



Sparrow Lake Association (SLA) *Newsletter*
Serving Lakefront Property Owners and Cottagers
Lock # 42 Washago—Lock # 43 Swift Rapids
Editor: *Meredith Oberfrank*

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Note: Click on underlined text in this newsletter to access relevant websites/emails.

1. Greetings from the President

Bob Corbett

Another cottage summer is in the books and, as we pack away the water toys and perhaps close up completely, please stop for a minute to take a deep breath, look out over the water, and remember how lucky we are to be able to enjoy this life. Most weekends this spring and summer gave us good weather, the water temperature got up into the low 80s (27°C), we did not experience any crazy destructive weather, and with COVID-19 restrictions lightened, we were allowed to invite guests up again.

Just when it looked like everything was getting back on track, we had to deal with some different challenges this summer. In late May, we were hit with Gypsy moths. Oops... their name was quickly revised to LDD moths. Regardless of their name, these pests left our trees stripped and our decks covered in moth poop. Apparently, a good way to deal with any egg larvae found on tree trunks and branches is to spray them with soapy water. The larvae overwinter on the trunks, so spray them now before they hatch next spring!

We have also had to encounter “anti-vaxxers.” Although a touchy subject for some, non-vaccinated individuals did create some socializing tension. Let’s hope that we can all get through any remaining pandemic issues safely and quickly, and start 2022 with a clean slate.

There are two lingering issues that have not gone away in 2021, and these will be discussed in more detail throughout this newsletter.

Short-term cottage rentals (aka STR, Airbnb, VRBO) have been increasing. With cottage prices and operating expenses rising, renting a cottage for a portion of the summer to offset the costs is the only way many can afford to keep a leisure property. Others are seeing this as a business opportunity, and have purchased several cottages and rent them out fulltime /year-round. In many cases, the cottage owners screen their renters to ensure they understand that

excessive noise, loud music and partying into early morning hours is not permitted. Unfortunately for some cottage neighbours, this doesn't happen, and they get a new party group nearby every weekend. In past newsletters, we have advised you to call the police and the township bylaw department. This has helped a bit, but in most cases the offending groups have left the property before a bylaw officer arrives. Most township officials agree that dealing with the property owner is the best way to deal with this problem.

The SLA is very fortunate to have a great working relationship with both Mayors Kelly and Burkett from Gravenhurst and Severn Township. There have been active discussions in both townships on dealing with the STR problem. Unfortunately, our legal system also gives rights to property owners. Even with bylaws in place they are taking advantage of a backed-up court system and ignoring the rules. Consultants have been conducting information meetings with local residents to assist the township officials in coming up with better solutions. Our wish is that, instead of trying to reinvent the wheel in every municipality, all mayors and township leaders get together for a summit and utilize the best practices from each municipality to create one policy for STR that is common for every township. Then, everyone will know the rules, and the method of dealing with infractions will be consistent.

The other concerning issue is **weeds**. The problem seems to be getting worse, and not just in our region. SLA members continue to contact us for a solution to deal with it, and I wish we had one. We can break the problem into two categories: reducing and preventing weed growth, and getting rid of them (again, this will be discussed in more detail later in the report). When we contact municipal and provincial officials for help in our area, the answer continues to be that the water in the Trent-Severn Waterway is controlled by Parks Canada which is federal, and their mandate is to control water levels only—not water quality.

Let's put a different twist on the situation. If some strange weed infested the lawns, parks, and gardens in urban developments and grew so thick that residents couldn't access their driveways or play on their lawns in the city, it would be classified as a catastrophe. Does this sound far-fetched? Well, if we were told 8 years ago that some strange weed would choke out many of our bays and prevent waterfront property owners from swimming or getting their boats out from docks, they would have said that was crazy. This is now a reality for many. The only difference is that waterfront properties are a very small percentage of most communities, and the problem isn't getting the same attention as a major issue in the cities.

Last but not least, the SLA would like to acknowledge and thank Robert Colhoun Jr for installing, removing, and maintaining the **hazard markers** throughout Sparrow Lake for 20+ years. Thanks to Robert, many of us avoided serious boat and/or personal damage. This work is too often taken for granted. Robert has decided to step down from this job, and we are lucky to have two individuals who have offered to continue the tradition. Jeff Kent and Peter Markle are working with Robert to remove the markers for this season, and will take over fully in 2022.

