

November 18, 2022

Melissa Halford
Director of Development Services
Town of Gravenhurst
3-5 Pineridge Gate
Gravenhurst, ON
P1P 1Z3

Dear Ms. Halford:

Re: Peer Review of the Environmental Impact Study – TRG (Cherokee) Holdings, Town of Gravenhurst

In this letter we provide our peer review of the Riverstone Environmental Solutions (RiverStone) Environmental Impact Study (EIS) as part of a proposed multi-residential and commercial development at the Gravenhurst Wharf. We provided a brief overview of the RiverStone Report, followed by our specific comments, and overall conclusions of the peer review.

1. Background

The 2.06 acre subject property is zoned Commercial Special Purpose and is located adjacent to the Gravenhurst Wharf. The proposed multi-residential and commercial development would include 129 residential units and 927 m² of commercial space in a seven-story building. The EIS was completed to fulfil requirements under the Town of Gravenhurst's Official Plan.

Our peer review focused on determining whether the RiverStone Report:

- contains sufficient information on the natural environment of the area, including detailed documentation of natural features, ecological functions, environmental sensitivities, and constraints, and impacts of the existing development on them,
- uses the correct methodologies to gather and analyse the information (e.g., that follow industry standards and best practices and apply appropriate scientific approaches), and
- makes sound conclusions and recommendations based on the best available information to characterize the short-term and long-term development impacts associated with the proposed development and how those impacts conform with applicable environmental policies and legislation.

2. Summary of the RiverStone EIS

The RiverStone Report was conducted through both desktop and on-site field investigations carried out on four occasions during the summer of 2021.

The subject property is currently developed with a single residential dwelling, manicured lawn dock and boathouse. The property is relatively flat with very steep slopes along the northern boundary of the lot. Approximately half of the property is within the Static Floodline Elevation which is addressed separately by

Pinestone Engineering. A watercourse runs through the northern portion of the property and the littoral environment contains shallow water depths, sandy substrates and dense aquatic vegetation.

Vegetation communities were identified as “Anthropogenic” on-land and “Floating-Leaved Wetland Community” in the nearshore environment. Background review indicated that 17 species at risk had potential to occur on or adjacent to the subject property, while field investigations narrowed the list to seven species. It was determined that the subject property could function as Significant Wildlife Habitat, both as a Turtle Wintering Area and through provision of habitat for Special Concern and Rare Wildlife Species.

Aquatic habitat is predominantly classified as Type 1 fish habitat because of the presence of dense aquatic vegetation in the nearshore environment. Vegetation is sparse adjacent to the northern property boundary and is therefore classified Type 2 in that nearshore area. The watercourse on the property drains urban stormwater from the Town. It provides direct habitat for fish and is a permanent, coolwater creek.

The proposed development will extend development from the adjacent Gravenhurst Wharf immediately to the south and will include two large docks. Modification of the shoreline area to mitigate flooding risk and support dock construction is proposed. The watercourse will also be partially covered and moved to accommodate the development.

Impacts to fish habitat in the littoral environment and watercourse are anticipated so it was recommended that review and permitting from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) be completed. RiverStone recommended that tree clearing be completed outside the Species at Risk bat active (roosting) period and in-water work be completed outside of the spawning period for spring spawning fish. Ultimately, it was determined that the works would have a low level of impact on Species at Risk and their habitat while impacts to fish habitat will be appropriately considered through consultation with DFO.

3. Specific Comments

In the following sections, relevant information from the EIS is included in *italics* to provide context for the subsequent HESL comment.

Species at Risk

“Following review of the aerial photography and our on-site assessment, seven (7) endangered or threatened species have the potential to use features in the location of the subject property based on the habitat-based approach: Spotted Turtle, Blanding’s Turtle, Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, Barn Swallow, Little Brown Myotis and Northern Long-eared Myotis. Features with the highest potential to provide habitat for species at risk on the subject property were associated with the shoreline wetland and forest communities. See Appendix 2 for a detailed technical description of Riverstone’s assessment and to review the boundary of these habitat features and potential habitat for each SAR species.” (p. 10)

HESL Comment #1:

RiverStone determined in Appendix 2 that there is potential Eastern Hog-nosed Snake and Barn Swallow habitat on the subject property and there could be impacts from the proposed development. It is not clear how impacts will be avoided or mitigated. A thorough description of the suitability of habitat is provided for Spotted Turtle and Blanding’s Turtle and it was determined that critical habitat is not present, while a



timeframe for tree-clearing was recommended to minimize impacts on Little Brown Myotis and Northern Long-eared Myotis, but Eastern Hog-nosed Snake and Barn Swallow are not similarly discussed.

