

July 23, 2012
Re: Rideau Canal

Dear Mr. Gordon Brown, M.P.

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Rideau Roundtable in response to your article in the Smiths Falls EMC on June 12, in particular to your call for “ideas for the future” of the Rideau Canal.

The Rideau Roundtable is an incorporated not-for-profit association of individuals, community organizations and government agencies working together to keep the Rideau and Cataraqui Watersheds from Ottawa to Kingston healthy - socially, economically and environmentally

Recent announcements of budget cuts to Parks Canada’s Rideau Canal organization pose real threats to the progress that has been made, and underscore the need for new collaboration and cooperation among organizations and concerned citizens.

The mandate of Parks Canada and the obligation of our government to the world at large for the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site have all been well documented. The international acclaim of the Rideau as the 2nd most authentic world heritage site together with the recent Google recognition as the top Canadian Site all bear witness to the how the world values the Rideau. No other historic sites can make the claim that they are used for the purpose for which they were originally built. We are lucky and indebted to our forefathers for their foresight to reserve and conserve the best of our landscapes and the most ingenious of our heritage infrastructures by designating them as National Parks, National Historic Sites and in rare cases, World Heritage Sites.

Governments are elected to be stewards for their people. Our government must provide the organizational capacity to ensure the mandate of Parks Canada can be met and the sustainability of areas of natural and cultural heritage protection assured.

Despite of budgetary reductions by Parks Canada in response to government direction, the nationally and internationally significant heritage values of the Rideau Canal and its corridor must still be conserved. These cultural, ecological, recreational and economic values must be preserved to sustain our communities, and to ensure a legacy for future generations. Decisions made today can have lasting negative implications for the health of the Rideau system and its stakeholders, underscoring the importance of informed and prioritized choices.

The conservation of cultural heritage, natural and scenic values of the canal and its setting; water management; and the retention of quality navigational and visitor services at least from early June to late September, should be the highest priorities for Parks Canada.

The health of the Canal’s wetlands is vital to the maintenance of water quality and fisheries habitat. Natural systems have adapted over almost 200 years to a consistent water management regime and some areas of the Canal rely on knowledgeable and reliable water management operations to maintain water levels during the season and minimize the potential for flooding during the rest of the year. Simply put, without the assurance of the availability of year round skills the possibility of serious consequences to natural habitats and human occupation exists and long term impacts to property values are inevitable.

The recent changes to the Fisheries Act and the Federal Government’s environmental assessment process could leave important natural resources more vulnerable. Coupled with changes within the Provincial jurisdiction related to Stewardship Council, Conservation Authorities and the Ministry of Natural Resources, it appears that the future security of our shared natural system and its values will be at risk.

The Rideau Canal staff and Parks Canada must work collaboratively with other government organizations and stakeholder organizations, such as the Rideau Roundtable, to seek and put in place new approaches to manage the important values and resources of the Rideau Canal and its corridor.

Leadership, engagement and cooperation are required to forge these important alliances and partnerships that will assure a sustainable future, and are not budget dependent. Sustainable, effective and exemplary operation of the Rideau Canal in collaboration with stakeholders and canal corridor residents to promote its heritage, cultural and ecological values can lead to big economic benefits. Accessibility to these treasured sites with engaging interpretation to enrich the experience of visitors will increase the number of tourists, adding economic benefits to the region and increasing the coffers of governments through new revenues.

Within the boundary of the Eastern Ontario Field Unit of Parks Canada, we have a potential of two million visitors and another 8 million within three hours of driving time. We have a huge pool of land-based visitors, plus other international tourists. There are opportunities to expand and diversify the local tourism economy based on the world renown of the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site. Creating facilities for hikers, cyclers, campers, canoeists and kayakers will draw in more people to get close and personal to Waterway. These contributions to local economy with the slower pace and in-depth exploration of the area could match if not surpass the economic benefits generated by regular boaters.

Enabling students to know and experience various facets of the Rideau will increase their community pride by sharing their enthusiasm of their visits with their families and friends. The local knowledge and civic pride provide some key foundations for creating local ambassadors who in turn to promote tourism, and caring attitudes towards national treasures.

Programs and attractions created by careful collaboration of various partners and stakeholders with Parks Canada and Rideau Canal organization would help to fulfill its the mandate and our obligation to the world for the Rideau Canal, Ontario's only World Heritage Site.

Such collaborations strengthens our the collective ownership and common goals - to preserve our best,our National Parks, our National Historic Sites and World Heritage Sites.

Sincerely,



Peter Au

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