

Save The Petawawa: Update #3

March 20, 2011



Thank you! As the snow begins to melt and the ice is lifting off the water, it brings with it a very tangible reminder of how lucky we are to have such a river in the heart of our community. There is no doubt, as this message is being prepared, families are walking the trail, visiting the rapids and enjoying the parks and green space. Thank you all for your continued interest in protecting this wonderful part of our community.

In addition, for those that attended the March 1 Open House, your donations to the jar at the door are very much appreciated, and you provided over \$250 to help the cause going forward.

How you can help: Your letters, concern and questions are still very much important. All the details are on the CASP website: www.SaveThePetawawa.ca including a form letter, e-mail addresses and a list of possible questions.

Have you told your friends and family yet? This river needs our help and the more people we involve, the better, so please pass along this update and the web site address to your friends and colleagues.

Many thanks,
Community Alliance to Save the Petawawa

www.SaveThePetawawa.ca
Petawawa-River@hotmail.com
Facebook: Save The Petawawa

More details are provided on page 2 and 3. Please keep reading.

Recent Activities:

TOURISM:

Following a presentation from CASP, the Ottawa Valley Tourism Association (OVTA) has asked that a full economic study be done that takes into account the potential loss of income and damage to the tourism branding of Renfrew County and the OVTA.

PUBLIC:

A CASP Community Town Hall was held on March 1. Again, we had great participation from the community with over 100 people in attendance. This included representation from the offices of our local MP and MPP. Representative both delivered prepared remarks that invited concerned citizens to contact their offices, and continue to exercise their right to have a say in any development that so deeply impacts our quality of life.

MEDIA:

There has been a great deal of coverage in the local media – largely but not exclusively in our support. Noteworthy among them certainly are the paid advertisements (propaganda) from Xeneca; the recent full article that featured Olympian, and Ottawa Valley local Sarah Boudens, who trained and continues to paddle the Petawawa River. The article is linked on www.SaveThePetawawa.ca if you are interested in reading it. As well, the North Renfrew Times recently featured an article from CASP Member Dr. Alan Hepburn.

CONSERVATION:

Meredith Brown, the Ottawa Riverkeeper (www.OttawaRiverKeeper.ca) is a very influential figure in river conservation circles, and she has weighed in on the issue, presenting a very technical, but understandable synopsis in an open letter to Xeneca. As the Petawawa is a major tributary of the Ottawa, her organization is very concerned about the impacts on environment. Her letter is available on www.SaveThePetawawa.ca.

FUNDRAISING:

A fundraising and awareness opportunity will be held on May 7, 2011 in conjunction with the Hell or High Water whitewater rafting and kayaking race. Funds raised through entry fees, sticker and shirt sales, and the dinner party go to three charities including Whitewater Ontario's River Advocacy efforts, which in turn support CASP and the Ontario River Alliance, a provincial body in which CASP, through Al Hepburn, is closely involved. CASP will be present at the HOHW event on May 7 with a table/booth, petitions and information available to interested parties. If any one is interested in helping out that day, please write us back and let us know. Details on HOHW can be found on www.HOHW.ca.

PROPERTY OWNERS:

We have a new member joining CASP. Paul McGuire has agreed to help assist with questions and concerns around property values, impacts, and other such items. On March 15, Paul and a number of other representatives of the local real estate business met with Xeneca VP, Mark Holmes. Paul noted that "Mark was quite adamant to point out that the Petawawa River did not belong to the residents of the area and in fact belonged to the people of the province of Ontario and Xeneca is funded primarily by a provincial government pension fund..."

WHITewater RECREATION:

Xeneca has become increasingly friendly to the kayak community of late, with invitations to meet, and money to build "enhancements", the most unusual of which was the offer to fund the Hell or High Water event; and event who's original purpose was to build awareness and raise funds to fight the very project they are proposing. Unusual to say the least. However, a meeting between Xeneca and the Petawawa River Rats, Whitewater Ontario and the HOHW Organizers has been tentatively scheduled for March 31 in Petawawa.

PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSIONS:

Xeneca advised that a Public Information Centre (PIC) will be held in Petawawa on May 31. When, and if it does happen, we need to make sure that there is a good public turnout. A small turnout will be interpreted as lack of public interest, which in turn means lack of public concern, which means Xeneca gets a “green light” to proceed.

