

November 28, 2016

Mayor Kim Cartier-Villeneuve and Members of Council
Municipality of Otter Lake, QC

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

I am writing to you as President of the Greater Otter Lake Residents Association (GORA) concerning the issue of invasive species and the threat they pose on our lakes. The GORA Board has discussed the issue and agrees that preventative measures can, and should, be taken to help protect our lakes from invasive species.

As many of you are aware, a one-day Public Forum was held in Maniwaki in September 2016 to discuss the issue of invasive species and boat-washing. The Forum was organized by ABVdes7 and there were approximately 50 representatives attending from several municipalities and lake associations in various parts of the province, including those from the Municipality of Otter Lake and MRC Pontiac.

At the Public Forum, we learned about the harmful effect of invasive species, particularly those caused by the Eurasian water milfoil plant. This plant survives in a lake by destroying all other native plants, which leads to a total decline in the lake's oxygen levels. Not only would this result in the loss of fish life, the lake water itself would be very unpleasant for both swimming and boating. We also learned that once a lake is infested with invasive species, it is incredibly difficult (if not impossible) to completely eradicate them.

Much of the discussion at the Forum was around "best practices" to prevent the spread of these invasive species, such as public awareness through signs at boat launches or at entrances to roads leading to lakes; gates at public boat launches to limit unrestricted access and to ensure that boats and trailers are washed before entering the water; and the provision of boat-washing facilities. It was also noted that the most successful approaches appeared to be those undertaken collaboratively by residents, lake associations and municipal representatives.

Given our knowledge of the harmful effects on lakes that invasive species can have, given that we know that there are lakes in close proximity to the greater Otter Lake area which are already affected by these species, and given how easy it is for invasive species to proliferate if a portion is on a boat or trailer that is coming in from another lake, GORA understands this to be a serious matter that warrants our collective attention. The GORA Board is also strongly in favour of taking a collaborative approach.

The Municipality has an interest in taking action on the matter of contamination of our lakes given the detrimental impact it would have on the local economy. The tourism industry (including cottage owners and renters, sport fishers, etc.) is integral for the municipality's tax base as well as for the livelihood of local merchants. The lakes are indeed a core part of the local economy.

We believe that GORA and the Municipality should work together to take action to help protect our lakes. To that end, we propose the following as an Action Plan for discussion. The Action Plan is a 3-pronged approach and could be implemented in a phased-in manner with each step building upon the previous one. We understand that some of the measures we propose may require the introduction of Municipal Bylaws in order to implement.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN TO HELP PREVENT INVASIVE SPECIES FROM ENTERING OUR LAKES

Phase I (Immediate; relatively low-cost): Launch a public awareness campaign to share information about invasive species and their effects on lakes. The campaign would include the following elements:

- Distribute information by mail to all taxpayers through the Municipality's newsletter. The ABVdes7 provides a brochure that promotes boat-washing and outlines the harmful effects of invasive species, such as the Eurasian water milfoil plant and zebra mussels. (Target date: Tax mail-out in February 2017)
- Make information known to members of GORA through the regular Newsletters as well as distribute brochures at the Annual General Meetings (Target date: both the December 2016 and Spring 2017 Outdoors newsletter and Summer 2017 AGM)
- Request local businesses to make information available to customers for distribution (Target date: Spring 2017)
- Hold a public awareness event (jointly organized by the Municipality and GORA) to share information and seek feedback from the public. Potential to invite an expert representative from ABVdes7 to make a presentation. (Target date: Spring or early Summer 2017)
- Post signs at public boat launches and main roadways leading to lakes to give notice of the importance of washing one's boat and trailer before launching. ABVdes7 has signs available for purchase. (Target date: April 2017 before the beginning of fishing season)

Phase II (Short-term): Provide a boat-washing facility for boat operators to clean their boats and trailers with a power washer

- Provide access to a power washer at the Municipal Hall in Otter Lake. The Municipal Hall is a reasonable location for a boat-washing facility given that it is at a safe distance away from any lakes, creeks, etc. Other alternative locations would be at retail establishments, such as a gas station or store. (Target date: Spring/Summer 2017)

Phase III (Medium term): Introduce measures to help ensure that all boats and trailers are washed prior to being launched in the lakes

- Limit unrestricted access to the public boat launches on Farm Lake and Hughes Lake by installing a locked gate. Access would be allowed during regular hours of the day. This could also involve hiring a person to monitor the boats and request that boat operators wash their boats and trailers before entering. (Target date: Summer 2017 or Spring 2018)
- Introduce a boat registry which would require that boat operators register their boats before entering the lake. To register, boat operators must wash their boats and pay a nominal fee to receive a sticker to display prominently on their boats. Enforcement measures could also be introduced. (Target date: Spring 2018)

In closing, I would like to emphasize that GORA believes that taking preventative measures against invasive species is critical in order to maintain the ongoing health of our lakes into the future. In keeping with GORA's mandate, the proposed measures are designed to ensure ongoing and permanent change in behaviour to preserve the community's lakes and livelihood for generations to come.

We recognize that the Municipality is a key player/partner and we look forward to working collaboratively to move forward. We would also suggest that the Municipality consider organizing a committee that would allow for interaction with interested members of the public and organizations such as GORA and ABVdes7.

If you would like to further discuss the issue, we would be pleased to attend a meeting of Council at your convenience.

Respectfully yours,

Jennifer Quaille
President, Greater Otter Lake Residents Association
Gora.argo@gmail.com