Cheers

Bob Corbett, President

2. Treasurer's Report and Membership

Judy Moore Vey

As of September 30, 2021, Sparrow Lake Association has \$13,714 in Term Deposits invested at TD Canada Trust. If we ever needed to hire a consultant or external professional for any issue that may warrant expertise, we do have funds available. We have over \$2000 in the SLA chequing account which allows the association to have sufficient funds to cover all expenses through the winter and until May 2022. These funds cover the Director's Liability Insurance, FOCA fees, marker fees, and any other expenses that may arise.

In April 2021, all members whose memberships had expired were contacted. We had several renewals, and have also gained several new members this year. Our current membership status is now 62 active members. We now have online membership capabilities, and that has made it much easier for people to renew/join.

In addition, we would like to ask all active members to mention the Sparrow Lake Association to a neighbour, friend, or someone who has just purchased a cottage on the lake. Please encourage them to join SLA to help us grow our membership base.

3. Water Testing

Judy Moore Vey

Sparrow Lake is fortunate to have several commercial businesses on its shores where water testing is mandatory. We were not notified of any reported water problems from any of these businesses in 2021. Testing kits were available for personal use this summer, but for drinking water only. SLA did receive test kits from the Ministry of the Environment/Lake Partner Program this summer. We would like to thank a SLA member/cottager for volunteering to take water samples from Sparrow Lake. The water samples were submitted in July, and the testing results will be updated on the Ministry of Environment website in the near future. For previous-year testing results, please see <https://www.ontario.ca/page/map-lake-partner>.

4. Short-Term Rentals (STRs), Gravenhurst & Severn

John Cooper

Here is a summary of the latest information on the increasingly complex, and emotionally charged, subject of short-term rentals, with most of the offending rentals being a "partnership" between AirBnB and the landlord. Most landlords are responsible for ensuring their tenants are familiar with the current fire regulations, placing a limit on the number of residents that are allowed overnight, and informing the tenants of the number of cars permitted on the property. Many rent only to friends and family who are familiar with the property, restrictions, and the expected behaviour after 11 p.m. Many landlords must generate rental income to be able to maintain the property and pay increasing taxes. We appreciate this reality.

Gravenhurst and Severn Township are still working on legislation, registration, and bylaws to control the STR problem, and it is likely that this will not be completed until the spring of 2022.

The SLA board has studied several municipalities' STR programs. By far, the superior combination of legislation licensing and bylaws has been established by the Town of Huntsville. All aspects of their program are very clear for landlords and tenants to understand, and the program equips the town staff to deal with all kinds of problems and stays well away from those who are reasonable. We have strongly recommended to Severn Township and Gravenhurst that they adopt the Huntsville program and make any small changes to suit local circumstances.

There is strong resistance to individuals and corporations who are operating “mini hotels” in residentially zoned areas and pay no licensing fee or business tax. Some owners have multiple units. To their credit, many have strict rules and regulations and present no problems for neighbours. Others, sadly, care little who use their property, or how they behave.

We urge all members to call where they pay their taxes—Severn or Gravenhurst—when there is a problem. Many don’t call, as past experience has shown that no action results. They must hear from taxpayers in order to realize that action is needed, so please do call!

[Here is the summary](#) of the Severn Township meeting on Sept. 22, 2021, which 70 seasonal and full-time residents attended. Highly emotional, charged discussions took place. The township’s consultants are summarizing all of the meeting material, and responses from questionnaires they circulated, to make a program recommendation to Severn.

We will keep you apprised of any significant progress from these two communities.

5. Invasive Weeds in Sparrow Lake

John Cooper

Certainly the most talked-about and most frustrating experience for all Sparrow Lake Association members this season has been the most prolific weed growth in history. The fast-growing invasive species Eurasian Water Milfoil is the most problematic. We are also starting to see Starry Stonewort, another fast-growing invasive species from the same family in Sparrow Lake, and both are related to blue-green algae.

Weed growth is greatly encouraged by nutrient-enriched water. The greater the enrichment, the greater the weed growth!

