

17 Admiral Road
Toronto, Ontario
January 16, 2009

The Honourable Jim Prentice
Minister of the Environment for Canada
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street, 28th Floor
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0H3

The Honourable John Gerretsen
Minister of the Environment for Ontario
12th Floor, 135 St. Clair Avenue West
Toronto, Ontario
M4V 1P5

Dear Ministers Prentice and Gerretson,

RE: Extensive beach pollution arising from the Nottawasaga River

I am writing to you at the direction of the board of directors of The Federation of Tiny Township Shoreline Associations (the "Federation"). The Federation is an umbrella organization representing 27 associations comprising some 1,800 households in Tiny Township in Simcoe County

In recent years, pollution evidently arising from a plume emerging into Georgian Bay from the Nottawasaga River at Wasaga Beach has caused unhealthy counts of *E. coli* to occur along many of the beaches of Tiny Township, which lies just to the north. We appeal to you to undertake measures to investigate and remediate this serious health problem.

Background: Starting about ten years ago, our members reported serious concerns and health problems with the water quality on the beaches.

With considerable assistance from the local Midland Health Unit, we organized and ran a volunteer swimming water-sampling program each year since 2001. At the end of each summer we compile a comprehensive spreadsheet of our weekly sample results, results taken by the Simcoe-

Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) at the public beaches it monitors, and others taken by the staff at Awenda Provincial Park.

As a result we are well aware that *E. coli* and other fecal bacteria have plagued the beaches of Tiny Township for many years. Particularly affected are the beaches along the more than twenty miles of Tiny's western shore, some of which regularly have geometric means above 100 according to SMDHU's own statistics and are thus considered unsafe for swimming.

After our first year of sampling, we asked the Township of Tiny to investigate and eliminate the sources of pollution. The Township first attempted to reduce *E. coli* loading to our beaches by means of mandatory system of septic inspections that began in 2002 and will complete its first pass through the Township next year. For the last three years, the Township has participated in a North Simcoe Geese Management Program Task Force looking into ways to reduce the numbers of geese on the beaches, and has hired the Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) each year since 2003 to consider possible sources of pollution on our municipal beaches. Our monitoring and that undertaken by the SMDHU indicate that the septic inspection program has had some success. Despite all these efforts, however, the levels of *E. coli* and frequency of beach posting have remained obdurately high along the southern nine concessions of Tiny Township's western shore.

The Problem: The SSEA has reported that the Nottawasaga River may be a significant source of the *E. coli* and fecal bacteria, especially on these southerly Township beaches. Aerial photographs included in their reports show a plume of silt flowing from the river and being carried north by currents onto Tiny Township Beaches. Also, monitoring by Environment Canada shows that levels of *E. coli* in the portion of Georgian Bay impacted by discharge from the Nottawasaga River are elevated above *E. coli* levels in adjacent lake-water.

We are concerned that swimmers and residents continue to be at an unacceptable risk, probably due to the discharge from the Nottawasaga River.

We need your help in addressing this problem. Tiny Township does not have the financial resources, the equipment, or the expertise to tackle it. The Nottawasaga River is not under the Township's political control. The SSEA had no suggestions as to what to do about the impact of the Nottawasaga apart from observing that "The Township should be aware of and comment on any proposals to modify the mouth of the Nottawasaga River in order to

protect the beaches in the southern coast of the Township from further regional adverse effects of the River discharge.”

We residents, however, are urgently concerned that the problem be addressed.

We have become aware that your ministries addressed a problem similar to ours that exists on the southeast shore of Lake Huron where there is discharge of fecal bacteria from large rivers onto recreational beaches. There, the Ministry of the Environment and Environment Canada put microbiologists, limnologists, modellers and river-lake interface specialists to work on the problem. The federal-provincial Lake Huron Southeast Shore Working Group was created specifically to address this concern. It produced “Sources and Mechanisms of Delivery of *E. coli* (bacteria) Pollution to the Lake Huron Shoreline of Huron County”. The success of this program, and the realization that the entire Lake-Huron-Georgian Bay system needs protection has recently led to “A Canadian Framework for Community Action - Lake-Huron Georgian Bay Watershed” which is led by MOE and Environment Canada with the objective of promoting a healthy landscape.

We ask for assistance of the kind given to the SE shore of Lake Huron.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care’s new “Beach Management Protocol”, and specifically entry 1.a.iii “Environmental Survey”, local boards of health must:

Carry out an environmental survey of the public beach prior to the commencement of regular testing of the water quality. The purpose of conducting the survey is to identify possible pollution sources and their potential impact on the quality of the water to determine the safety of the water for public recreational use. As part of the environmental survey, the board of health shall:

- Verify existing sources of pollution at the public beach, such as storm water outfalls, and identify other sources that may not have been identified in previous seasons;
- Work with municipalities and other surrounding landowners, wherever possible, to reduce or eliminate sources of pollution, such as garbage and litter; and
- Collect water samples as deemed necessary from areas such as storm water outfalls, which may influence water quality at the bathing area.

Our Request: We ask that your ministries undertake an Environmental Survey of the impact of the Nottawasaga River on water quality along Tiny Township's beaches, and we are requesting that the expertise within MOE

and Environment Canada be made available to assess the problem. Specifically, we want the following questions answered:

- (1) What are the contaminant levels in the discharge plume in Georgian Bay from the Nottawasaga River, before and after storm events?
- (2) Do contaminants from the discharge plume of the Nottawasaga River reach the beaches of Tiny Township via currents and wave actions?
- (3) What environmental factors lead to elevated levels of contaminants on the beaches of Tiny Township?
- (4) What health risks do the contaminant levels present to swimmers using the beaches of Tiny Township?
- (5) How can the beach pollution problem in Tiny Township be addressed and remediated?

Finally, we ask that MOE bring together in an appropriate Working Group local beach associations, the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, the Town of Wasaga Beach, the Township of Tiny, the Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and local community groups to monitor the conduct of the requested Environmental Study and the subsequent programs to reduce contaminant loadings to the Nottawasaga River, with the ultimate goal of reducing the present unacceptable health risk on beaches of Tiny Township.

We look forward to receiving your help and to hearing from you. If volunteers would be useful, the Federation would be glad to supply them.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Grant
President, Federation of Tiny
Township Shoreline Associations

Cc: Ms Peggy Breckenridge, Mayor, Township of Tiny
Mr. Bruce Stanton, MP for Simcoe North
Mr. Garfield Dunlop, MPP for Simcoe North