

Save The Petawawa: Update #1

Feb 04, 2011

Thank you sincerely for your concern about the Petawawa River, and thanks as well for your patience as we continue to organize the mailing lists and decide on the best course of action. In addition to the update, more information on how you can help is also provided below.

Update:

As a brief update since the January 17 Open House in Petawawa, the following activities have taken place.

- On January 18, Alan Huckabone and Al Hepburn (BBRA) spoke with John Yakabuski, our local MPP, about the concerns of Petawawa residents. John has since agreed that "if residents give him a clear statement that they oppose the project" he is willing to raise these concerns with the Minister of the Environment. He can be reached at: john.yakabusko@pc.ola.org
- On January 19, the Town of Petawawa was provided with a list of detailed questions, with the request that, further to Mayor Sweet's pledge to engage in more open dialogue on this issue, the questions would be forwarded to Xeneca. Despite several subsequent emails, no response has been received.
- On January 20, an e-mail requesting information on dam safety requirements was sent to the president of the Ontario Waterpower Association. No response was received. See below.
- On January 25, one of our attendees sent a number of well formulated questions to Xeneca. Most of the responses were trivial, but Xeneca did state that the mitigating measures being considered for fish were things like improving spawning grounds and fish hatcheries elsewhere.
- On January 27, the Ministry of Transport was approached in regards to maintaining navigability on that stretch of river. We were advised that a formal "navigability assessment" will be undertaken in the near future. No other details were given. Note: A portage trail is considered a suitable means of providing for navigation. It may be a very long walk...
- On January 28, an agent of Xeneca approached the whitewater kayak and canoeing community for discussions on building a 'concrete and rubble ditch' that would permit kayaks to pass through Railroad (Trestle) Rapid by channelling the 'compensatory flow'.
- On January 31, our January 20th email requesting information on dam safety requirements was re-transmitted to the president of the Ontario Waterpower Association. This time, we cc'd the Minister of the Environment, Mayor Sweet, and the President of Xeneca. This time, we got a response in 27 minutes. It contained links to a draft standard pertaining to dams that is currently being circulated for discussion. It is clear that a dam like the one at Big Eddy will be in the high to very high "Hazard Potential Classification". When asked for more detail, the OWA President responded that we had exceeded the limits of his technical expertise, and referred us to the Ministry of Natural Resources. The document contained one notable quote: weir type dams such as the one proposed for Big Eddy are referred to as "drowning machines".
- On January 31, an Open House was held in Deep River with, approximately 40 people in attendance. John Yakabuski sent a representative. An additional 125 lawn signs were distributed at the meeting. They were printed with the support of Portage Place B&B, GearHeads, Go On & Get Lost and the kayak community (Guelph Kayak Club, Kawartha Whitewater Paddlers, and MacMaster Whitewater).

• On February 1, an official in the Ministry of the Environment finally responded to our call. We told him that Xeneca has largely ignored the requirement for public consultation contained in the Class EA process. Given this demonstrated contempt for the process, we asked if the project could immediately be switched to an Individual Environmental Assessment. He replied that the only time such a request would be entertained was after the Notice of Completion was published, and the 30 day clock was running. He advised us to keep accurate records of all questions raised, and Xeneca's responses, in order to support the case.

• On February 2, Elder Skip Ross received a reply from Chief Kirby Whiteduck (Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn, Golden Lake) stating: "We have not developed a position on these particular proposed water power projects yet but are still corresponding with the company and the governments. We are seeking more details from the company, including our possible involvement in the projects. We are waiting for more information from them."

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• An Alliance with other communities and user groups from similar projects across the province is in the early stages of being formed. The kickoff meeting will be in North Bay on February 19.

• On February 2, it was confirmed that Petawawa Town Council will continue to remain silent on the issue, and is not willing to be a conduit between concerned residents and Xeneca for fear of legal ramifications. It does seem that we will have to go it alone.

Look for another Town Hall in the near future to set up some kind of local alliance of stakeholders if we are forced to go that way. While we have had lots of questions from fishermen, we seem to be lacking a lead person from that community. Please feel free to put forward your name.

How You Can Help:

1. If you haven't already done so, please contact venskaitis@xeneca.com and state your concerns about the project. Put your questions in a table, with an empty box for the answer. That makes it more difficult for them to supply a "content free" response. Request to be added to their mailing list for receipt of the Notice of Completion.
2. Send an e-mail to John Yakabuski (john.yakabusko@pc.ola.org) and thank him for agreeing to bring your concerns to the attention of the Minister of the Environment and others in Provincial Parliament.
3. Record and save any and all correspondence with Xeneca, particularly when you have posed questions and not gotten suitable answers. Please Cc us on all questions and responses. We are building a case that will argue they are failing to meet their 'public consultation' obligations as dictated by the Class Environmental Assessment process. This will assist in requesting that a full and proper Individual Environmental Assessment be required.
4. Please forward this e-mail and the website www.SaveThePetawawa.ca to any friends or colleagues that may have an interest in helping to protect the Petawawa.

If you have additional questions or concerns please contact Save The Petawawa at:

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