

FRIENDS OF THE RIDEAU

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February 7, 2020

Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, MP
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
and Minister responsible for Parks Canada
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Wilkinson,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister responsible for Parks Canada. We have noted the Prime Minister's instruction in your mandate letter with respect to advancing Parks Canada's "...efforts to play a leadership role in natural and cultural heritage conservation...and ensure that Canada's national parks and national historic sites are a source of national pride and enjoyment today and for future generations." We are writing to you, as a volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing and conserving the heritage and charm of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site (NHS), to raise several issues regarding the Rideau.

We share the concern expressed by observers, scholars and international experts regarding the lack of **commemorative integrity** on the Rideau Canal NHS. With respect to the **public education dimension** of commemorative integrity, there is **no effective heritage interpretation or education program** for the Rideau Canal NHS. As Professor Christina Cameron, CM, has noted, commemorative integrity is ensured significantly "...when the reasons for (NHS) designation are effectively communicated to the public and when the site's heritage values are respected in all actions affecting the site." The Parks Canada Agency Act addresses this issue directly, however, insofar as the heritage resourcing and management of the Rideau Canal NHS is concerned, this is absent in Parks Canada's present management of the Canal.

A further dimension of commemorative integrity is the **protection of heritage landscapes**, especially important in the case of the Rideau Canal NHS. Heritage landscape issues at many of the lock sites along the Rideau are not being addressed. In addition, the 2006 ICOMOS assessment report for the Rideau Canal to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee recommended that the visual values of the Rideau be properly identified and that legal protection of those values, outside the Canal buffer zone, be enacted. The visual values have yet to be identified properly and to date no protection has been implemented.

Of further concern to Friends of the Rideau is the absence of a comprehensive **management plan** for the Rideau Canal NHS. The last such plan was prepared in 2005. The reorganization of the administration of the Rideau Canal into a new management structure (Ontario Waterways) in 2012 should have triggered the preparation of a new plan. Also in 2012, changes to the Parks Canada Act specifying a 10-year review rather than a 5-year interval, should have triggered the preparation of a new plan, ie one in place by 2015. Preparations for a new management plan for the Rideau Canal began in 2016 and the last public engagement in January 2018. There has been no public communication since then. There is a very short

time period remaining if Parks Canada is to meet its stated deadline of December 2020. Public input must be incorporated into the new management plan, a time-consuming process if done properly, before the plan is finalized for your signature and submission to Parliament.

Not only is the management plan an essential accountability document, but the process to prepare the plan provides a vital opportunity for public input, for identification of key areas of shared responsibility between Parks Canada, provincial and municipal levels of government, the private sector and civil society organizations like ours. The context within which the Rideau Canal NHS exists is a dynamic one, with changes, pressures and new challenges constantly coming forward. Parks Canada managers need an approved framework within which to do annual and longer-term planning, to seek adequate resources and very importantly to work with the many partners and stakeholders along the Canal.

While the Rideau Canal is one of a number of national historic sites designated for statutory protection under the Parks Canada Agency Act, its geographic location, running by the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, to say nothing of its place in the history of our country, give it a unique status. It is the only Canadian historic canal with World Heritage Site designation. It has significance to the nation. We must make all efforts to manage, conserve and present it and ensure that Canadians can enjoy and appreciate the Rideau Canal as a jewel in our national heritage.

Yours sincerely,

<signed>

Hunter McGill
Chairman