

Ken W. Watson
RR1
Elgin, ON K0G 1E0

Daniel Watson
Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada Agency
30 Victoria Street
Gatineau, QC J8X 0B3

May 31, 2018

Re: Let's Talk Parks Canada: Rideau Canal

Dear Daniel,

I am attaching a letter I sent to Minister McKenna, which I copied to you via email on May 27, 2018. It is regarding her directives from the *Let's Talk Parks Canada!* consultations, for Parks Canada to change focus back to your primary legislated mandates of the protection and presentation of heritage and ecology. My interest in this, as you are likely aware, is the Rideau Canal, which is presently not being managed as a heritage site. I included a few tangible examples of this (i.e. website, passport program) in my letter to the Minister.

I understand that any substantive change will take time, however there is a current immediacy, which is the new management plan. This management plan must reflect the Minister's new directives to Parks Canada. There is an expectation that, when the draft plan comes out for public review this summer, it will fully reflect this required change in focus, as the Minister has directed, back to your legislated and policy requirements for the commemorative integrity of the Rideau Canal. It's to be noted that the Rideau Canal is not currently in a state of commemorative integrity. I've brought up this issue in the past and Parks Canada has not disputed that fact – while the built heritage is presently being looked after with the infrastructure program, you have a clear failing when it comes to the heritage landscapes and the public education components of commemorative integrity.

To return to a state of commemorative integrity, the Rideau Canal will have to be properly resourced, as the Minister has directed. There is presently no capacity, no expertise, within the Waterways structure to do the required heritage programming and public education. You'll see that I've recommended Parks Canada set up a heritage unit within the Rideau Canal Office headed up by a person skilled in the public presentation of heritage, such as a Public Historian. This has to be specific to the Rideau Canal which is both a National Historic Site and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Both the designations have a requirement for the public presentation of the reasons for the designation, something that is not being done today. It cannot be combined with the Trent-Severn which has a very different history than the Rideau Canal – the learning curve for the history and heritage of the Rideau Canal alone takes years. That heritage unit

should also be mandated to engage with heritage groups and individuals such as myself who are presently doing more to present the rich heritage of the Rideau Canal than Parks Canada.

I also have major concerns about the management of the Rideau Canal, or rather lack thereof. At this time there are no senior managers in residence in the Rideau Canal Office of Parks Canada, they are all located on the Trent-Severn. There were reasons in the past for an organizational structure that included both a Superintendent and a Director of Operations in the Rideau Canal Office and those reasons still exist today. The Rideau Canal is a very large and complex system; it must have its own dedicated managers. You don't manage Banff remotely from Jasper, yet in effect that is what Parks Canada is doing with the Rideau Canal. Proximity is a basic tenet of effective management – the Rideau Canal is not and cannot be effectively managed from the Trent-Severn Waterway. The 2012 re-organization was clearly an experiment gone wrong; it's not an effective management system.

In addition to effective management, the lack of senior managers on the Rideau Canal has had a severe impact on the limited amount of public engagement that Parks Canada was doing. The only person doing that was Associate Director John Festerini, who is now away until November. I've been advocating the restoration of the Rideau Canal Advisory Committee (RCAC), which Parks Canada terminated in 2010 ahead of the re-organization. It was a mechanism to bring the public voice directly to senior management. A formal request by members of that committee to re-instate the RCAC was turned down by Director Jewel Cunningham in 2013. John Festerini has also turned down requests to reform the committee although I believe he now sees the value of it after very successful focus group sessions for the new management plan held in February of this year. Those engagements were very good and quite similar to what the RCAC did.

The RCAC, as a formal mechanism, was simply one means of hearing the public voice. Active public engagement (going out to talk to various engaged individuals and groups) is also required. There also used to be a yearly Rideau Canal symposium, hosted by the RCAC and Parks Canada, that brought together decision makers and engaged members of the public, to discuss issues surrounding the core values of the Rideau Canal which, as defined by the 2001 symposium, included Ecology/Natural History; Historical/ Cultural Heritage; Recreation, Economy/Tourism; Community Pride; and National Identity. None of that public engagement is being done today.

The changes the Minister has directed will require a cultural shift in Parks Canada to put ecology and heritage first in decision making and that shift has to start at the top. A major flaw in the development of the Visitor Experiences Program by Parks Canada in the early 2000s was that it was made separate from ecological and heritage programming – those should be integrated programs. As noted in my letter to the Minister, tourism, heritage and ecology are not exclusive items – I've been blending the three for the last 22 years with my Rideau Canal website, Rideau travel guides and public presentations – it's not that hard to do.

In the short term, I hope that Parks Canada will direct and resource the Rideau Canal Office to move ahead with heritage items already proposed such as the passport program, detailed heritage landscape studies, properly defining and protecting the visual values of the canal (as UNESCO has requested) and a much more robust heritage presentation of sites such as the Jones Falls Lockstation (the Rideau Canal Office has a recent internal proposal for that) and the

other key heritage presentation lockstations (Kingston Mills, Smiths Falls, Merrickville, Long Island and Ottawa). Your website should include detailed information on the history of the canal, on the history of each individual lockstation, on the canal's National Historic Site designation and on its UNESCO World Heritage designation – not just a simple listing but the reasons why those designations were given to the Rideau Canal and why they are important to Canada and still very relevant in the 21st century. In the long term, I'd like to see Parks Canada involved in things like school programs, public speakers, community engagement and other means of public education. The restoration of local Rideau heritage resource material (removed in 2012), and/or making it available in digital form on the web would also help serve your public education requirement.

I would also like to see Parks Canada re-engage in scientific work on the Rideau Canal, including terrestrial and underwater archaeology. Significant heritage sites such as Jones Falls have never had any archaeology or heritage research done on them by Parks Canada. I recently wrote an article about the indigenous use of the Rideau waterway for the most recent Friends of the Rideau newsletter (you were sent a copy). There are physical reminders of that period, including abandoned portages and campsites at lockstation locations, yet none of those have ever been investigated by Parks Canada and integrated into the story of the Rideau.

I am looking forward to seeing significant changes in how Parks Canada manages the Rideau Canal and to see a restoration of the commemorative integrity of the canal. And, as noted at the beginning of this letter, I expect to see a change in priority, to put commemorative integrity and heritage presentation as key priority items in the new management plan. That plan should not be reflecting the current state (focus and resourcing) of the Rideau Canal, but rather the next 10 years.

I would appreciate a considered reply to my concerns. I am very well aware of what Parks Canada is doing today on the Rideau, I don't need to be reminded of that – I would like to know that Parks Canada will commit to changing focus on the Rideau Canal back to your legislated and commemorative integrity policy requirements and that you'll properly resource the Rideau Canal Office to be able to do that.

Yours truly,

Ken W. Watson
rideauken@gmail.com

cc. Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. Catherine McKenna, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
Hunter McGill, Chair, Friends of the Rideau
Save Our Rideau