

March 12, 2017

Comment Article for the Hamilton Spectator: Help needed at all levels for the Great Lakes

As a long-time resident of Burlington, a committed environmentalist and a volunteer and member of BurlingtonGreen, I was very concerned to learn of Donald Trump's proposal to cut annual U.S. federal funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative from \$300 million to \$10 million. BurlingtonGreen is proud to add our voice to the conservation groups who have criticized the potential cut and to join the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative in taking a stand against this policy setting a dangerous precedent and having a far-reaching and devastating impact on our ability to combat invasive species, curb algae blooms, clean up toxins and restore habitat for wildlife with whom we share this precious ecosystem. A short-term savings in government spending cannot compare to the importance of protecting such a critical resource that fulfills our personal water needs and supports power generation and a broad range of economic, commercial and recreational activities. Should our efforts to protect the Great Lakes come up short, we will be failing future generations and our fellow species dependent on our actions now to either secure or destroy our future water security and habitat.

We were heartened to read Howard Elliott's editorial taking issue in no uncertain terms with Trump's plan, deemed "an assault on the Great Lakes". We agree unequivocally with his position that protecting the Great Lakes is not "some trendy, fringe environmental project", but rather, a matter of "life and death" affecting "90 percent of Ontario's population and 40 percent of Canada's economic activity." In fact, we assert that there really is no such thing as a "trendy, fringe" project when it comes to protecting the environment. Putting economic considerations in opposition to the environment is simply wrong-headed thinking: without clean air and water and a climate that can sustain food sources for ourselves and our fellow creatures we have no future. With a much-needed shift in thinking, we can begin to see that caring for the environment, beyond being central to our welfare, can provide us with many economic benefits and opportunities through the development of new technologies, industries and jobs.

That shift in thinking cannot be left solely to governments and industry: it needs to be championed by individual citizens who are unwilling to risk mortgaging our children's futures for short-term convenience or gain. While the magnitude of the problems we face in undoing the damage we have done is daunting, we can all play a role in making positive change happen. There are many examples of local efforts to solve environmental problems and to raise public awareness, the first step towards changing attitudes and behaviour. Our not-for-profit organization has led 6 shoreline restoration projects at Beachway Park where hundreds of community volunteers came together to clean up and improve this ecologically significant area and we continue to spread awareness about the importance of the Great Lakes through the information signs now posted at the park and with our "Become a Great Lakes Guardian" campaign. As part of our annual Eco-Film festival, we were proud to present "Waterlife", the story of the last great supply of fresh drinking water on Earth – the Great Lakes. The film was narrated by Gord Downie who has also been actively involved with Lake Ontario Waterkeeper (LOW), an organization working to protect our lake so that it is swimmable, drinkable, and fishable. On March 22nd we will celebrate World Water Day with a special film presentation of "Sea of Life" with local filmmaker, Julia Barnes. For details readers can visit our website www.burlingtongreen.org. We hope to see you there!

Meanwhile, we must now hope that our neighbours in the Great Lakes States who also depend on their waters will make their voices heard, and that the American Congress listens and refuses to approve this ill-conceived plan of Mr. Trump's. Many of us will be watching.

Jane Jenner
Member and Volunteer, BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association