



Sparrow Lake Association (SLA) *Newsletter*

Serving Lakefront Property Owners and Cottagers

Lock # 42 Washago—Lock # 43 Swift Rapids

Editor: *Meredith Oberfrank*

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Note: Click on underlined text in this newsletter to access relevant websites.

1. Greetings from the President Bob Corbett

For the past five years, the SLA (Sparrow Lake Association) Board has been publishing a Spring newsletter to welcome everyone back for another cottage season. We have written about late snow melts, high water levels, cold temperatures, bugs, and other unpleasant things that we experience during the Spring. Well... in light of what is currently happening right now in our homes, communities, provinces, country, and around the world, our reporting about pesky Spring annoyances seems pretty unimportant. We are hoping that you and your families are healthy, are practising all the safe measures to keep physically separated, and are occasionally taking your mind away from the doom and gloom by thinking about great times at the lake.

2020 begins our third season of being a virtual cottage association. Although we took this path as a result of changing social habits and of cottagers wanting to spend more time doing “their own thing,” the good news is that we are still able to keep everyone informed. The SLA is simply three years ahead of what other cottage associations are now having to do.

Your SLA Board has continued to track many of the issues that are important to you as cottagers. Although our information is as accurate as possible, the current health crisis is affecting decisions, dates, priorities, and cancellations across the country.

IMPORTANT: Outdoor Fire Ban: Effective April 3, 2020 until further notice, this ban includes outdoor burning of grass, debris, and campfires, even when using an outdoor fire grate, fireplace, or fire pit. This ban is in effect in order to enable emergency responders to focus their efforts where they are needed most. For more information, [see this press release](#).

IMPORTANT: Sheltering at the Cottage during COVID-19:
 [From FOCA (the Federation of Ontario Cottagers’ Associations)] If you are a snowbird, or otherwise returning from travel abroad, Health Canada expects you to self-isolate for 14 days. Information is available online here: [Health Canada COVID-19 Information](#).

What if you own property in two places in Ontario, and want to relocate from one to the other, such as to shelter in place at your cottage? FOCA has heard from many members, partners, and municipal contacts over the past days about this issue. Many are concerned that any transiting increases the chance for spread of illness.

FOCA reminds members that our rural communities have reduced capacity to accommodate sudden changes in supply demands. Many of us wouldn't ordinarily open the cottage until nearer to the May long weekend. As we already know from our local grocery experiences, parts of the supply chain are under strain. Additionally, rural hospitals have limited capacity and resources, and you should consider where your health needs can best be met, in an emergency situation.

If you do relocate to your waterfront residence (or are there already), FOCA suggests the following:

- Connect with your lake association on social media (find many connections via [FOCA's Facebook page](#)). As always, these are the people who know your waterfront area best!
- Provision yourself for several weeks (with food, drinks, gas, hardware supplies, prescriptions) before leaving your off-season community, so that you will not need to make stops along the way. This is not the time for our usual credo to "buy local" in cottage country. As you would do anywhere at this time, should you urgently need anything from a retailer or pharmacy you should call ahead to see if there are options for safe pickup or delivery.
- Continue to follow all the principles of physical distancing at the cottage! Although cottage country is usually the place for relaxed rules, that cannot be the case anywhere for the foreseeable future. Cottages are often the gathering places for multiple households in an extended family; for now, and possibly for some time to come, that could put everyone at risk.
- Develop an exit plan with immediate family, in case you develop any indications of illness while at your waterfront property.
- As the clock slows down on our usually-hectic schedules, use this time to enjoy nature, cook, read, sing, dance, nap and dream about dock-jumping time to come.



Lakes and Boat Travel: We contacted the TSW (Trent-Severn Waterway) to ask to if the current COVID-19 situation is going to impact the operation of the locks. As of March 26, they state: "Parks Canada's priorities for Ontario Waterways at this time are the provision of the critical services of construction projects and water management. The scheduled start date of the 2020 navigation season for the Rideau Canal and the Trent-Severn waterway continues to be May 15, 2020—the Friday of the Victoria Day long weekend." Conversations with residents and commercial stakeholders along the TSW, along with the news of our government's COVID-19 legislation of more business closures and banning any public gatherings, has us believing the opening date could be postponed. We are hoping our assumption is wrong, but this could certainly impact the restaurants, marinas, and businesses in our area. You may want to contact your local marina to determine if they are able to get your boat out of storage. Stay tuned!

Water Levels: The colder Spring temperature has slowed the snow melt, which has minimized the run-off and early high-water levels. This has allowed a controlled draining of Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching through Sparrow Lake and the Swift Rapids. Unfortunately, the high snowpack from the Haliburton Highlands and Algonquin Park and the run-off down the Black River has not yet finished, nor have we yet experienced any heavy April rains, so we are not yet clear of flood potential. Again, this information is changing daily, and we will send eblast updates as needed.

Your SLA Board has been working with neighbouring cottage associations to track water levels and flow rates between Lake Simcoe and Port Severn for several years, and we are correlating the metric measurements of water levels to actual landmarks in our areas. The plan is to establish benchmarks that we can easily identify with (e.g., the government dock at Port Stanton or Franklin Park, possibly Sopher's Landing on McLean Bay, and/or the concrete piers for the

train bridge near Hydro Glen). Once we can establish a metric height above sea level for the benchmarks, you can compare the current water levels (provided online by the TSW) from these locations to your own cottage.

Here is a hypothetical example: if the top of the government dock at Port Stanton is at 213 meters above sea level (masl) and the current water level is at 212.82 masl, then the water is approx 7" below the dock. You could create your own benchmark on a rock, dock, or anything permanent near the water at your own cottage. By comparing the current published water level from the TSW to the level on your own benchmark, you can calculate your own masl. You can then conveniently monitor this (online) from anywhere or anytime, and determine if the water level at your cottage is approaching a condition that requires action.

Airbnb: Another expression that was not in our vocabulary five years ago is *short-term cottage rentals* (e.g., Airbnb). In past decades, renting your cottage worked well if you were going to be away from your cottage for several weeks, or if the operating costs of your cottage were getting out of control. You could then recover costs by renting to friends or family. Airbnb have escalated this into a fulltime business. People are buying up cottages, renovating to allow for large groups of renters, and often not doing any background checks on these renters. Unfortunately, many of these cottages have been turned into a "new-party-every-weekend" problem for neighbours. Don't get me wrong—I enjoy socializing at the lake with my friends—but being "neighbourly" goes both ways for fulltime cottagers, and complaints are quickly dealt with.

Many Airbnb customers treat their rental property with respect, but with other renters comes loud music, lots of refreshments, fireworks, trespassing onto your property, and partying until early morning. Dealing with these "others" has also created a problem for police, bylaw enforcement officers, and municipal offices. After checking with municipalities from The Blue Mountains to Huntsville, we find that there is no common process in our province (or regions/counties) in place to deal with such infractions. Police often get the first call as a "disturbing the peace" complaint. Bylaw officers do not normally work on weekend evenings, and most cottage neighbours are reluctant to walk over to an Airbnb property that is packed with people who have been partying all day. That leaves us with the question: how do we address this problem?

Our suggestions:

1. If you happen to know the owner of a cottage operating an Airbnb business that has had prior issues, be proactive and contact them. Share your concerns ahead of the busy rental season, and suggest they add some rules to the rental contract about excessive noise, loud music, late-night partying, lakefront safety, property boundaries, etc.
2. If the noise continues past a reasonable time, call the police (do not call 911; please call **1-888-310-1122** or ***16** on a cellphone—the dispatcher will be able to determine your location), and lodge a disturbing-the-peace complaint. Ensure you have the proper address for the rental cottage.
3. Register a complaint to your municipal office. Township officials will be able to track down the property owner, ensure the Airbnb is properly registered, and record this information for future complaints.

Other Business: This newsletter also contains reports from other members of our Board. As access to information through weblinks improves, the need for lengthy reports is reduced. We have tried to add many links that you can quickly access in order to keep up with current issues (especially in this volatile time). Hopefully our reports will add some additional clarity.

FOCA (Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations): SLA is a member of FOCA. They provide information and support on many topics that relate to all cottage owners. Their recent updates touch on COVID-19 and sheltering at the cottage, OEB and Hydro One Seasonal Electricity Rates, Spring Bear Hunts, Spring Water Levels, and Concerns over Salt in the Freshwater system. There is a good video link regarding invasive species and Starry Stonewort in Lake Scugog. If you would like to read up on any of these topics, please see [this website](#).

Trent Severn Waterway—Water Level Management Updates: Parks Canada's water management team continues to actively monitor water levels and flows and weather forecasts across the Trent-Severn Waterway. These factors are used to determine dam operations on a daily basis for the Trent-Severn Waterway. Their website is [here](#) (and here is the link specifically for [Sparrow Lake water levels](#)).