Consultation and Permitting

“A Request for Project Review be submitted to DFO that includes the proposed development plans and our fish habitat assessment. Their review will determine if the project can proceed through a letter of advice or through formal authorization.” (p. 15)

HESL Comment #2:

We agree that a Request for Project Review should be submitted to DFO, but the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) should also be consulted regarding the project as permitting under the Public Lands Act and Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act will likely be required.

Mitigation Recommendations

“Two communities or features with the potential to be identified as SWH was identified: Seasonal Concentration Areas of Animals – Turtle Wintering Areas” (p. 10)

“As part of this assignment and during many hours being along the boardwalk of the Gravenhurst Wharf, we have observed several Painted Turtles and Snapping Turtles” (p. 16)

HESL Comment #3:

We recommend that exclusion fencing be used during construction to separate the development zone from surrounding habitat given the presence of turtles in the vicinity and potential habitat for Eastern Hog-Nosed Snake and Eastern Ribbonsnake. The fencing is important for preventing direct mortality to wildlife and for preventing wildlife from using the construction zone as nesting habitat. Many turtle and snake species, for example, lay eggs in soft substrate, and may thus be attracted to any sand fill used during the construction phase.

Significant Wildlife Habitat

“There are fourteen (14) species that have the potential to be present or use vegetation communities on the subject property or within adjacent lands based on existing records and range mapping. This list of species was refined to four (4) species that had the potential to be present on the subject property. These remaining species were anticipated to be found within the wetland/watercourse (Snapping Turtle, Northern Map Turtle, and Eastern Ribbonsnake, and anthropogenic edges (Monarch) which are present on the subject property.”

HESL Comment #4:

It is not clear how impacts to Snapping Turtle, Northern Map Turtle and Eastern Ribbonsnake will be avoided or mitigated if the habitat of these Special Concern species is overprinted or removed (i.e., watercourse will be covered). Please provide additional detail on that portion of the impact assessment,



such as how other recommended mitigation measures apply to the Special Concern species and related SWH.

Low Impact Development

“Because the site is going to be mostly developed, Low Impact Development (LID) techniques should be implemented wherever possible, to promote infiltration. This may include use of vegetated swales and permeable pavement where stormwater is directed to take-up overland runoff, before entering the watercourse or lake.” (p. 14)

HESL Comment #5:

We agree that LID techniques should be implemented wherever possible to improve stormwater quality before it is outlet to Lake Muskoka. Gravenhurst Bay is well isolated from the main body of Lake Muskoka, receives a considerable amount of stormwater runoff and therefore stormwater quality should be of primary importance to avoid water quality impacts such as the proliferation of algal blooms.

A phosphorus budget could be required to meet the intent of water quality-related policies in the Town’s and District’s Official Plans where the post-construction phosphorus load is compared to the pre-development load, and LID techniques are incorporated into the detailed design so that the post-development load is equal to or less than the pre-development load. It is unclear if any other regulatory requirements will necessitate the utilization of LID techniques or focus on stormwater quality apart from limited MECP Environmental Compliance Approval requirements related to the removal of Total Suspended Solids so stormwater quality should be improved in accordance with the intent of Official Plan policies.

Salt Management

HESL Comment #6:

The impact of road salt on freshwater environments is well documented. We recommend that a salt management plan is developed to minimize the impact of salt use from the future development on the water quality of Gravenhurst Bay.

Cumulative Impacts and Climate Change

HESL Comment #7:

The District Municipality of Muskoka Official Plan contains policies related to Climate Change (C3) and Cumulative Impacts (C1.6.3). Please indicate how these concepts have or will be assessed, and what mitigation measures or design elements could be incorporated to meet the intent of those policies.

4. Conclusions

The subject property is already developed, and the proposal will extend development from the adjacent Gravenhurst Wharf. The potential impacts are primarily focused on the aquatic environment and



consequently provincial (MNR) and federal agencies (DFO) should be consulted to determine if there are any permitting requirements. We identified a few issues in our peer review related to:

- ❖ Species at Risk;
- ❖ Consultation and Permitting;
- ❖ Mitigation Recommendations;
- ❖ Significant Wildlife Habitat;
- ❖ Low Impact Development;
- ❖ Salt Management; and
- ❖ Cumulative Impacts and Climate Change.

We believe that addressing these issues will improve the EIS so that it is based on the best available information and provides a higher level of protection of relevant natural heritage features.

Thank you for the opportunity to undertake this assignment.

Sincerely,
per. Hutchinson Environmental Sciences Ltd.



Brent Parsons, M.Sc.
Senior Aquatic Scientist

