

Maintaining Federal Management of Canadian Inland Waterways

2007

Canadian Inland Waterways from coast to coast have long been transportation routes for vessels both industrial and recreational. The global uniqueness of our waterway systems both natural and man-made is truly the envy of the world. Few systems affect so many levels of our economy whether they be industrial, recreational (tourism), environmental (water management and ecology) and historic values. Indeed, eight of Canada's one hundred and forty federal historic sites are National Canal Systems. Over the past several years, our waterways have continued to grow in recreational traffic and are now primarily tourist attractions for Canadians and international visitors. Our waterway systems unfortunately have also continued to receive less and less federal funding year after year. Because of this lack of funding, both for maintenance and enforcement, our waterways are now facing deterioration of their natural habitat and their manmade assets at an alarming rate. For example, the Trent-Severn Waterway which travels 386 kms through Ontario connecting Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay and which is over 100 years old has been left in disrepair and it is estimated that over 400 million dollars is required in a short term manner to bring the waterway back to a manageable state. Coupled with reductions in operating funds, the Trent-Severn has shortened work days and its operating season resulting in less revenue. Additionally, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has also because of funding cuts drastically reduced the amount of inspectors and officers that patrol our national waterways. There are several concerns over our waterways, but the two most alarming involve: 1) The current lack of funding for waterway management and enforcement and 2) the possible downloading of waterway systems to local municipalities.

We have outlined several concerns regarding the current and possible state of our national waterways.

1. As our waterways have become primarily recreational routes for both local and international visitors, the lack of funding and possible reallocation of management would have an unfathomable impact on the tourist economy of the towns and cities that border the waterways and rely on this influx of seasonal money. As the condition of the waterways continues to deteriorate, tourist traffic would surely decline and whole communities would suffer. In several communities along Canadian waterways, over 75 % of the local businesses rely on the condition of the waterways for fishing, boating and shopping. Recreational fishing for example accounts for a very large portion of tourism dollars with over 750,000 foreign fishers coming to Canada every year. These visitors spend annually in excess of \$650 million dollars for food, lodging, transportation and fishing supplies.
2. The infrastructure of man made lock systems which are now over 100 years old have continually deteriorated to the point where on a national scale several hundred million dollars needs to be spent to bring these systems back to a safe working order. These operating deficiencies are a direct result of lack of current funding and poor long term planning by Parks Canada. If these deficiencies would be passed along to local municipalities that border the waterways, it is certain that they could not manage the increased capital expenditures. The expenditures are far beyond the mandate of a municipality. The increased tax burdens to local municipalities for the costs of improvements would hurt the local businesses and individuals that rely on these very water systems.
3. The management of our National waterways has been the responsibility of Parks Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. As the waterways continue to adapt and change based on several factors including urbanization, declining infrastructure and global

climate change, the national departments in charge of their operations have been slow to adapt to meet the changing needs of the waterways.

4. The continued use of land adjacent to the waterways has promoted the deterioration of their banks and the decline in habitats for the waterways fragile ecosystems. Several species are currently at risk of extinction and as development continues, many more species will be lost. Because of the nature of the waterways as recreational, many cottages and developments have been built along the waterways, contributing to difficulty in controlling water levels and flow rates.
5. As the erosion of our waterways continues, so to does the deposit of sediments along the waterway. Along many rivers, including the Fraser River in British Columbia and the Mackenzie River in the Northwest Territories, sediments deposits are so high that it consistently jeopardizes the flow of navigational channels to allow boats passage. The transport of sediment along our waterways also contributes to the disruption of energy production and disturbs the fish and aquatic habitat.
6. Currently, to access many of the waterways in our Country, 'user fees' have been enforced to contribute to the management of the systems. These user fees have the ability to have traffic and usage decline on the waterways if they continue to rise to unattainable rates. This would have the reverse goal of providing income for the sustainability of the waterways. Included under user fees are licenses for watercraft, fishing and permits as well as lockage fees.

Recommendations

That the federal government:

1. Immediately increase capital and operational funding to the necessary national departments to improve the quality of our national waterways. This funding would need to be distributed for:
 - a) Repairing and upgrading waterway assets including locks and buildings surrounding locks
 - b) Improving navigational markers
 - c) Improving monitoring and compliance for fishing and boating practices as well as shoreline development
 - d) Increasing staff to lengthen operating hours and season, ultimately to increase revenue
2. Restructure the departments responsible for the maintenance of national waterways to properly reflect the changes in the usage of our waterways. A clear definition of roles for each department needs to be included for the most efficient management to occur.
3. Make a clear commitment to maintain ownership and management of all national waterways and that no maintenance or services be downloaded to provincial, municipal or local government.
4. Re-invest monies to our national waterways to reduce liability, comply with current codes and increase revenue by marketing to domestic and international visitors.