

MADAWASKA RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT REVIEW  
STANDING ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Meeting #5, June 13, 2001 – OSPG Board Room

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Attendees:

SAC – Barry Martin, Steve Roy, Ernie Coulas, Brian Wright, MaryAnn McRae, Kevin Barclay, Bob Braden

MNR – Ron Spurr, Henry Checko, Brian Vermeersch

OPG – Jim Whyte, Linda Halliday

Guests: Dorothy Stalkie, Harold Walker

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. by Chair Barry Martin

2. The evening's guests were introduced:

Henry Checko, MNR Algonquin Provincial Park

Brian Vermeersch, MNR Bancroft District

Dorothy Stalkie, Bark Lake resident

Harold Walker, Barry's Bay Fish & Game Club

3. Approval of Minutes of April 25, 2001

Move to approve – Steve Roy, seconded Ernie Coulas. Carried.

4. Business arising:

4.1 Summary of public issues received since last meeting on April 25:

4.1.1 MNR – Ron Spurr circulated a list of comments received by MNR and explained that he had requested that other MNR Pembroke District staff log all comments, complaints, etc. received by letter, fax, email or phone re: the Madawaska and forward them to himself.

4.1.2 OPG – Jim Whyte circulated a list of complaints logged in our EMITs program. Two complaints, both received from Bark Lake residents, Mr. D'Aoust and Mr. Browning, have yet to be entered into the data bank.

A complaint from Wally Kargas dealt with the summer range of Kamaniskeg Lake. The SAC might wish to recommend that the operating range of 283m +/-12 be reset at 283m +/-9, to take pressure off the lower end of the lake.

A concern over pike spawning in Conroy's Marsh was raised – whether the 8cm change might have an effect on this. Duck nesting might also be impacted by low or

fluctuating water levels. It was also discussed that a constant water level could be detrimental to the wetland

**ACTION: SAC members to consult John Boos of MNR re: 8cm. change and its effect on pike and waterfowl in Kamanisheg Lake and Conroy's Marsh.**

Steve Roy commented on the processes that OPG and MNR have put in place to bring issues and complaints to the committee table for comment and discussion. He expressed that he was pleased with the progress to date, and asked that OPG enter the outstanding issues into its EMITs database and that MNR design an issues form.

Steve Roy had received an expression of concern from Jack Threader re: the spawning bed at Cherry Beach (discussed under 5.2).

Barry Martin had received three comments re: improvements in the fishery and one complaint about fishing. Also, neighbours had commented about the lack of shoreline erosion resulting from lowering water levels before freezing took place last year.

Ernie Coulas asked why last week, 50 cms was flowing out of the Palmer Rapids Dam and the flow was reduced to 35 cms on the weekend. Local residents and paddlers would prefer higher flows at the weekend to allow for whitewater paddling. This appears to be contrary to the wishes expressed at the Madawaska Paddlers' Workshop on April 21<sup>st</sup>.

Jim Whyte responded that, at the Paddlers' Workshop he had commented that it would be very difficult to manipulate flows to suit Palmer Rapids paddlers, since the main requirement is to regulate the level of Kamanisheg Lake. He also indicated that, if there was an opportunity, OPG would provide good flows for a weekend.

(Subsequent to June 13<sup>th</sup>., Jim Whyte checked Palmer Rapids dam flows. Flows were decreased prior to the June 1<sup>st</sup>. weekend as Ernie had suggested, because Kamanisheg Lake was low. However, the Palmer Rapids flow was increased prior to the June 9<sup>th</sup>. weekend.)

#### 4.2 Update on Levels and Flows (Jim Whyte)

On June 13, Bark Lake was at 312.89m. It was explained that the level was rising towards its summer level of 313.74m, and that lack of precipitation and limited spring freshet had resulted in the current lower level. Present inflow was 30 cms and outflow, 3cms.

Ernie Coulas asked whether it would be possible to drop Bark Lake's level 7 m instead of 9m at the end of winter to help prevent such low levels in the future. He wondered whether significant downstream flooding would result in a "normal" year. Jim Whyte explained that, if there was a miscalculation, there would be flooding in Combermere. This happened in 1983 and 1998 when the Palmer Rapids dam was fully open and Kamanisheg Lake was full.

