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Swan Supporters to have Input on Controversial Marina Expansion

The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change announced last week they will not seek further environmental assessments at this stage for a controversial LaSalle Park Marina expansion proposal that includes building a permanent breakwall and doubling the marina's boat capacity. The report, released July 21, does not rule out potential harm to the recovering Trumpeter Swan population that overwinters in the area and imposes tighter protection measures for the project. Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Glen Murray required the City of Burlington and the LaSalle Park Marina Association (LPMA) to include Trumpeter Swan supporters in the design process if the project does go forward.

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee

The advisory committee is proposed to include representatives from Conservation Halton, the Hamilton Conservation Authority, and the Trumpeter Swan Coalition, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Stakeholder Group, Environment Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

The much-anticipated report is the response to calls for an advanced Part II Environmental Assessment that would have further examined the proposed breakwall's impact on wildlife who call LaSalle home – including the Trumpeter Swans, a bird that had previously been completely wiped out in Ontario. Three requests for deeper study were made in the summer of 2013 including submissions by Conservation Halton and the Trumpeter Swan Coalition, of which BurlingtonGreen is a member. The requests cited concerns for the Trumpeter Swans' survival and numerous flaws and unanswered questions in the proposal's initial environmental review.

Tighter measures imposed

Despite the Part II study denial, the Ministry decision orders the creation of a Stakeholder Advisory Committee that would include representatives from the environmental watchdogs who first raised the concerns. The expansion initiative can only move forward with the committee's participation in the creation of what the Minister called an Aquatic and Terrestrial Environmental Monitoring and Mitigation Plan to "address any potential impacts from the project on the aquatic environment and/or overwintering Trumpeter Swans in the vicinity." The imposed conditions do not exclude the possibility of denying further environmental approvals if the project does prove harmful to the swan population and their habitat. The committee's involvement will be crucial in highlighting those potential issues and ensuring appropriate actions are taken.

Mitigation is not protection

BurlingtonGreen is pleased the Environmental Ministry is insisting on the inclusion of a Stakeholders Advisory Committee to provide input on habitat and wildlife protection and believe we are an important voice in that process. However, some concerns remain about the effectiveness of even the best-intended mitigation efforts at the LaSalle site. As an organization, we are committed to protecting natural habitats.

Limited public knowledge or support for expansion

During the past year, BurlingtonGreen representatives visited 36 events and reached out to more than 10,000 people as part of our Greenprint for the Future advocacy program. LaSalle Park development was a main topic of discussion and hundreds of people stressed the importance of protecting habitat, particularly that of the Trumpeter Swans. However, the vast majority of people were unaware of the proposed project before visiting the booth and many expressed deep concern at the lack of public information and consultation thus far.

BurlingtonGreen will continue to advocate for increased public awareness and input on this project. Ultimately, since LaSalle Park and the Trumpeter Swans are such an important part of our community, it will be up to the people of Burlington to decide what kind of future they want for this beautiful area.

About Trumpeter Swans

- Trumpeter Swans are native to North America and are the largest swans in the world.
- The birds were wiped out in Ontario in the late 1800's; by 1935, there were only an estimated 69 Trumpeter Swans left in all of North America. In 1982, retired Ministry of Natural Resources biologist Harry Lumsden made it his mission to bring them back.
- After 30 years of efforts, there are close to 900 Trumpeter Swans in Ontario – ***roughly one quarter of the entire provincial flock calls LaSalle Park home.***
- The Trumpeters first chose LaSalle as their wintering grounds in 1993, making it an established habitat for more than 20 years.
- Habitat loss, especially of wintering areas, has a significant negative impact on recovery efforts.

About BurlingtonGreen:

Established in 2007, BurlingtonGreen is a citizen-led, not-for-profit environmental agency. Their mission is to protect the diversity of nature and to create a healthier environment, now and for the future. Through awareness, advocacy, and action they collaborate with all sectors of the community to protect the natural environment and to make Burlington a cleaner, greener, more environmentally responsible city.

To learn more visit their website at www.burlingtongreen.org

For media inquiries, please contact:

Jannene MacNeil, Program Assistant
BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association
Jannene@burlingtongreen.org