

Presentation to the Committee of the Ontario Legislature Considering Bill
198

Given by Judith Grant
President of the Federation of Tiny Township Shoreline Associations

May 9, 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Federation of Tiny Township Shoreline Associations of which I am President represents 24 homeowners' associations located along 72 kilometres of shore in Tiny Township. Tiny, as you may know, is a Township in Simcoe County. It lies north of Elmvale and Wasaga Beach and west of Penetanguishene and Midland. Twice a year we publish a 16 or 20 page newspaper, which goes to all 10,000 households in the Township.

Usually, our interests and concerns are focused at the municipal level. The Federation has no political affiliation; the directors of our association are of all political stripes; I myself am philosophically a Liberal; and the members of our member associations are likewise diverse in their political allegiance. So when we come to speak to you about Bill 198 it is not in support on one party or another, but rather to address a shared concern about one essential aspect of the Bill.

The residents of our Township are keenly interested in environmental matters. Our Official Plan is an "Environment First" Plan that embodies extensive provisions to preserve the natural environment for wildlife and people.

But those of us who live along Georgian Bay have been sharply aware for a number of years that something is seriously out of whack in the upper Great Lakes:

- The levels of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay have fallen almost 2 metres since the high water of 1986, while Lakes Erie and Ontario have remained at normal levels.
- This drop in upper lakes water levels has been devastating for vital wetland ecosystems over a huge area.
- It has jeopardized the health of Georgian Bay by exposing rocks, drying up fish spawning beds, encouraging the growth of stinking algae, besides making navigation difficult and many beaches unswimmable.

To our great relief, the International Joint Commission is right now undertaking studies to study the drop in water levels and recommend mitigation methods.

We would like to applaud the Ontario government unreservedly for introducing Bill 198, which puts in place the legislation needed to support the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Sustainable Water Resources Agreement. But there is one provision in the Bill that could jeopardize any attempt at stabilizing and restoring the water levels of the upper lakes.

Bill 198 takes a firm stand against diversions of water out of the Great Lakes basin, and we are glad to see this.

And we also support that clause 34.6 recognizes the importance of not diverting water from any one of the five major watersheds in the Great Lakes-St Lawrence River Basin to another.

But we are appalled at the possibility of a series of proposals taking advantage of the huge Exceptions allowed in (2) 1. i. These exceptions work against the main principle of no inter-basin diversions, and they have the potential to upset the balance of the entire Great Lakes system. Certainly, any further pressure placed on water volumes in Lake Huron and Georgian Bay will cause serious problems and could undercut the work of the IJC I just referred to.

We believe that the Exceptions clause in the present Bill 198 will just pave the way for major water diversions that already are being planned, and more will surely follow:

- We oppose the plans of York Region to build a huge sewage pipe from the Lake Simcoe-Georgian Bay watershed to a treatment plant on Lake Ontario – a huge diversion of water from one watershed to another.
- We oppose the plans of several cities in the Lake Erie and Lake Ontario watersheds to draw drinking water from Lake Huron or Georgian Bay and divert the effluent to the lower lakes.

In our view, all these Exceptions should be removed from the Bill. Firm statements about living within our means and about conservation should replace them. You would then be passing a Bill of which you and future generations truly could be proud.

I'd like to leave you with a modest example of what happens when water is drained away from where it lies in the natural scheme of things. The Nature Conservancy of Canada owns a block of woodland directly behind the beach where we have our cottage on Georgian Bay. Much of it is wetland, and has, since 2001, has been protected in our Official Plan. A year or two earlier, in 1999 or 2000, the Township engineer installed a culvert from the swampy area (which is typically flooded after the snow melts in the spring) across the local road to a ditch, which drains excess water to the Bay. The effect of this culvert has been to deprive the swamp of time in which to slowly absorb the spring melt water and the consequence of that is that the swamp has gradually gotten dryer. Many of the cedars that grow there have become unstable and over the last couple of year a large number of them have fallen over, exposing huge flares of roots. What used to be a fine stand of trees is now a pickup-sticks mess.

This is a small example of what happens when water levels are tinkered with – even a little.

We urge you to respect the instinct that produced the wording in 34.6
(1) A permit shall not be issued or amended under section 34.1 so as to authorize the taking of water from a Great Lakes watershed if,
(a) any of the water would be transferred. (i.e. diverted out of the watershed)

This is where the clause should stop. All the exceptions should be removed.

As a society we have been profligate in our use of water. We must learn to live within our means. And we must learn to respect the natural systems that sustain us. If we fail to do that, we'll destroy them – and gradually make life on our planet impossible. Diversions of water, either for drinking or with sewage, from one watershed to another, tinker with something large and important in a way that could have devastating consequences.

We have chosen to speak about only one aspect of the Bill. It addresses a complex and important matter in a thoughtful comprehensive manner. It is a good starting point. We would note, in conclusion, however, that good thinking should be respected and drawn upon, no matter who happens to be doing it. We have reviewed the discussion in the Legislature during second reading of the Bill, and we think you should pay careful heed to the points and perspective presented by Mr. Peter Tabuns.

Thank you.