Harold Walker asked whether field observations are done to determine the ground frost depth and content, and if these readings are taken into consideration. The Round Lake

area near Bark Lake had double the amount of snow of a normal year this past winter, yet it did not into the water courses because the ground was not frozen. He would like to see both ground frost depth and water content in the snow used in impact calculations before Bark Lake is fully drawn down.

Jim Whyte mentioned that, while the mid-March snow readings accounted for the lower water content, the lake drawdown had occurred in late January.

Ernie Coulas that he is contracted by OPG to carry out the field observations on ground frost content and snow water content measurements in the Madawaska area. In 1999 and again this past winter there was no frost and dry ground – similar conditions that resulted in similar low water during dry winters. OPG does consider water content and snow depth but does not take frost factors and dry soil conditions into account in decision making. He thought that these factors should play a critical role in water level and flow calculations.

**RECOMMENDATION: from the Madawaska Standing Advisory Committee, that OPG try something new by factoring frost and dry soil conditions into future drawdown calculations on Bark Lake. Hydrologists would need to be consulted about this.**

Steve Roy asked what is the percentage of water absorbed into the ground in an average year and a dry year.

**ACTION: Jim Whyte to obtain more information about the above from hydrologists for the next meeting.**

Dorothy Stalkie referred to Page 71 of the Madawaska Review Final Report, Section 2.12.10, Action item 5 that states “OPG and MNR will be more vigilant in monitoring the pre-spring and spring conditions, including ground conditions (level of water table, whether or not the ground is frozen), rate of snow-melt and runoff, amount of precipitation in the snow, etc.” and suggested that this was not the case last winter.

Jim Whyte responded that such readings have been taken for years, but never, to his knowledge, factored into drawdown decisions.

Ernie Coulas noted that, since 1999 and 2001 were similarly dry in the winter, if these readings had been factored into calculations, Bark Lake might have been left slightly higher.

Discussions took place on whether ground frost and water content have an impact on snow pack changes, and whether computer modelling exists to account for any variations.

**RECOMMENDATION: that the organizations agree to make a commitment to take ground frost measurements and dry soil conditions into consideration in each future winter/spring drawdown calculation for Bark Lake, as stated in the Madawaska Review Final Report, Section 2.12.10, Action item 5, page 71.**

Jim Whyte reported that, starting June 18 MKC will receive water two days per week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays 25.6 cms will be released from the Bark Lake from 9am to 3pm. This will result in a 1cm lowering of Bark Lake and is the same situation that was agreed to in 1999. If this causes a further decrease in the level of Bark Lake, the releases will be stopped.

Kevin Barclay – is a follow-up motion necessary to make sure that the above Action item is adhered to?

Steve Roy thanked Dorothy Stalkie for coming to the meeting and being so specific about her concerns and requests.

#### 4.3 Update on Information Needs and Projects (Ron Spurr)

Ron reported that MNR will be coordinating Fall Walleye Index Netting (FWIN) projects for 2001 in the Stewartville headpond, Bark Lake, Lake Madawaska and Barrett Chute headpond/Norcan Lake. This covers priority #1 and #2. The fishery downstream requires a survey including bathymetry mapping. Staff recently received training so this can be accomplished this year. Once the bathymetry is completed, a future fishery assessment project is planned for this area in 2002. The intent is to complete most of these projects by the end of 2002. MNR will be assessing Black Donald/Centennial Lake with a FWIN project over the next few years to assess the fishery and the effects of the new regulation.

#### 5. New Business

##### 5.1 Update on Algonquin Provincial Parkwater policies & procedures and impact on Bark Lake (Henry Checko)

The upper one third of the Madawaska River watershed is in Algonquin Provincial Park. Bark Lake is situated about one third down the Madawaska River proper. Cottage Life magazine, May 2001, pp. 75-79 has an informative article on how watersheds work. Opeongo Lake feeds Bark Lake in the east and the Madawaska River from the west. There are 3 main dams and smaller spill dams. Opeongo, Cacher and Two Rivers dams are control dams. Aylen and Galeairy Lake dams control flow into Opeongo River above Bark Lake.

Barry Martin – at the third Madawaska PAC meeting the committee studied the question of cooperation between OPG and the MNR dams in Algonquin Provincial Park. In 1999 we discovered that there was no such cooperation. As reported in recent newspaper articles, MNR-controlled lakes were already at summer levels. MNR's commitment under the Madawaska River Review was to pass all water above summer minimum operating levels to assist raising Bark Lake levels. Now, MNR Algonquin Provincial Park and Bancroft are saying that this was not the case.

