



MNR6446MC-2017-301

JUL 28 2017

Mr. Robert Ensor  
President  
Muskoka Lakes Association  
Box 298  
Port Carling ON P0B 1J0

Dear Mr. Ensor:

Thank you for your letters of February 15, 2017 and March 31, 2017 requesting to meet regarding the Muskoka River Water Management Plan (MRWMP). Although I regret the delay in responding, I am pleased that my staff was able to meet with you on my behalf in the interim.

While I understand your concerns about high water levels, I would like to reiterate that flood control is not a goal of the MRWMP. The plan applies to normal conditions and recognizes that unusually high rainfall or snowmelt can result in high water and/or flooding. The plan identifies that 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. They can regulate flows but do not prevent flooding.

I also understand there is a belief that adjusting the MRWMP would prevent flooding when an extreme or abnormal weather event occurs. However, even if these events could be predicted, additional or earlier lake drawdowns would not minimize or reduce peak water levels during a true flood event. When preparing for spring freshet, water control structures are set for optimal discharge early in the winter. During this time, it can be expected that discharge will increase as lake levels rise and lake levels will rise where inflows from a storm event or sudden snowmelt are greater than discharge flows.

The MRWMP did not change the operating zones for controlled lakes. The operating zones remained unchanged from the previous operating direction dating back to 1969. Through the planning process, numerous studies considered existing municipal land use policies, existing infrastructure around the lakes, habitat requirements for a variety of fish and wildlife, and the impacts of water levels on ecosystems, such as wetlands and shore lands of lakes and rivers. The water management planning process, which took three and a half years, was an extensive process that incorporated input from the public, stakeholders and the municipality. The result of this planning process considered values for fish, wildlife, socio-economic and water control infrastructure.

Flooding is a natural event that typically occurs when extremely high or fast river flows, created by rapid snow pack melt and/or significantly heavy rainfall, cause water levels to surpass bank-full conditions and inundate low lying areas. Flooding impacts typically occur along shorelines of lakes and in the floodplain of rivers at flood-prone locations that have been developed over time. As long as people continue to build in these areas, there will continue to be impacts caused by flooding, including damage to shoreline infrastructure.

I am confident the operating plans and objectives of the MRWMP and supporting dam operation manuals are sound, and that all measures at our disposal are carried out every year to mitigate the impacts of high water. Accordingly, aside from administrative changes to incorporate new, mandatory policies regarding the long-term maintenance of existing water management plans, my ministry has no plans to initiate a process to revise the MRWMP. My ministry recently released technical bulletins in relation to the *Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act* and *Maintaining Water Management Plans*.

Prevention is the highest priority in protecting people and property from risks posed by water-related natural hazards, such as flooding and erosion. In Ontario, prevention is achieved principally through municipal land use planning and zoning consistent with natural hazards policies (section 3.1 of the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014). In other parts of southern Ontario, conservation authorities also implement a shared provincial-municipal program in natural hazard management that includes flood forecasting and warning, ice management, operation, and maintenance of flood and erosion control structures. Conservation authorities are well positioned for this role as they operate in a coordinated manner across broad watershed-based jurisdictions. You may wish to discuss the potential for a conservation authority with your local municipal officials. Under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, a new conservation authority can be formed at the request of two or more municipalities and with the approval of the province.

Should you require further clarification on these issues, please contact Dan Duggan, District Manager, Parry Sound District, at (705) 773-4236 or [dan.duggan@ontario.ca](mailto:dan.duggan@ontario.ca) to discuss this matter further. I appreciate that you have reached out to my office, and trust that my response has addressed your concerns.

Thank you again for writing.

Best,



Kathryn McGarry  
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

c: John Klinck, Chair, District of Muskoka  
Don Furniss, Mayor, Township of Muskoka Lakes  
Graydon Smith, Mayor, Town of Bracebridge  
Paisley Donaldson, Mayor, Town of Gravenhurst

Jamie McGarvey, Mayor, Town of Parry Sound

Bruce Gibbon, Mayor, Seguin Township

Scott Aitchison, Mayor, Town of Huntsville

Michael Hart, Past President, Muskoka Lakes Association

Terry Rees, Executive Director, Federation of Ontario Cottagers Association

Norm Miller, MPP, Parry Sound-Muskoka

Dan Duggan, District Manager, Parry Sound District

Jennifer Keyes, Manager, Water Resources Section