Water flows from the Oak Ridges Moraine near Richmond Hill toward Sparrow Lake. Extremely dense residential and commercial development from the Moraine to the Holland Marsh at Highway 9 contains the following realities: a significant percentage of the ground area is paved (roads, plazas, driveways), so rainfall runoff is maximized, and absorption is minimal. Residential property owners put salt on snowy and icy walks and driveways, fertilize their lawns and wash cars. Chemicals from these activities then flow into the water.

Southern Ontario was developed with less-than-required sewage capacity. Torrential rainwater runoff, now greater with climate change, mixes with raw sewage. When this runoff reaches Holland Marsh—our largest market garden—the water is already significantly nutrient-enriched.

Holland Marsh (in the distant past) was fertilized with combinations of phosphorus, potassium, and nitrogen. A growing population and pressure to grow bigger crops faster encouraged researchers to develop urea fertilizer. This chemical indeed increases farm productivity, but it takes little imagination to appreciate that this twice enriched water substantially increases the speed and density of aquatic growth!

Spring floods and heavy rainfalls in the milder seasons drain large quantities of enriched water from the crop fields into the Holland River system. That water then drains into Cook’s Bay, then Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching and, at Lock 42, into the Trent-Severn River. Until more recent years, Lake Simcoe remained quite “grunge” free, and still does, except for the southern end which is now showing more evidence of the effects of nutrient-rich water. Lake Simcoe is a very deep, cold lake, so it is able to fend off the nutrient-rich effects. Lake Couchiching is a shallow lake but is gravel-based and surrounded, so the water is limestone- and calcium carbonate-populated and, until recent times, an effective, unwilling host to the effects of nutrient-rich water.

Sadly, the northern parts Lake Couchiching are starting to show significant weed growth—both Starry Stonewort and Eurasian Water Milfoil.

When the water flow continues out of “Couch” at Lock 42 and into the Trent-Severn River, the water encounters a most willing host. The Trent-Severn is shallow and therefore warmer, and has a metre of iron-rich bottom (actually hundreds of years of decayed aquatic vegetation). This reality runs from Lock 42 all the way to Port Severn.

Efforts to ensure well-functioning septic systems, growing native plants on our shorelines, and minimizing paved surfaces on our properties are somewhat helpful. However, the serious water enrichment that encourages the excessive weed growth (that so detracts from our enjoyment of our waterfront properties) is a result of several realities that are well beyond our control.

SLA understands that Parks Canada, which controls the Trent-Severn system, has no control over water quality. They have emphasized this to us in many meetings over the years. Water level is their focus, and we work as closely as is possible, on your behalf, with their staff on water levels.

For your interest, the amazing Muskoka Watershed Council (MWC), with their superb Muskoka District staff support and a large group of talented, motivated volunteers, do a masterful job of water- quality influence and control of the lakes north of Gravenhurst. With respect to water levels, MWC works with the Ontario Government Ministry, who has ultimate water level control.

We understand cottagers are looking at different options on how to handle the weed situations. We have had several cottagers contact SLA about this. Over the winter we will research and provide a report on the weed options available.

6. FOCA (Federation of Ontario Cottagers Associations) Notes Meredith Oberfrank

FOCA speaks on behalf of 500,000 waterfront property owners and more than 500 Lake Associations across Ontario. FOCA’s fall seminar will be held November 6, 2021. The Guest speaker will be [Dr. Norman Yan](#) speaking about protecting our lakes in the face of climate change and emerging threats. There will be discussions on rural and private roads, boating safety and awareness, running for Municipal Council, plus several other topics. One of the SLA Directors will attend the fall meeting and will report back to SLA members.

FOCA and estate lawyer Peter Lillico have been teaching families about **cottage succession planning** for the past decade. His traditional in-person events shifted to digital in 2021. If enough Sparrow Lake property owners express interest, we can contact Peter to host a virtual seminar for us in 2022. Alternatively, you can join one of his virtual seminars for another lake association. Please see [FOCA’s page on succession planning](#) for more details.

Most importantly, click [here](#) to sign up for **FOCA’s monthly elerts**. They are usually delivered to your inbox in the middle of each month.

On behalf of the SLA Board—
Bob Corbett, Judy Moore-Vey, Meredith Oberfrank, John Cooper—
we look forward to seeing you at the cottage again soon.