



**Sparrow Lake Association (SLA) *Newsletter***

Serving Lakefront Property Owners and Cottagers

Lock # 42 Washago—Lock # 43 Swift Rapids

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

1. Greetings from the President

Bob Corbett

As we compiled this SLA newsletter, we experienced heavy rain and flooding in southern Ontario. Some of our members have been marooned by the high water levels on the lake and river. In addition, the black flies are just starting to whet their appetite, and everything is mucky mess. It must be time to open the cottage and I can hardly wait!

Welcome to the 2017 cottage season.

Your SLA team has once again been busy over the winter, and we have lots of information to share with you.

Water is a good subject to start with. Without it, the whole concept of cottaging would change. We have divided this topic into three sections: water levels, weed growth, and water quality.

We are challenged each year with fluctuating water levels. We see the levels change from very high in the spring—to the point of flooding and property damage;, to perfect levels in late spring/early summer; and then to very low levels by August, when exposed rocks and docking issues arise.

Normally, the levels in Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching are lowered during the late fall and through the winter to make room for the spring thaw and rainfall. Last fall, water levels on these lakes were not dropped as is the custom. With the unseasonable rainfall and melting in February, the result was early flooding for the Severn River and Sparrow Lake. The dam at Washago was open, and water was released from Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching. Commensurate with this exceptional flow, the Black River, which drains a substantial part of Algonquin Park’s lakes and has no control features or capabilities, was flowing at its seasonal high, so the Severn River and Sparrow Lake faced severe flooding. This exceptional water flow

could not drain through the narrow Severn River channels (west of us) as fast as it was flowing in. We were facing major flooding. Our only salvation was a sudden drop in temperature, which slowed the draining from the Black River. We were then able to handle the drainage from Lake Simcoe only.

Fast forward to early May—with several days of heavy rain, saturated ground, high run-off, and a swelling Black River, the water level shot up 2–3 feet in a few days. (Note: the recent flooding is at the highest levels since the "Great Flood of 2008.")

It sounds complicated, and it is! Your SLA representatives and directors from neighbouring cottage associations in Gloucester Pool, SRAPO, and 6 Mile Lake are once again meeting later this spring with senior officials from TSW (Trent System Waterways)/Parks Canada and Ontario Hydro, who control our water levels. We all look forward to TSW better explaining the process and trigger points for when and how best to control the water levels for all our areas.

The summer of 2016 was the "perfect storm" for weeds in most areas of cottage country. Low water levels, very hot sunny days, and higher-than-average water temperatures allowed for weed growth to the extreme. Many of our shallower bays and inlets with less water current were inundated with Eurasian Water Milfoil weeds. Our nutrient-enriched water, combined with the conditions above, are a major factor in the exceptional weed growth.

Our nutrient enrichment results from two principal factors. The urban runoff that starts at the north side of the Oak Ridges Moraine (near Richmond Hill) finds its way into the Holland Marsh, where it combines with the fertilizer runoff resulting from spring flooding of the Holland Marsh, Canada's largest market garden.

Our resident SLA Director John Cooper recently attended a full day seminar on the subject of algae. This seminar was initiated by the Muskoka Watershed Council. The best water-quality experts provided exceptional presentations of all aspects of the algal bloom challenge. The same "perfect storm" that causes our abundant weed growth provides an ideal host for the over 50 varieties of algae and the resulting unsightly and unwanted, and often toxic, algal blooms. A full executive summary of the algae challenge specific to the TSW, from Lock 42 at the north end of Lake Couchiching right through to Georgian Bay, will be sent to all members shortly

The good news is that, regardless of water levels or weed growth, our water quality continues to be acceptable. The nutrient-enriched water on its own is not a problem for swimming. What it "sponsors," in the way of weed and algae growth, is! The spring of 2016 found us unable to use the local water testing lab in Orillia. Therefore, we contacted several of the camps and businesses in our area to confirm that their water quality tests had been completed and came back approved. We are currently in the process of securing another laboratory to allow us to check water samples from several bays and river locations in the SLA area. If you are interested in checking water quality at your cottage, bottles and testing information will be passed along as soon as we approve a new lab.

On behalf of the Directors and volunteer SLA Board, we hope you all have a great 2017 cottage season!

I look forward to seeing you throughout the summer.

Cheers, Bob

## 2. Membership

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Any organization is only as strong as its membership. With approximately 600+ residents between Lock 42 and Lock 43 (Swift Rapids), and our current membership of approximately 80 families, the SLA struggles to operate with 10% participation. The \$30/year membership fee barely covers the costs needed to stay connected with FOCA, liability insurance, regatta prizes, AGM costs, and marketing/poster fees, etc. Your SLA Board still believes the best method of obtaining new members is for our existing members to help spread the word to your neighbours. We have created a new brochure that identifies the benefits of being a SLA members. To share our enthusiasm, a copy is attached. Printed copies are also available for anyone who would like to help canvas some cottagers in their area.

## 3. SLA Regatta

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A celebration of Canada for cottagers on Sparrow Lake and area!

Please join us on Sunday, July 30 (not the holiday weekend), for our annual SLA Regatta. This year's regatta will celebrate Canada's 150th birthday.

Since the SLA Regatta was resurrected by the Burrows family, there have been various changes to the annual event. This year sees a change of date, as the holiday weekend is not available to us due to the camp's schedule of sessions. However, we are fortunate to continue to have access to the camp, which also allows us to use their canoes, kayaks, lifejackets, washrooms, and beach. We would like to focus on family participation and fun as we plan for an event that will be inspired by Canada's 150th celebration.

Please save the date—July 30—for the 2017 SLA Regatta!



Photos courtesy of Emma Bowman

For more information, contact [Jane Bowman](#) or check for updates on the SLA website.

#### 4. Fishing Derby

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The Fishing Derby has been a SLA tradition for many years. It is a great opportunity for our young anglers to put away the electronics and to hook up with their parents or grandparents to enjoy a morning of fishing. All children get a prize, and the event finishes with a light lunch/picnic.

Unfortunately, the turnout for this event has dwindled over the years. The children of our current host family (The Prendergasts) have outgrown the event.

We are looking for a new family (or families) with young kids to volunteer to organize this event. It is usually scheduled during National Fishing Week (Saturday July 8<sup>th</sup>), so no license is required. If we can grow the participation back to the numbers of a few years ago, the plan would be to combine it with an SLA barbeque lunch/picnic hosted in the Franklin Park area. However, hosting a dozen kids and parents at your dock would be a great start. Any volunteers?!

#### 5. Dates to Remember for 2017

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- Saturday, July 8: Fishing Derby if volunteer to co-ordinate is found
- Sunday, July 30: SLA Regatta
- Saturday, August 5, 9:30 a.m.: Annual General Meeting at Bayview-Wildwood Resort

#### 6. Useful/informative Weblinks

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[Gravenhurst Opera House](#): News of all events and activities happening at the OP! This jewel of Gravenhurst is alive with entertainment options with a great variety of entertainment that may well be of interest to you and your guests.

[Town of Gravenhurst News](#): This will be of interest to those members who pay their taxes to Gravenhurst. The paper is very well prepared and keeps one well apprised of everything significant happening in the Gravenhurst and Southern Muskoka area.

[Peters Players](#), who offer some of North America's top jazz, blues and rock artists in an intimate setting right in Gravenhurst.

[Coldwater Talk of the Town](#) is the area's community newspaper that shares events, stories, business and more for the residents on the Severn Side.

**Have a fantastic and safe summer!**