

FRIENDS OF THE RIDEAU

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Honourable Catherine McKenna
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
Minister responsible for Parks Canada
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa K1A 0H3

November 11, 2016

Dear Minister McKenna,

We wrote last November to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister responsible for Parks Canada and to let you know of some concerns we had regarding the protection, preservation and presentation of the heritage of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Thank you very much for your reply of July 6.

Now that you have been in office for a year we thought it would be appropriate to write again. Your announcement in May of \$57 million for important rehabilitation and reconstruction work on the Rideau Canal was most welcome and very necessary to protect essential infrastructure. A very good start. Upkeep of the physical fabric of the Canal is a critical part of the responsibility Parks Canada has been given as custodian and protector of this key element of our heritage.

We remain concerned, however, that presentation of the history of the Rideau Canal, and interpretation of that history for visitors, is still woefully underfunded and understaffed. In 2017 this will be highlighted even more than has been the case in the past when far larger numbers of visitors, Canadian and international, will come to the Canal by boat and on land as part of their enjoyment of Canada's 150th anniversary. Commemorations, such as those to take place in 2017, offer wonderful opportunities to present the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site as a vital component of Canada's history, but these chances will be missed if there are inadequate numbers of heritage interpretation staff to tell the story of the Canal, from Kingston to Ottawa. Visitors want to see and learn about a historic canal in operation. There is no substitute for live interpretation, delivered by a team dedicated to that task.

In your letter you mention the process, now beginning, to develop a new (long overdue) management plan for the Rideau Canal National Historic Site. We are looking forward to taking part in the consultations which we hope will begin soon. It is important that Parks Canada staff launch the process with an active program to engage and involve the public. This process is one of the very few occasions when all the communities of interest, or stakeholders, along the Rideau Canal are convened to discuss management, preservation, protection and presentation issues. While Parks Canada has the lead, there are many other agencies, levels of government, not-for-profit groups and organizations such as Friends of the Rideau which can contribute to the sustainable management of the Canal consistent with the principles of commemorative integrity, which Parks Canada is mandated to uphold. As operator of the Rideau Canal, Parks Canada must establish the framework within which the rest of us will do our part.

With warmest regards, onward and upward!

Hunter McGill
Chairman