



December 12, 2005

19 Edgewcombe Ave.
Toronto M5N 2X1

Richard Doucette, Assistant Park Planner
Ontario Parks, Central Zone
451 Arrowhead Park Rd., R.R.#3
Huntsville, ON P1H 2J4

Fax: (705) 789-5948

Email: richard.doucette@mnr.gov.on.ca Re : EBR Reg# PB01E3011

Mr. Doucette:

The Georgian Bay Association is an umbrella group established in 1916 that now represents 22 resident associations and 17,000 residents along the littoral of the eastern and northern shores of Georgian Bay and adjacent waterways. Our mission statement is “to work with our water-based communities and other stakeholders to ensure the careful stewardship of the greater Georgian Bay environment and to promote the quiet enjoyment of its diverse and finite spaces.”

The GBA has taken an interest in the proposed changes to the O’Donnell Point Provincial Nature Reserve since the Ministry of Natural Resources went public with its plans more than six years ago. We have acted as a liaison with four of our member associations in the immediate area and have offered our own opinion on the various plans presented over the years.

As this process appears to be nearing completion with the release of the *Draft Supplement to the Final Environmental Study Report for O’Donnell Point*, the GBA believes the federal and Ontario governments need to use this unprecedented land transfer to correct some historical oversights made by past governments.

The first oversight was made a century ago when the Moose Deer Point First Nation was established in three separate tracts of land. The GBA supports the First Nation’s desire to have a contiguous community, both for its social and economic well being.

The second oversight was made a half a century ago, when the Ontario government decided to sell Crown land in undersized 100-foot lots along the ecologically sensitive rocky cliffs and shoreline marsh areas of the north and south shores of Twelve Mile Bay. Many decades later, the over-development of this environmentally unique area has resulted in serious degradation of water quality in Twelve Mile Bay.

Our concern is that correcting the first wrong risks exacerbating the second under the proposed transfer unless great care is taken. The situation is only made more complex by the fact that the proposal involves transferring previously protected lands in which multiple stakeholders already have a vested interest. We would like to present some solutions that we think will aid the MNR and Ontario Parks in dealing with the complexities.

Water Quality Issues

For many years, the Georgian Bay Association has worked with the Township of The Archipelago and the Township of Georgian Bay to undertake professional water quality testing in some of our water-based communities. Recent test results from Twelve Mile Bay and King Bay are distressing.

Between 2003 and 2004, tests showed that total phosphorous surface levels went from 19 to 42, compared to background 5 micrograms per litre for Georgian Bay. Water clarity was also seriously compromised. In addition, in the very deep waters, the fish community had disappeared as a result of anoxic conditions. Tests in 2005 showed conditions had continued to deteriorate, especially in the waters east of the Moose Deer Point Marina where there is little exchange of water. (Please find attached charts from water testing in Twelve Mile Bay, which provide detailed phosphorus counts and water clarity readings. The full reports can be found on our website www.georgianbay.ca under environment and water quality.) In King Bay, where there are two marinas, there have been “boil water advisories” due to high bacteria levels – likely related to boat discharge and runoff after heavy rainfalls.

The GBA believes the situation in Twelve Mile Bay and King Bay is already so serious that a failure to remediate the quality of the water could lead to problems such as toxic green algal blooms like those which have developed further up the coast in Sturgeon Bay, near Pointe au Baril Station. We urge the MNR to take a holistic view of the Twelve Mile Bay and King Bay water systems by investing in immediate remediation programs for cleaning up those bodies in parallel with your consideration of the land transfer (see below). We believe without a corresponding remediation plan, any further development could tip the balance in the fragile ecosystem that is the reality in Twelve Mile Bay.

Land Integrity Issues

Many of our Association members have close and long-standing commercial arrangements with the MDPFN, particularly through the marinas on Twelve Mile and King Bay. We are confident that the land transfer will in no way disrupt those relationships. However, we urge the MNR to work with the Township of Georgian Bay to ensure existing road allowances and shoreline public access points continue to be protected in any land use plans associated with this proposed transfer. This is of particular concern for property owners accessing their islands from marinas in King Bay.

Of broader concern to our total membership is the issue of the transfer of previously protected public lands to any private interest. We recognize that what is involved here is a land transfer, not a sale of Crown lands. Nonetheless, we urge the Ontario government to be very careful to avoid creating any sort of precedent in this transaction by abridging its long-standing policy of refusing to sell water-front Crown land on the Great Lakes.

In fact, we would like to see the government use this unique transaction as an opportunity for reinforcing its wilderness policies. By running the land transfer project in parallel with a water mitigation project in Twelve Mile Bay, the integrity of the government's intentions in protecting the environment would be strengthened.

Solutions

The GBA Board of Directors recommends the following actions in connection with protecting the waters and lands around the proposed land transfer:

- Conduct a comprehensive environmental assessment that fully takes into account the serious water quality problems that currently exist in Twelve Mile Bay and King Bay. The environmental assessment should not only identify the problems, but also recommend mitigation.
- Commit the funds gained from the transfer of land to the federal government to address environmental problems caused by poor land-use planning of previous governments on all of Twelve Mile Bay. This could include, but not be restricted to, remediation of native and non-native septic systems with a program to fund the installation of OMOE approved composting toilets in any residences in the area.

With additional funding, the GBA could contribute by extending our Dock Talk program, begun in 2005, to include all shoreline properties in both Twelve Mile and King Bay as a further support to these mitigation measures. This very successful program provides individual property owners with education and assistance in reducing negative environmental impacts in the way they manage their properties.

- Empower the existing Ecosystem Protection Group (EPG) to continue as the liaison point for all the stakeholders involved once the transfer is complete, as recommended in the *Draft Supplement to the Final Environmental Study Report for O'Donnell Point*. This group includes government, native, industry, environmental groups and cottagers, working co-operatively as stewards of this environmentally sensitive region, including the water that surrounds O'Donnell Point. This type of multi-stakeholder co-operation is essential to the long-term success of any plans. It would also have an important role to play in any water-quality mitigation plan for the area.

But the terms of reference of the EPG must be clarified for its recommendations to carry any weight. If set up and financed properly through this process, the EPG could serve as a model for other government-native-cottage planning and monitoring processes elsewhere.

Conclusion

The Georgian Bay Association is committed to working with all levels of government, the Moose Deer Point First Nation, other environmental groups and our cottage associations in the area to create an environmentally sound plan for O'Donnell Point. We are willing to share water quality monitoring results, wetlands studies, satellite imagery funded by the GBA Foundation and other expertise that we've acquired from our years of work on Georgian Bay.

We understand you will also be receiving responses from some of our individual resident associations, including the Twelve Mile Bay Association, Sans Souci and Copperhead Association, the Manitou Association and the Wah Wah Taysee Association. Our members have done extensive work in preparing their submissions and we urge you to carefully consider their responses.

If you have any questions about our response or require further information, please don't hesitate to contact us at the number and email below.

Regards,



Mary Muter
VP, Environment
Georgian Bay Association
416-489-8101 mmuter@georgianbay.ca

cc: Chief Ed Williams, MDPFN
Mayor Mike Kennedy and Council, Township of Georgian Bay
Reeve Peter Ketchum and Council, Township of The Archipelago
Presidents of Twelve Mile Bay Association, Wah Wah Taysee Association, Manitou Association,
Sans Souci and Copperhead Association, Madawaska Club at Go Home Bay
Andy Heerschap, Acting District Manager, MNR Parry Sound Office
Brian Pfrimmer, Ontario Parks