

MNR Budgets and Services cut again

The citizens of Ontario are being short changed on services which protect our environment including our lakes and rivers. Because of the Provincial dire fiscal straits which are the legacy of a number of spendthrift governments, the Ministry of Natural Resources has had its budget cut again.

The background and examples are compliments of the Coalition of Haliburton Associations (CHA) and the last section is verbatim from the MNR consultation document. It is important to realize that the direction appears to be that when funds are tight, cut services, not administration.

Background: The MNR has been told by the Provincial cabinet to cut another \$70 million from its budget. This cut is on top of cuts that have been made over a number of years. The CHA is convinced that any cuts to the MNR budget will negatively impact our environment.

Current Situation: At this time, landowners are required to gain MNR approval before making most changes to their shoreline area. Anyone who makes changes without a permit may be required to restore their shoreline to its original condition.

Proposed Change:

MNR is proposing to eliminate this advance permit requirement in favour of a 'permit by rule' approach whereby certain shoreline activities will no longer require advance approval as long as the activity adheres to rules set out in the regulations. These activities include:

1. Dredging – where dredging has taken place in the area in the last 5 years
2. Relocation of rocks and/or boulders for boating and swimming access
3. Restoring, repairing or replacing an existing erosion control structure
4. Minor maintenance to trails, water crossings or roads
5. Mechanical removal of native aquatic vegetation for swimming or boating access
6. Mechanically removing invasive aquatic vegetation

The problem:

While most people can be trusted to behave in a responsible manner many do not understand the relationship between their shoreline actions, aquatic health and water quality. The current prior approval process provides an important opportunity for MNR to increase ecological literacy levels.

However, a small but significant minority just don't care and will do as they please without due regard for their impact on the environment or their neighbours. These are the ones that are constrained by the current rules. A quick poll of the CHA executive came up with the following examples of activities undertaken under the current permit process:

Example #1 - concerning some dredging

In this case a few neighbours were frustrated with low water levels that prohibited using their boat near their dock after mid-August. They needed to dredge in order to gain boat access to their dock and MNR agreed that it could be done, but only at a certain time of the year and only if proper baffles were used to minimize any silt spreading to areas that were close by. Everything was done 'by the book' and all were happy with the result.

We are concerned that if a permit was no longer required, as this dredging had been done within the last 5 years, the next time dredging is done the conditions would not be observed.

Example #2 - concerning shoreline repair

A cottager wanted a sand beach at his shore, instead of a combination of sand and rock. He moved some of the larger rocks and trucked in several loads of sand. When MNR found out about it, he was informed that the shoreline must be restored to its previous state. He begrudgingly complied and the natural shoreline was restored. Again, the legislation worked as expected.

Example #3 - Dredging between lakes

A landowner wanted to dredge a narrow channel between two lakes so that he could go boating on either lake. These lakes were at two different levels, so dredging would have lowered the water level in the higher lake, destroyed spawning beds and increased boat traffic on both lakes. The permit was denied and the legislation worked as expected. As described in the policy paper, MNR is reviewing approvals it currently issues to consider the following alternative approaches: Removing regulatory control, including eliminating the need for approvals from MNR, where for example, an activity will have little or no potential impact since another organization now regulates the activity. Reducing the number of approvals required from MNR by establishing rules in the form of a regulation that clients must comply with. Reducing the number of approvals required from MNR by establishing rules in the form of a regulation that clients must comply with

MNR Consultation Document:

- Moving some approvals from paper-based processes to an automated electronic registry where businesses and individuals register their activities and where rules are established in regulation
- Retaining the current application and review approach for certain approvals, while taking advantage of opportunities to use technology to streamline where possible.
- The proposed regulatory amendments described are the first in a series of proposed amendments to specific approvals that are being put forward for public comment as part of this review. These proposals are based on an evaluation of key considerations described in the policy paper including potential impacts on public health and safety, natural resources, social and cultural uses of natural resources, the economy, and public expectations of government.

Recording Secretary needed

We are looking for a volunteer to attend 3 – 4 meetings per year including the AGM to record minutes for distribution to the executive. "Join a team of dedicated Mountain Lakers and play a vital role". Meetings are usually in May, June and Oct.