

## County forms new water management organization

By Chad Ingram

Haliburton County is joining forces with the Coalition for Equitable Water Flow (CEWF) to create a new organization to give a unified voice to the stakeholders of the feeder lakes of the Trent-Severn Waterway when it comes to water management in the system.

Councillors passed a resolution for the creation of the organization after hearing from CEWF chairman Ted Spence at their Oct. 28 meeting.

The councils of the county's four lower-tier townships each received visits from CEWF reps in recent months, outlining the coalition's plan.

Unlike other regions feeding into the Trent basin, Haliburton County is not represented by a conservation authority.

The idea is combine the technical and academic expertise of the CEWF with the political clout of elected officials to create a body that can sit at the table with conservation authorities, Parks Canada and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for discussions on integrated water management.

“We do believe we need that single voice,” said CEWF chairman Ted Spence, a professor emeritus from York University who served 10 years as dean of environmental studies.

There are 35 reservoir lakes in the area, 17 of them in the Gull River basin, 13 in the Burnt River basin and five among what are considered the southern feeder lakes.

As Spence has pointed out, 70 per cent of the water that flows through the system at Lakefield comes from these reservoirs, that percentage increasing to 90 during the summer months.

There have been various groups dedicated to trying to mitigate water level fluctuations on Haliburton County feeder lakes over the decades, including committees that operated from the 1960s through the 1990s and whose documentation the CEWF has been looking at.

“They were asking some of the same questions,” Spence said.

A panel on the future of the TSW held in Peterborough in 2008 had produced what

Spence said were a couple of promising initiatives, both of which turned out to be major disappointments.

One was the establishment of a water management advisory council, which included county representatives Chris Riddle and Keith Hodgson.

“It looked like it was going to be a useful group,” Spence said. “It's actually been dormant.”

Spence said government cutbacks in recent years led to a focus on canal operations, leaving water management largely out of the picture.

There was also a memorandum of understanding between the provincial and federal government signed in 2011, although Spence said water management initiatives stemming from this partnership were essentially nil.

“They've not been dealing with water management and there's no indication that's going to happen,” said Spence, adding that the MOU was soon to expire.

Among other initiatives, the group will concentrate on objectives such as dry and wet season planning and flood planning.

“We saw what happened at Horseshoe Lake and Mountain Lake when the decision was made to store a little extra water there to try to save Minden,” Spence said, referring to the 2013 Minden flood and the many cottages that were damaged upstream of the flooded village.

County councillors were on board.

“The challenge will be, how do we not become the next group of people trying to do something, in the face of the history we see before us,” said Algonquin Highlands Reeve Carol Moffatt, who called the organization a “good marriage” between the CEWF's expertise and council's access to higher levels of government.

“For the last year I spent a lot of time looking at this,” said Minden Hills Reeve Brent Devolin, who said he liked the “hybrid solution” that did not entail the bureaucratic trappings of a conservation authority.

He also liked that the principal authority would lie with county councillors.

As Spence explained, the CEWF's vision for the new organization's board to include nine members; three from CEWF, four from Haliburton County and one each from the

townships of North Kawartha and Trent Lakes, in northern Peterborough County.

Chaired by one of the elected officials, a potential name is the Upper Trent Watershed Water Management Partnership.

“It's a little long, but it says what it needs to say,” Spence said, adding the moniker could be modified.

The county's lower-tier councils will each be asked to put forward one councillor to serve with the organization, which Spence estimated should meet at least three times a year, perhaps with additional meetings when required.

Spence hoped that a working group to create a charter for the organization would meet before the end of the calendar year and that a report from the group would be presented by May.