It would be possible to draw down Aylen Lake several feet after the spring trout spawn and the level would be able to be brought up in the same manner as Bark Lake. Apparently Jim Etmanski, the Mayor of South Algonquin spoke of cottagers at a recent Township Council meeting complaining about the high water on Aylen Lake because their docks were swamped. MNR reported that the Aylen Lake dam is to be replaced by a fixed weir that will maintain a constant lake level.

MNR's commitment to OPG did not start until 1999 when extreme low waters were experienced on Bark Lake. After that Algonquin Provincial Park staff attended a PAC meeting to talk about the process. In 2000 20 contacts were made with Don Ferko in the spring re: log operations. In 2001 contact has been less than in 2000 because of the situation, but MNR operations have not changed. MNR lakes are currently at the bottom of the summer operating range. They have been kept low to allow outflow downstream into Bark Lake. Peak flows were attained on April 18, 2001 in Algonquin Provincial Park. Galeairy Lake is now at 389.59 m with 5 logs in one gate. This is the summer minimum operating level. Lakes in the park have small summer ranges of about 6 inches. Water will be retained in July and August if downstream conditions are stable.

MNR was supposed to install snow stations in Algonquin Provincial Park for water content measurement – 2 in Opeongo and 2 in Madawaska. This information should be recorded on a spread sheet for review by SAC members in an understandable format. The effects of drawdown on large and small lake ecosystems need to be studied as well.

MNR Algonquin Provincial Park was supposed to hold public meetings to inform the public about the possibility of operating at a level 6 inches lower than at present. MNR Bancroft District holds lakes at summer minimum and has no staff available to carry out a public information campaign. The only lake really worth consideration is Opeongo because it is basically at a 1:1 ratio with Bark Lake. The general public would be more disturbed about lower levels in Opeongo Lake but permanent residents would probably not complain too much. To carry this out, however, would require a public consultation process.

Steve Roy challenged the fact that, even though MNR lakes have always been treated in a certain way, this should not happen in the future. Going forward, MNR should take a serious look at the lake levels and the minimum and maximum levels to see if operating changes are warranted. Flexibility is not being demonstrated in the domain of MNR Algonquin Provincial Park and Bancroft District.

Dorothy Stalkie – please consider the Madawaska River as a system and do not permit manipulation of individual lakes.

What about the possibility of changing the valves in the Bark Lake dam to assist minimizing the outflow?

Steve Roy – an integrated solution is required here whereby snow content and ground conditions are first assessed, then factored into the overall forecast. What would be the

economic and environmental impact of changing the operating conditions in Algonquin Provincial Park? Can we challenge the use of outdated calculation methods for measuring and estimating summer water levels? Are we talking to the right people in MNR?

**RECOMMENDATION by Kevin Barclay that we request to know the potential impacts of such changes.**

What about OPG's 9-metre drawdown of Bark Lake in early Spring – could be challenged as well? Hal Walker asked if OPG would consider halting the drawdown half way through the process, to assess available information and recommend action, then continue to a recommended level that might not always be at the bottom of the drawdown range.

**RECOMMENDATION that OPG consider the above action, including factoring of maximum downstream flooding, cost to OPG and environmental impacts, including fish habitat.**

Dorothy Stalkie – could the valves at Bark Lake be serviced underwater?

Ernie Coulas – the valves at the Bark Lake dam are either open or closed. If drawdown to the sill at 307.8m. were to take place in December and not January, would it be possible for maintenance on the valves to be completed and fill up also finished earlier? Consideration would have to be given to downstream high flows, flooding of furbearers and fish spawning habitat destruction. Regardless of the valves, 15 cms flow is still attractive to pickerel at Bell's Rapids in spawning season.

Barry Martin asked that OPG and MNR take a very serious look at the problems facing Bark Lake and consider a wide range of possible actions, including all the suggestions presented here.

5.2 Cherry Beach water levels during the walleye spawn (Steve Roy)

## **Submission to Madawaska River Water Management Review Meeting of June 13, 2001**

**Agenda Item:** Cherry Beach Water Levels during the Walleye Spawn

### **Background Information**

Until approximately 1990, the Walleye were plentiful in the Stewartville reach of the Madawaska. Since then, there appears to have been a steady decline, to where today, Walleye are rare, but still present. This decline has been attributed a variety of causes, one being the mismanagement of the spawning conditions at Cherry Beach.

