

Jan. 30, 2008

Peter Chown  
1 Ripley Ave., #505,  
Toronto, M6S 4Z6,  
416 767 7979

The Honourable Donna Cansfield  
Minister of Natural Resources  
6630 Whitney Block, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
99 Wellesley St. W.  
Toronto, Ontario,  
M7A 1W3

Dear Donna

Congratulations on your new portfolio. You have had an exciting journey since Metro negotiations. It is wonderful to see folks like you and Kathleen, with such a community based experience, as major players in our Provincial cabinet.

The purpose of my letter is to briefly share with you some of the background and current issues surrounding the proposed management plan for the *Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park* [KHSSP] and request a meeting with you to discuss these issues and offer some strategies that may help move the process forward in a timely and positive way.

I think it is fair to say that I can share with you a commonly held, local, point of view that is the result of years of experience and careful consideration.

My relevant experience on this subject includes:

- Owning a cottage in the site for the past 50 years.
- Executive member of the Long Lake Cottagers' Association for many years.
- Involved in the management of the Long Lake Access Point [via an MNR LUP] for over 20 years. [This is the busiest single access point in the site.]
- Presented at the Saint Lawrence Roundtable hearings representing the township sponsored community group.
- Served on the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Local Stakeholder Committee [LSC], chaired by Sissy Tanner, until I withdrew for health reasons.
- Founding member of the Stakeholder Groups of the Kawartha Highlands [SGKH].
- Executive member of the Federation of Ontario Cottage Associations [FOCA].
- Executive member of the North Kawartha Lakes Association [NORKLA].
- Actively fish, hunt, snowmobile, ski, hike etc. in the site.
- Have taken part in volunteer rescue and fire fighting activities in the site.

Donna, there has been strong local support for the protection of the site going back to the St. Lawrence Round Table. The local vision was to maintain, protect and enhance the physical, cultural and recreational aspects of the site as it is for generations to come.

The previous government struck the Local Stakeholder Committee [LSC] in recognition of the local involvement and concern. This was met with initial enthusiasm but soon the LSC was perceived as wanting to make the site into a traditional provincial park. The concern of the local stakeholders and traditional users was that a park would result in an unnecessary ban on many activities enjoyed for generations within the site.

When it became apparent that the voices of the local stakeholders were not being heard, the *Stakeholder Groups of the Kawartha Highlands* [SGKH] was formed to truly represent the local stakeholders who have been the stewards of the land for over 100 years. This group includes members from all the major local stakeholder groups including: over 500 cottagers, 50 plus recreational hunting camps, anglers, trappers, bear license operators, commercial operators, the Reeves of the two townships encompassing the KHSSP and representation from the *Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters* [OFAH].

Once again the previous government acknowledged the arguments of the local stakeholders and traditional users by bringing forward the Recreation Reserve Act. This was an attempt to create a new land use designation that would protect the land and the traditional activities outside of the provincial park system. It was hastily prepared legislation doomed to political failure.

However the concept was not lost and MPP Chris Hodgson assured those with concerns that a UNIQUE park could be created that would protect BOTH the ecological integrity of the site and its traditional activities. The result was the Charter and Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park Act [KHSSP Act].

The fact that the SGKH and OFAH took part in all Charter negotiations also demonstrates the previous government's regard for their concerns. At this time the SGKH and OFAH are the only two active signatories to the Charter.

It is the opinion of the SGKH that the proposed *Preliminary Park Management Plan* [PPMP] contradicts the Charter in significant ways and has yet again resulted in significant concern and mistrust. Typically the contradictions relate to the banning of traditional activities supposedly protected under the Charter and KHSSP Act. We understand that the OFAH has expressed similar concerns.

Having been at the negotiating table I am very sensitive to the growing frustrations and mistrust, expressed by the local stakeholders, when it appears that the Charter is not being respected and the promises are not being kept.

It is important to understand that the traditional recreational activities that have historically taken place are not an ecological threat to the site. In fact the site is in better shape now than any time in the last 100 years. No doubt in a 35,000 h site a few examples can be found of areas in need of rehabilitation but by and large protection should be targeted at preventing future over-use and abuse – not on banning harmless traditional activities.

Another concern of local stakeholders was that provincial parks are expensive to operate and attract visitors resulting potential abuse and over-use.

It was and is obvious that as the site is already at or near capacity, has numerous established access points and is spread over a large area, the cost of managing this site as a provincial park would be many times the potential income received from user fees.

Having already seen the disastrous results of the non-operating Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park local stakeholders demanded that the Charter guarantee that the new park be sufficiently funded to be an operating provincial park.

MPP Chris Hodgson stated that 6 million dollars would be set aside to develop the infrastructure and to operate the park.

It would appear that this is a promise the government can not afford, therefore, any management plan will need to rely on the continued stewardship support of the local stakeholders who have a vested interest in the long term protection of the site. In fact the SGKH has presented a detailed sustainable management plan that to date has not been acknowledged or discussed. Without sufficient funding for core staff and infrastructure and a strong commitment to engage the support of the local stewards of the land, the protection of the site will be in great jeopardy.

During Charter negotiations both Chris Hodgson and Sissy Tanner stated that two new roads would be constructed, one on the east side and one on the west. It was also stated that cottage roads, whether they be private or municipal paid for by cottagers, would not be used for park entrances. The Charter provided a watered-down version of these promises. If new roads are not constructed it is essential that sufficient funds be allocated to upgrade municipal roads, construct sufficient parking and provide for appropriate staff to supervise major park entrances and services such as fire and rescue, waste management etc.

The Charter documents the main elements of the agreement reached in the focused discussions related to the establishment, and long- term sustainable management and use of the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park. The OFAH and SGKH, worked hard to ensure that the Charter protected the continuation of traditional activities in part for the future stewardship by local stakeholders and traditional users to assist with search and rescue, reporting abusive use, extinguishing campfires etc.

There is much local speculation on how the PPMP could deviate from the Charter to such an extent. It is, therefore of great concern, as stated at the open houses, that the proposed next step in the development of the final plan would not provide another opportunity for public consultation before the final plan is approved. In that the PPMP requires such a major overhaul, there needs to be another opportunity for public consultation.

It is also clear that the Charter must be attached as an appendix to the final plan and all future revisions to the plan to help prevent further deviations in the future.

Donna, I look forward to an opportunity to discuss the enclosed with you. Focusing on the next steps in the process would be most beneficial especially since members of the SGKH have been active proponents as volunteers and cooperative contributors to and throughout the entire process.

Major challenges include:

- Reestablish the Charter and KHSSP Act as the cornerstones of the management plan.
- Provide an opportunity for consultation on the next version of the PPMP.

Your leadership in this important issue can lead to an agreement that will ensure a better, fully viable and cherished future for the KHSS. We believe that is what everyone wants and deserves.

I have attached a detailed list of concerns with the PPMP that have been identified by the two Charter signatories, who are directly connected to the KHSS, namely the SGKH and the OFAH.

Peter Chown

cc. Mr. Kevin Wilson, Assistant Deputy Minister  
Adair Ireland Smith, Ontario Parks  
Dave Coulas, Park Superintendent  
OFAH