It is vital that you plan on attending their PIC, and we strongly suggest that you have a list of questions prepared in advance. Since most of the PIC stuff is verbal, and subject to continuous change, it’s all deniable by Xeneca. Be clear in your expectations. Be clear in your questions, and keep pressing them for details.

If they cannot provide accurate information, how can the public form an understanding of the “pros” and “cons” of the proposed project? And, in turn, how can we provide detailed concerns?

Inquire about aesthetic impact, fish passage, public safety, recreational use, destruction of a world class kayaking site, risk to the south pier of the Petawawa Blvd. bridge, impact on property values, sediment build up, ice build up, potential failure of the control mechanism, and any other issue that could be judged, in broad terms, to have an impact on the environment and river ecology.

It is my understanding that the Town should have their environmental consultant on staff by now. I will be contacting Mayor Sweet to see what progress has been made in that area shortly.

WEBSITE UPDATES:

The following items were recently added to the website:

- Question Tracking Form
- CASP’s March 1 Presentation (Open House)
- Letter from Olympian Sarah Boudens
- Letter from Meredith Brown, Ottawa Riverkeeper

SUMMARY OF XENECA'S ENGINEERING MEETING (PEO MEMBERS AND GUESTS):

On March 15, Xeneca gave a presentation on the Big Eddy dam to the local chapter of the Professional Engineers of Ontario in Deep River. The Xeneca team comprised Mark Holmes, Uwe Roeper P. Eng., and Michael Vance P.Eng. Attendance was restricted to 60, and the meeting room was fairly full. Philip Kompass, Brad Wipp, Jan & Byron Ostrom, and Carolyn & Alan Hepburn from CASP attended

Here are a few items that we noted from the presentation.

Xeneca only has 12 staff, and they are pursuing 19 projects, so they are very light on staff. It also raises very valid concerns about whether they will simply sell the project to another operators once built. Beware of promises made, as the new owner may be less welcoming of past conditions.

Although "engineering details" we promised, they were not provided, and the project remains very unclear.

- The turbine will be in the range 4.1 – 5.3 MW (only during peak flows)
- They were quite adamant that there will not be a dam – it will be a "weir," as though the name makes any difference.
- Various scenarios were depicted, ranging from a fixed obstruction in the river floor, with water pouring over the top to a structure with variable gates similar to that described in their Project Description. However, make no mistake, there will be some structure in the river to raise the water level or "head" by 2 metres. Call it what you want.
- They were quite adamant that they will not follow a peaking strategy, and that the flow downstream of the powerhouse will always equal the river flow upstream of the headpond.

The angle of the inlet channel has been changed, so that the outflow from the turbine is not directed so much at the south bank. However, it seems that it now points straight at the south pier of the Petawawa Blvd. bridge

They are openly admitting that the flow in the "affected reach" (the stretch of the river between the dam (sorry, "weir") and the powerhouse will be "substantially reduced." They were asked for the residual flow in this part of the river, but declined to give a number.

There will be a fish passage but there is no indication if it is sufficient to actually allow passage, particularly for the 10 months of the year that the water will not be spilling naturally over the weir. Any fish that can make it over the weir during the spring freshet, when there's lots of water spilling over, will be welcome to pass. Otherwise, they're out of luck.

There was a lot of discussion about ways for kayakers to "share" the river but again, strikingly few details. Money is being spent, design are being done, but not once have kayaker had an opportunity to have input or comment on what is being prepared. There was some discussion indicated that flow would be made available for kayakers on an on-demand basis. How this applies with 2(c) above was not clear.

Michael Vance gave a description in which he showed how the level control gates were needed to facilitate starting and stopping of the turbine. When asked for further clarification since it seemed that the gates would only be required if it was the intent to start and stop the turbine frequently (which sounds a lot like peaking) they took Vance off the podium. The question never was answered.

In the one-on-one Q&A session that followed, it was obvious that company CEO Uwe Roeper was not aware of the applicable technical guidelines (which date back to 1977). He had some knowledge of the possible future guidelines (currently marked "Draft, for discussion only") but did not understand that there was a public safety issue in the absence of peaking. He eventually acknowledged that he understood the problem, and undertook to look into that in their safety analysis.