions have changed according to many sources, including the Ministry of Natural Resources (Climate change projections for Ontario: An updated synthesis for policymakers and planners, 2015). Their results show significant changes are expected in future years (2011-2040, 2041-2070 and 2071- 2100) when compared with the baseline period 1971-2000 (coincidentally the same baseline period in the MRWMP). They predict that air temperatures will be 2-7 degrees warmer in summer. Winter temperatures are projected to increase, on average by 2.5 to 2.8° in the 2020s.

Another new report focused on the Muskoka Region on the impact of climate change is well documented in the Planning for Climate Change in Muskoka report, published by the Muskoka Watershed Council, 2016 (www.muskokawatershed.org).

This sets the stage for increased lake-effect snow and/or winter rain in the Muskoka River basin.

Extreme events are becoming more common and WMP's need to have management scenarios to address this risk. MNRF needs the weather forecasting tools and models to provide for increased lead times for heavy rains. It is our understanding that MNRF staff do not even have the model used to develop the MRWMP to assist them in managing this complex basin. All this means that we need to update the MRWMP sooner than later and determine if changes in the system operations are warranted.

Having said all this, the Water Management Plan only looks water levels to support recreational boating, fisheries and hydro power generation. There are many other aspects of a watershed that contribute to the control of water levels in the lakes. Further, water quality in our lakes is equally important as are fisheries, wildlife and forests.

We agree with the *Made in Ontario Environment Plan* that “effective watershed management is important to the people in our communities, especially at times when watersheds are facing stresses such as increased development and flooding caused by severe weather events”... and that we need to “develop a more comprehensive approach to watershed management, which can inform current actions and future development”

Watershed plans are essential tools to allow us to see the current condition of our systems and predict the future conditions, with various mitigation or management tools applied. The MRWMP should be updated as a component under the Watershed Plan. The Muskoka Lakes are a significant driver of the economy in central Ontario and it is time that we were provided with the same management tools that watersheds to the south have. No longer can the environmental conditions of Muskoka be managed with an army of volunteers and outdated data and models.

Hence, the MLA is requesting that the MECP allocate a significant portion of the \$5million Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative to developing a MUSKOKA LAKES WATERSHED PLAN, incorporating an updated Muskoka River Water Management Plan. Further, the MLA urges the Province to advance the work on this plan immediately to ensure that property, tourism and infrastructure are protected in Muskoka. The MLA is ready and willing to assist the province in this important endeavour.

We would be happy to meet with you or your representatives to in support of developing the scope of this plan.

Yours very truly,



Lawton Osler, President

c.c. Katie Edwards, General Manager, MLA
MPP Norm Miller
John Klink, Chair District of Muskoka
Kevin Trimble, Chair, Muskoka Watershed Council