Hamlet Swing Bridge Fixed and Temporary Closure—Notice from Parks Canada:
Peterborough, Ontario, March 26, 2020 –The Hamlet Fixed and Swing Bridge will be closing to vehicle traffic on April 8, 2020 for approximately one month to address deficiencies. During this closure, the contractor will complete repairs on the mechanical systems which support/swing the bridge, complete final balancing of the swing bridge and complete remaining painting activities. Parks Canada and Public Service & Procurement Canada (PSPC) are working together to overcome challenges and sustain the re-opening and full function of the bridge. Parks Canada has formally instructed the contractor to implement a strict work plan in order to mitigate further delays and to adhere to quality control specifications. Parks Canada appreciates the patience from the travelling public and apologizes for the inconvenience of this closure. The replacement of the Hamlet Fixed and Swing Bridge is part of the Government of Canada's Federal Infrastructure Investment program. Parks Canada is leading this important infrastructure work to ensure safe, high-quality experiences for visitors by improving heritage, visitor, waterway, and highway assets located within national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas, including along the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site. For questions or concerns, or to receive email updates regarding this project, please contact us at Ont.TrentSevern@pc.gc.ca and include "Hamlet Bridge" in the subject heading. Click [here](#) for news about this or other infrastructure projects in your area.

Couchiching Fixed Bridge—Notice from Parks Canada:

The Task: The Bridge has been demolished and contractors are continuing with concrete removal. East side is almost complete and west side is underway.

What to Expect: Noise and traffic consistent with a construction site is to be expected.

Safe Quiet Lakes:

Safe Quiet Lakes is a group of people who are passionate about life near the water and who are determined to help sustain it.

Their Mission: Make the Muskoka lakes safer and quieter to ensure the sustainable enjoyment of a treasured shared resource

Their website is <http://safequiet.ca/>, and here is their link to their [March newsletter](#) if you would like to obtain more information.

Gravenhurst Opera House and Orillia Opera House

Due to COVID-19, the Gravenhurst Opera House and Orillia Opera House are closed. Here are the links to their websites to track their future shows:

- [Gravenhurst Opera House](#)
- [Orillia Opera House](#)

As we mention in every newsletter, the SLA is currently operating as a volunteer virtual association, and there are still necessary expenses. As with any organization, we require liability insurance. We also incur expenses to install, remove, and maintain the hazard markers on Sparrow Lake, fees to keep our website and domain address active, administrative costs and fees for seminars, and fees to remain part of FOCA. We ask each year that you not only ensure your own membership remains current, but that you help us grow this association by reaching out to at least one more family to consider joining. Our membership numbers are dropping each year. We may not host a regatta, social picnic, fishing derby, or golf tournament anymore, but I believe we are all passionate about our time at the lake. One large voice certainly pulls more power than many smaller ones, as we are seeing with our different levels of government at this time. I very much hope the current world crisis is behind us soon, and that we can focus our attention on having another great season at the lake.

On behalf of the SLA Board—Judy Moore-Vey, Meredith Oberfrank, and John Cooper—we wish everyone a safe and healthy Spring, and we look forward to seeing you at the cottage soon.

Cheers

Bob Corbett, President
Sparrow Lake Association

2. Membership

Judy Moore Vey

At the beginning of 2019, SLA had \$14,500 in Term Deposits. We withdrew \$1000 to help offset the Spring expenses of Directors' Insurance and FOCA fees, website and administrative expenses, etc., leaving us with \$13,500.00 in Term Deposits, which we still have today. 2019 was a good year financially for Sparrow Lake Association. We had \$1455 in renewals for membership fees, and we had a very generous anonymous donation for \$1400 which will help us with Directors' Insurance and FOCA fees for 2020. We will have more than enough funds to sustain us throughout 2020.

Our active memberships are low. We are down to 38 active members. Approximately five years ago we averaged around 80–100 active members, and then for a couple of years we were around 65–70 members. However, by the end of 2019, we were down to 38 active members. Last year I only sent renewal notices to people whose membership had actually expired, but many people contacted me wondering what their status was. This month I will contact every SLA member by email and will let you know if your membership is current or outstanding. If your membership is outstanding, I will provide you with renewal instructions and will request that you renew by sending an e-transfer to treasurer@sparrowlakeassociation.com. SLA does reach out by email to more than 38 members. Since I have more time at home now, I am going to personally contact the members we have lost over the last few years to see if we can invite them to rejoin as active members. In addition, we would like to ask all our active members to mention the Sparrow Lake Association to a neighbour, friend, or someone who has just purchased a cottage on the lake. I am happy to email you (or them) the application form and you can drop it by their cottage. Alternatively, ask them to visit the SLA website [here](#). I would like to know that we can obtain enough money each year to offset our expenses so that we don't have to withdraw from our GIC investments, and so that those funds are available if a major issue arises.

Here are some highlights from recent FOCA meetings that I attended in person and via webinar. FOCA refers to itself as the “largest non-agricultural land-owner group in Ontario.” Being such a large group means it can do many things for us. This group works tirelessly on our behalf.

Highlights:

Hydro One electricity pricing: The seasonal category (i.e., many of us) may be reclassified. FOCA is against eliminating this category, and has made their stance known to the government. Without this class, we could see cottage electricity bills increase by 54% (\$68/month).

