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**NEWS LOCAL**

# Parks Canada wrong for waterway: MP



By Brendan Wedley, Peterborough Examiner  
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Simcoe North MP Bruce Stanton, from left, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock MPP Laurie Scott, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock MP Barry Devolin and Northumberland Quinte West MP Rick Norlock discuss their notes following a roundtable meeting on new revenue options to back proposed cuts to the Trent Severn Waterway on Friday, June 15, 2012 at Trent University.  
CLIFFORD SKARSTEDT/PETERBOROUGH EXAMINER/QMI AGENCY

Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock MP Barry Devolin plans to table a private member's bill to pull Trent-Severn Waterway out of Parks Canada and turn it into an arms-length organization better suited to managing the canal system.

Devolin discussed his plan at Peterborough County council's meeting on Wednesday, stressing that the private member's bill will never pass but that the government could take on the idea to make it happen.

Parks Canada isn't the agency to manage the waterway, Devolin said.

"It's not a park. It's a piece of infrastructure," he said. "It's outside of their area of expertise."

Devolin envisions setting up a Crown corporation to oversee the system, which would be a similar situation to Nav Canada, the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation and Confederation Bridge linking Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

The Conservative MP shared he's particularly interested in the governance model at Pearson International Airport in Toronto where a board comprised of representatives from the City of Toronto, the City of Mississauga, the provincial government, the federal government, the business community and other stakeholders manages the airport that's owned by the federal government.

Trent-Severn Waterway's governance model could be similar with a board made up of representatives from the communities along the system of canals and lakes between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay, Devolin said.

"I'm cautiously optimistic that we're going to put this on a better footing for the future," he said. "It will be tabled soon... sending a message to decision makers that this is important."

MPs along the waterway have been lobbying the government to maintain the services along the system. Last year, the federal government's cutbacks to services led Parks Canada to consider scaling back the length of the boating season along its three waterways. On the Trent-Severn Waterway, the boating season has traditionally extended from Victoria Day weekend in the spring until Thanksgiving in the fall. That traditional navigational season is being preserved for this year.

Another change has been in the administration of the waterways. Parks Canada has cut jobs at Trent-Severn Waterway headquarters in Peterborough and it merged the management of the Rideau Canal and the Trent-Severn Waterway.

Instead of cutting the length of the season, the managers of the waterway should be looking at ways to attract more people to the system, Devolin said.

Devolin used the example of ski hills to make his point. He told council that ski hills offer season's passes for mid-week and off-peak periods as well as passes geared for the busy times in order to pull more people to the hills.

On the water management side of the operation, which is about 70-80% of the role of the waterway, there's been a lot of deferred maintenance of dams, bridges and locks, Devolin noted.

"We haven't been spending as much as we should have," he said.

North Kawartha Mayor Jim Whelan responded that about 80% of his community's property taxes come from residents who live on waterfront properties.

"The water management end of it is absolutely critical," Whelan said of the waterway.

Devolin led the push to review the waterway, which led to the creation of a panel that put together a report on the future of the system.

It was the right thing to do for the waterway, but the panel maybe wasn't the best thing to do politically because it created expectations, Peterborough MP Dean Del Mastro told county council.

"The waterway is in better physical condition than it has been in for probably more than a decade," Del Mastro said.

The waterway serves a water management role, supports tourism and helps supply green energy through hydroelectric generating facilities built along the system, Del Mastro said.

"It's not a very good business. It costs a lot of money and it doesn't bring much in. It's expensive," he added. "It's more than simply a piece of infrastructure, it's part of who we are."

County council members encouraged the MPs to take action.

"We need you guys to make the right move on this, no matter what happens," Warden J. Murray Jones said. "We've got to make this the best it can be."

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