

# Residents voice concern over losing public access points at Lake Eugenia

GREG COWAN

A recent decision made by Grey Highlands council to not renew lease agreements with Ontario Power Generation has cut off two public access points at Lake Eugenia causing concern among those who use them.

At the May 18 meeting of Grey Highlands council, a motion was carried that council direct staff to notify OPG that the municipality will only renew their lease for the main Canrobert Street public beach and boat launch at Lake Eugenia. The decision cuts the public off from longstanding lake access areas at Sideroad 30, north of MacDonald Road, and the Plannts Point Road lake access area.

Akky Mansikka said she has used

the Sideroad 30 access road for decades as a route to the lake for swimming. Now, she said no trespassing signs have been put up in the area.

"It has led to the closure of these accesses to the lake with no public input," she said. "COVID has shown we need more public wilderness spaces."

Mansikka is part of a growing group of residents and lake goers who are hoping to reverse council's decision.

OPG owns the lakebed and shoreline around Lake Eugenia, which is an operating reservoir for the Eugenia Generating Station. The electricity generator also owns the land leased by the municipality for the lake's public beach and boat launch.

OPG also licenses waterfront access to lakeside property owners allowing them to install docks and use the waterfront area for recreation. There is no cost for the license, but there are rules and regulations in place and they must be renewed every five years.

The municipality previously leased the three public access points from OPG, but the leases lapsed in November 2019. Since then, staff have heard complaints from cottagers abutting the public access points relating to illegal parking, illegal dumping, and general damage to the area being caused by unsupervised overuse.

The Lewin and Del Vecchio families own two cottages split by the Sideroad 30 public access point.

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## CONCERN FROM A1

They presented as a delegation to council at a May 18 meeting.

As part of their presentation, councillors were told of issues with swimming safety, unauthorized use of neighbouring land, impaired driving, vandalism, theft, as well as verbal and physical altercations with landowners.

The presentation included photos of vehicles parked on the side of the narrow road in winter and summer, boats and ice fishing huts stored near the shoreline, piles of garbage left behind, and the remains of spent campfires.

The main public beach lake access and boat launch is the only maintained public access point, staff reported, and it's maintained through an agreement with the Eugenia District Community Association.

Furthermore, staff reported the municipality has no enforcement capabilities on Sideroad 30 as the land is owned by OPG.

At a special meeting called by Grey Highlands Mayor Paul McQueen on April 26, OPG indicated to the mayor, municipal staff, and neighbouring cottage landowners (Sunset Shores Cottagers Association and Plannts Point residents) that they would want to divest the lands if the municipality no longer leases them and will be having discussions with the neighbouring property owners and cottagers association, according to meeting minutes. Staff have proposed a land swap between the municipality and OPG that would have the municipality acquire Sideroad 30. Once acquired, staff would present a bylaw to adopt Sideroad 30 into the Municipal Road Structure. Staff would then review the parking bylaw and present any relative amendments or signage required in order to enforce appropriately.

In a phone interview, McQueen said council made the decision to let the lease on the two unregulated and unsupervised access points lapse because of the concerns from municipal staff and neighbouring cottagers. He said council was told OPG would work with the neighbouring cottage associations and residents within walking distance of the former public access points to work out a modified access agreement. Everyone else who wants to access the lake will now need to use the remaining public beach access.

"It's there that we have portapot-

ties, we have ample parking and staff there to keep it organized. Plus, the Eugenia District Community Association looks after the lot and collects the fees," McQueen said. Fees collected at the public beach and boat launch are used to fund and support community initiatives, the mayor said.

"These issues were raised, issues around garbage, parking, no wash-room facilities, and council made a decision," McQueen said.

Mansikka said the concerns of residents who don't own waterfront property at Lake Eugenia is starting to swell and people have begun to organize. She expects a delegation to appear in front of council soon to argue for the reversal of the decision, and advocate for more public lake access.

"In the 50 years we have lived here that was our access point, and it existed well before that," Mansikka said. She and others worry the one public beach that remains at the lake, and still leased by the municipality from OPG, will become too busy this summer.

McQueen said he's heard from the concerned residents, and other avenues may be explored, but reiterated that all members of the public are still able to access the lake at the public beach.

"There's been some suggestion that maybe if this makes it a busier area we need to expand it, but I think the biggest underlying part of this is, and we heard this with the comments at the meeting, there are portapotties there and there's a control for the garbage," McQueen said.

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Thanks  
Fred &  
Gar.