Septic Systems (also known as “Residential On-Site Wastewater Systems”):

- Certain townships in Ontario have mandatory annual to six-year inspections
- The cost to homeowners ranges from \$0-\$200
- Metal septic tanks are not allowed by law; the majority of tanks are concrete
- Trees/bushes are supposed to be 6 metres away from your system
- Do you know the last emptying date or age of your tank? Please find out and note it
- FOCA can provide list of local (waste) service providers if you require their services
- There is unfortunately no good solution to dumping septic contents in Ontario
- FYI: there is legal recourse to septic “criminals”—if a contractor is refused an inspection, they can get a court order (since building/health laws are potentially being broken)
- Learn more about septic systems and inspections [here](#).

Dr. John Smol (Professor Environmental Change at Queen’s University) gave a fascinating talk about the **lake sediment history** of lakes and rivers in Ontario. Here are notes on his talk:

- His team checks sediment samples from bottom of lakes/rivers to track carbon particles, pollutants, pollen, mineral particles, insect remains, algae, water fleas, water organisms
- He is trying to assess why algal blooms are happening where they are not expected, e.g., in fairly clean small southern Ontario lakes
- Climate change (longer summers with less ice cover in winter) and a change in nutrients in the water are key in bloom creation—they really started to appear as a legacy of acid rain in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s
- Road salt is a huge issue (more on this later in this newsletter)

Dr. Andrea Kirkwood (Professor of Biology at Ontario Tech University) gave a very informative talk on **invasive species**. Here are key points:

- Invasive species displace native species
- They deplete oxygen in the water during die-back (and then fish, etc. die because of lower oxygen levels in the water)
- They impede boats and swimmers, and are unsightly and smelly
- The Trent-Severn Waterway is a hot-bed of invasive species, due to boat traffic
- Eurasian water milfoil is abundant in our area, e.g., in Lake Simcoe
- Starry Stonewort forms dense mats up to 15 m deep
- It is spread by boats, and displaces native aquatic plants
- Fish cannot swim through these dense mats
- To manage invasive species, we need to...
 - o Stop creating habitats for them to invade
 - o Stop polluting the water with nutrients that they feed on
 - o Stop erosion by hardening our shorelines and suppress wave activity

- Mechanical harvesting can actually spread these invasive species
- The best (very costly) method of extraction is to hire divers to pull them out by the roots
- Long-term management of these species requires a holistic approach
- Please let us know if you see these invasive species in our lake. Educate yourself on their appearance with this pdf: [A Shoreline Owner's Guide to Invasive Species](#)

Dr. Shelley Arnott (Professor of Aquatic Ecology, Queen's University) gave a detailed talk about **"over-salting our lakes"**

- Lake Simcoe is noted as a lake that has a greatly increasing chloride concentration
- This is a result of road salt
- Salt lowers the freezing point of water (pure water freezes at 0°C; water with a high chloride count freezes at -21°C)
- Our water-quality guidelines are not sufficient to control this
- What can we do about all the road salt that is used? Read on...
- Canadian municipalities are creating better road-salt storage, installing ground-speed electronic controllers on salting trucks; using pre-wetted salt (less salt is needed when it is pre-wetted)
- What can we do privately? Please try to remember these points for next fall/winter...
 - o Only use salt on your driveway/walkway when the temperature is -10°C or less
 - o Remove snow and ice before applying salt, and apply less of it
 - o Ensure there is proper drainage of snow/water
 - o Find out about ["Smart About Salt" training](#)
 - o Encourage your municipality to experiment with alternatives: beet juice, less salt

Lake Partner Program

- This program helps us keep an eye on chloride (salt) and phosphorus levels (phosphorus in water is bad!)
- Calcium levels are declining in our lakes, and this affects a healthy lake's ecosystem
- 15% of Ontario lakes are in the "danger zone" with high phosphorous levels
- Monitors water clarity (a tea-stained colour or hazy-looking water is a concern)
- There are 600 active Lake Partner Program volunteers on 550 Ontario lakes
- If you would like to volunteer to test water quality on Sparrow Lake, please contact us!

4. A Final Note

For the past 20+ years one SLA member has not only been active on the SLA Board, but as a fulltime resident on the lake, he has been the eyes and ears for our members. This is the person that many of us have called over the years to find out if the ice is in yet, how thick the ice is, whether the ice is out yet, when might it be out, how high the water level is, is the level continuing to rise, or has it started to recede?!

As of May 1, 2020, John Cooper will be relocating from his waterfront home on McLean Bay. He will continue to support the SLA as a Director, but we will certainly miss his "hands on" involvement around the lake and his watchful eye over our waters.

Good luck with the move John!!

Regards from all your neighbours, friends, and SLA members