

Ken W. Watson

The Honourable Catherine McKenna
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

November 10, 2015

Re: Parks Canada Agency and the Rideau Canal

Dear Minister McKenna,

I am writing to express my deep concerns about Parks Canada's administration of the Rideau Canal, specifically that they've abandoned their legislated natural and cultural heritage mandates for the canal, a National Historic Site of Canada and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In support, I have enclosed a report, "The De-Evolution of Parks Canada" which provides background and details of these issues.

Parks Canada today is focused on revenue generation projects at the expense of heritage presentation and preservation. During the election, your Conservative opposition in Ottawa Centre, Damian Konstantinakos, stated the Conservative policy for Parks Canada's administration of the canal; "it's important for sustainability purposes that what gets done on the canal does ensure that we can generate the revenue to maintain it." That policy has caused most of the natural and cultural protection and presentation of the canal to cease. It's a very serious problem that needs fixing.

In addition, there are significant issues regarding transparency, public information and public engagement. Parks Canada has completely closed themselves off to the public. Previous official means of public engagement, such as the Rideau Canal Advisory Committee, have been terminated. In the section titled "Public Engagement," the report compares what the current Management Plan for the Rideau Canal states they should be doing against what they are actually doing today. Although that plan is out of date in terms of what Parks Canada is doing today on the Rideau Canal, it does in fact state quite well what Parks Canada should be doing if they were following their own legislation and charter.

Parks Canada is not meeting its obligations to the Rideau Canal as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The heritage support and systems that led to the Rideau Canal becoming a World Heritage Site are now gone (a casualty of the 2012 cuts). Parks Canada is no longer following the World Heritage Site Management Plan for the canal. This is a serious issue that could eventually lead to the de-listing of the Rideau Canal. Very similar conditions existed in Germany prior to the de-listing of the Dresden Elbe Valley as a World Heritage Site in 2009. The Government of Canada has an obligation to follow the World Heritage Convention, something that is not happening on the Rideau Canal today.

One of the most damaging changes made by Parks Canada was to merge the Rideau Canal and the Trent-Severn Waterway into a single operational unit in 2012. This has caused, and continues to cause, many problems. The Rideau Canal is a large and complicated system, very different from the Trent-Severn Waterway in many aspects. As outlined in the report, the single management by Parks Canada of those two systems is not working. At the very least the Rideau Canal should have its own dedicated senior management. Currently there is a single senior position, Director of Ontario Waterways, responsible for both the Trent-Severn Waterway and Rideau Canal, relegating the management of the Rideau Canal to being a part time job.

The concerns raised in the report are not limited to the Rideau Canal. These issues, to one degree or another, are present in Parks Canada's management of every National Historic Site and National Park that they administer on behalf of the citizens of Canada. Several of these general issues are also outlined in the enclosed report.

I know that a stated Liberal position is to reverse the 2012 cuts to Parks Canada, but the problem goes much deeper than the funding of Parks Canada. Their corporate culture needs to be changed. Parks Canada must return to their core values in order to serve the people of Canada as their own legislation states they should be doing. This cultural change needs to be started now, simply increasing funding will not address the many problems.

I look forward to hearing what your new government plans to do to fix Parks Canada's administration of the Rideau Canal and what you plan to have them do to restore the natural and cultural preservation and presentation of the canal. The Rideau Canal, as a significant part of our Canadian heritage, deserves much better than what Parks Canada is doing with it today.

Yours truly,

Ken W. Watson

cc. Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada