

Dr. Mechtild Rössler
Director
World Heritage Centre
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France

April 6, 2021

Re: Significant Heritage Issues – Rideau Canal World Heritage Site

Dear Dr. Rössler:

I am writing to bring to your attention significant heritage issues related to Parks Canada's management of the Rideau Canal beyond those already provided to you by groups such as Heritage Ottawa in 2019. Those issues remain but the problems go much deeper than that. Quite simply, Parks Canada is not managing the Rideau Canal as heritage site, much less a World Heritage Site. I am a Rideau Canal heritage expert and I am also a long-time heritage advocate for the Rideau Canal. I have been dealing with Parks Canada's management of the site for the last 25 years, so I speak with some authority on this issue (you'll find my background in my review of Parks Canada's draft management plan).

In support of my case, I have enclosed my detailed review of Parks Canada's current draft management plan for the Rideau Canal. You'll find the Parks Canada draft plan itself included as Appendix B in my review. You'll find my issues summarized in the Executive Summary of my review of their draft plan. In addition, Section 9.0 of my review details UNESCO specific issues.

I am also very concerned that Parks Canada is not being honest with UNESCO concerning its heritage management of the Rideau Canal. Their draft management plan, which was released to the public in December 2020, contrary to what Parks Canada told you in their letter of 5 February 2020, contains no information about meeting UNESCO requirements, including those specifically requested in your letter to the Government of Canada of 4 November 2019. As noted in my review, what Parks Canada is presently calling a management plan, is not in fact a management plan, it fails at the most basic level to meet any of UNESCO's (or any protected heritage area) requirements for a management plan.

It is to be pointed out that the issues I'm bringing forward are not new, they date to 2008, only a year after inscription, when Parks Canada started to make a management shift on the Rideau Canal away from heritage. This was formalized by a massive management re-structuring in 2012. That change effectively made both its own Rideau Canal management plan (2005) and the World Heritage Site management plan (2005) obsolete, large sections of those plans were simply abandoned in 2012. You'll find that detailed my submission to Parks Canada regarding their draft management plan.

I am requesting that UNESCO take a close look at my review and Parks Canada's draft management plan for the Rideau Canal WHS and make your own determinations based on that evidence. I would also recommend that UNESCO do two things at this time:

- 1) Request a review of the next draft of the Rideau Canal Management Plan, one that Parks Canada says will incorporate UNESCO World Heritage Site requirements. This should be done prior to it being approved by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and being tabled in Parliament. Now is the best opportunity to get changes made into what is supposed to be a 10-year plan. Parks Canada has directly informed me that “we base our approach on the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention which state that the management plan and management system for WH sites need to be relevant and appropriate for each nominated property, and a separate stand-alone WHS management plan is not a requirement.” This means that Parks Canada intends for this stripped down plan to serve as the new UNESCO World Heritage Site management plan for the Rideau Canal.
- 2) Launch a full investigation into Parks Canada’s management of the Rideau Canal as a heritage site. This goes beyond the visual character issues noted in your November 2019 letter, it also goes to World Heritage Site public awareness of the Outstanding Universal Value of the site, which is lacking since Parks Canada has no WHS public awareness program and does not have the heritage resourcing to be able to create one. A full investigation will reveal many substantive issues when it comes to Canada’s management of the Rideau Canal as a World Heritage Site.

As part of my review of Parks Canada’s draft management plan for the Rideau Canal, I have done consultations with heritage groups along the canal (I volunteer with many of those), you will find broad support of my review with the engaged Rideau public.

I trust that you’ll take my requests under consideration. Should you wish, I can supply you with a digital copy of my submission (or you can download it directly from my Save Our Rideau website: www.SaveOurRideau.ca. I can be reached anytime at: rideauken@gmail.com

Yours truly,

Ken W. Watson

cc. H.E. Ms Natasha Cayer, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Canada to UNESCO
Christina Komorski, Deputy Director for Specialized Agencies, United Nations Division, Global Affairs Canada
Sébastien Goupil, Secretary-General, Canadian Commission for UNESCO
Regina Durighello, Director of Advisory and Monitoring Unit, ICOMOS International
Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada
Ron Hallman, President and CEO, Parks Canada Agency
Hunter McGill, Chair, Friends of the Rideau

Enc. (1). Submission to Parks Canada Regarding the Rideau Canal Draft Management Plan by Ken W. Watson, March 31, 2021, including (Appendix B), Rideau Canal National Historic Site of Canada and UNESCO World Heritage Site (including Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site of Canada) Draft Management Plan, Parks Canada Agency, February 2020.