



Water Access – GBA Primer

Seventy-nine percent of GBA Members own water access only properties. With the current low water levels crisis many cottagers will have challenges gaining direct access to their properties. GBA has been working with local municipalities, the Province (specifically the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources), and the Federal government as the rules and regulations around dock size and placement and lakebed alterations are reviewed, in order to enable continued use of properties during this crisis. The following is a summary of what we have learned.

Docks

It may be that you need to move your existing dock, or build an extension to your existing dock, in order to continue to have access to your property. Given the fluctuating water levels, it would be advisable to use floating docks. These also have less impact on the lakebed. Approvals for size, number and placement of docks are principally Municipal responsibilities. Each Municipality has its own rules outlined in their Comprehensive Zoning By-law. We are aware that most Municipalities along the Georgian Bay have recognized the emergency nature of the current low water levels and have taken steps to relax their regulations, at least on a one-off, time limited basis, to accommodate their ratepayers' needs. You should contact your Township's or Municipality's Building Department to discuss your specific situation and requirements. If extensions and/or relocation of docks are necessary, you will probably be required to consult with your neighbours, therefore you may wish to initiate those discussions prior to meeting with Building Department officials.

Dredging & Blasting

Should you need to dredge or blast the lake bed to restore access to your property you will need to make an application to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for a Shorelands Work Permit. A copy of the required forms can be found on the Township of the Archipelago's web site at; <http://www.thearchipelago.on.ca> (click on "dredging" link).

The application requires the applicant to provide as much detailed information as possible, including:

- Location map
- Survey Plan
- Sketches of proposed project
- Neighbour's comments
- Summer photographs of project site
- Municipal Comment Form

MNR has been working hard to streamline the application process in recognition of the urgency and need to react to the crisis situation. It should be noted that MNR is specifically sensitive to applications which will facilitate access to properties (i.e. a channel between a dock and open water). Broader applications to dredge entire back bays, or even move rocks along coastlines for aesthetic purposes, would require more scrutiny and time delays.

In the experience of the author, who applied for a Work Permit for dredging, it took one week to prepare the application including assembling pictures, drawing sketches, securing comments from neighbours and having the Municipality sign off on the application. It then took MNR 4

weeks to process the application including getting comments from the Federal Department of Fisheries. The approval came with multiple conditions attached including;

- The need to use in-water sediment control fences to contain silt to the site
- Dredged materials to be deposited so as to not re-enter water body
- No harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat
- Relocation of rocks, stumps or logs to adjacent area fronting property
- If dredging occurs before May 1, there must be a dedicated person to observe the dredging at all times to recover and immerse any unearthened turtles in a cold water bath

MNR identified an ideal window for this dredging project so as to avoid potential contravention of the Endangered Species Act. This window is between July 16th and August 31st.

The phone numbers for the three MNR offices that cover southern Georgian Bay are: Midhurst 705-725-7500; Parry Sound 705-746-4201; and Sudbury 705-564-7823. All are well equipped to answer your questions and guide you through the application process.

The next challenge is to find a contractor who has the equipment and time to carry out the work that you hope to have approved. Your Township Building Department should be able to offer some suggestions on who does this type of work in your area.

The sooner you get your approval and join the queue with a contractor the better.

Cost of Projects and Sharing of Information

The cost for dredging or blasting will be very site specific but is likely to be substantial. Even moving or extending docks will not be inexpensive.

GBA would like to keep track of how many properties undergo site alterations, so that we can track the number of such projects and their cost, to feed into the ongoing analysis we are doing with GBF on the financial impact of low water levels. We will then share this cumulative information with our elected officials to bolster support for our argument that a more permanent remedy to low water levels is warranted.

Simply put, we feel that spending money on adaptive management to keep harbours and channels open in the face of ever falling water levels is a fool's game. Governments must spend money on long term remedies, such as control mechanisms in the connecting channels between the Great Lakes.

If you would be willing to share information on works projects that you undertake to adapt to low water, please send details to Bob Duncanson (email address below)

Should you have any questions or wish further information please contact;

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