The Cherry Beach levels and flow conditions are a combination of Stewartville reach draw-down, Calabogie GS flow, Calabogie North channel flow and natural run off collected above the Cherry Beach rapids.

### **Situational Analysis**

In the Spring of 1999, a study was done on the Cherry Beach spawning ground along with other areas on the River. Sustainable Resources Report #990302, excerpts are attached.

During the original water management planning process, the Cherry Beach spawning condition requirements were not adequately considered. The resulting plan (excerpt attached) does not protect the spawning area, and walleye eggs are being dried out during the presently managed draw-down and unmanaged flow conditions.

In fact, the plan calls for a draw-down to 144.0 m with no reference to flows (pg 93 of the March 2000 Review Report), and in the 1999 study, walleye were observed spawning in the 0.3 m below the 144.3 meter level @ flows of 106 m<sup>3</sup>/s (pg 40 of the Sustainable Resource Report #990302).

### **Proposed Resolution**

**That the Water Management Plan be amended as follows:**

**1) during the walleye spawning period, the Stewartville reach water levels not drop below 144.3 m; and Calabogie GS and North Channel flows be adjusted to maintained not less than 106 m<sup>3</sup>/s at the Cheery Beach spawning area, until**

**2) further levels, flows and spawning studies are completed, at which time the plan would be revised to protect the required conditions.**

The above proposal would change the current wording on page 92 of the Review document. This proposal would allow for more water over the walleye spawning beds.

Jim Whyte – with higher flows going down the river, not much water would be in the narrow section above Cherry Beach. A minor change here could have a high impact. In summer it is difficult to maintain elevations with higher flows. The amount of water affects elevation and cannot be held back. At Cheery Beach the elevation is dependent on flow conditions.

**RECOMMENDATION from Steve Roy – since there is no current process for amending the Madawaska River Review document, we need to discuss this at the next meeting and recommend a formal process.**

**ACTION: In reference to the pike, muskie and walleye Study of 1999, John Boos will be requested to examine the Cherry Beach situation and report on the how walleye, and any other species, would be affected by daily fluctuations in water elevation. The SAC will consider next steps and actions in this process at the next meeting.**

In this case, even though we are not supposed to violate fish habitat, it reads as though we are, in fact, doing so. It might be that we need to modify the spawning habitat, perhaps with gravel bars at different elevations. However, something must be done before April 2002.

**ACTION – Steve Roy to report back to Jack Threader on the progress and actions taken re: his concerns.**

Next Meeting:

Meeting #6 of the Madawaska SAC will take place on Wednesday, September 26, 2001, 6:00 pm at the Renfrew OPG Administrative Office. The agenda will include:

1. Discussion of the process to modify and amend the Water Management Plan
2. Examination of John Boos' recommendations re: Cherry Beach.
3. Report on the progress of the Madawaska River paddler portage route around the dams and schedule for opening in 2002
4. Details of MNR erosion workshop, Fall 2001
5. Further discussion of information to be brought to the SAC based on the recommendations and action items in these Minutes.

Final Discussion:

Dorothy Stalkie thanked the SAC for inviting her to attend and participate in this meeting and stated that she would like to be kept informed about progress on the Bark Lake issue.

Ron Spurr would like SAC feedback and comment on the proposed MNR workshop – format, date, timing, content. Ron also commented on the Ontario Government's recent initiative to establish water management plans on 41 rivers across the province by 2003/2004. These will be modeled on the Madawaska Review plan and will be conducted in partnership between MNR and the power producer on the river. If the plans are not completed by the due date, financial penalties will be imposed.

Ernie Coulas gave a report on the Palmer Rapids Work Group meeting. A volunteer clean-up of the washroom facilities at Pine Point has already been completed. The work was undertaken by MKC, SWAT and Boundless Adventures groups. The MNR park needs signage to show paddlers where exactly to put boats in and take them out to protect the walleye spawning bed from damage. The groups is still hoping for weekend water releases for whitewater paddling at Palmer Rapids dam, but the cost is very high. MNR has contracted Boundless Adventures staff to do maintenance work at the park

below the Rapids. Fund-raising activities for Lower Madawaska Waterway Provincial Park facilities improvements will be undertaken, also by Boundless Adventures.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 pm.