



ONTARIO  
RIVERS  
ALLIANCE



29 March 2017

Warden Dennis Lever  
Councillor Neil Driscoll  
Councillor Andy Lennox  
Councillor Kelly Linton  
Councillor Allan Alls  
Councillor Chris White  
Councillor George Bridge  
Councillor David Anderson  
Councillor Gregg Davidson  
Councillor Gary Williamson  
Councillor Lynda White  
Councillor Rob Black  
Councillor Shawn Watters  
Councillor Don McKay  
Councillor Doug Breen  
Councillor Pierre Brianceau  
County of Wellington  
74 Woolwich St.  
Guelph, ON  
N1H 3T9  
By Email to Donna Bryce, County Clerk: [DonnaB@Wellington.ca](mailto:DonnaB@Wellington.ca)

Re: Hillsburgh Dam and Bridge, Town of Erin

Dear County of Wellington Warden and Councillors:

Trout Unlimited Canada and the Ontario Rivers Alliance are requesting the County of Wellington Warden and Councillors consider supporting the decommissioning of the Hillsburgh Dam with an offline pond, which is the preferred alternative from a natural heritage perspective. This would provide positive environmental benefits to the West Credit River ecosystem, provide resilience to climate change, and support a multi-species ecosystem-based recovery initiative for the long-term.

The West Credit River is a highly valued coldwater brook trout stream, that has been in decline because of a series of dams, including the Hillsburgh dam, that have contributed to thermal warming and degraded water quality, and blocked fish access to key habitat and spawning areas. Brook trout in southern Ontario, one of only three native heritage trout species in Ontario, have already seen an over 80% decline in abundance over the last 60 years as a result of old dams and water quality degradation. These impacts will only be amplified with the predicated increased frequency, magnitude and potential duration of droughts and extreme rain and flooding events that climate change will bring in the years to come.



According to a recent NASA and National Science Foundation funded study of more than half of the world's freshwater supply, climate change is rapidly warming lakes and rivers around the world, and threatening freshwater supplies and ecosystems. <sup>1</sup>

*"Climate warming will adversely affect water quality and water quantity, as well as the magnitude and timing of river flows, lake levels and water renewal times."* <sup>2</sup> Drought conditions could place additional stress on riverine ecosystems, while more extreme rainfall will heighten the risk of dam failures (14 dams were breached in a South Carolina flood in October of 2015) with rapid release of high volumes of water.<sup>3,4</sup> *"Climate will interact with overexploitation, dams and diversions, habitat destruction, non-native species and pollution to destroy native freshwater fisheries."*<sup>5</sup> It is crucial that we recognize the hazards of built infrastructure that would degrade water quality, threaten our fish and fisheries, or that jeopardize the ecosystem services that healthy rivers provide.

Trout Unlimited Canada has been working to ensure the integrity and health of the Credit River Watershed since 1979. In that time period this organization has provided over 8,000 hours of work by over 200 volunteers and approximately \$1 million dollars of in-kind, cash and support to the management of the watershed. There has been a major focus on two major issues, the impact of climate change on the upper Credit and West Credit watersheds and the river's health; and the impact of onstream structures in relation to climate change and the resulting impacts on coldwater resources on the upper watershed. The West Credit and main Credit Rivers are losing resilience and this is in part due to old obsolete on-line dams and ponds that are exacerbating the impacts of climate change on the river, its water quality and health. We have a keen interest in improving the quality of life, quality of environment and sustainability of the upper Credit and West Credit watersheds. Given that brook trout require clean, cold water to survive, they are in essence the "canary in the coal mine". When they disappear or are lost, it indicates that the local environment is becoming more degraded and unhealthy not just for fish but for people as well.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Trout Unlimited Canada, the Ontario Rivers Alliance, and several others have partnered to remove two upstream dams which facilitate the implementation of the Credit River Fisheries Management Plan (OMNR and CVC, 2002), a multi-species ecosystem-based recovery initiative, and the West Credit River Subwatershed Background Study and Impact Assessment (1998, 2001). The plan also supports the need to restore greater resiliency in the watershed to help our communities cope with greater climate variability: variability that can create major problems with water quality, property, human health and safety.

We respectfully submit, that the desire by some in the County to preserve the view of the pond is contrary to the intent of important ongoing initiatives that support a healthy multi-species ecosystem. We believe that neither the public good, public safety, nor the environment are well served in a decision to restore and maintain the dam. In addition, an argument can be made that by supporting

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<sup>1</sup> Study: *Climate Change Rapidly Warming World's Lakes*. 16 December 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Schindler, D.W., 2001. *The cumulative effects of climate warming and other human stresses on Canadian freshwaters in the new millennium*. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*. 58: 18-29.

<sup>3</sup> Dams fail, death toll rises as flood flows east in Carolinas. <http://wbtw.com/2015/10/08/dams-fail-death-toll-rises-as-flood-flows-east-in-carolinas/>

<sup>4</sup> Colorado flood: Dams break in Larimer and Adams counties; overflowing in Boulder. [http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci\\_24080336/dams-break-at-rocky-mountain-arsenal-and-larimer](http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_24080336/dams-break-at-rocky-mountain-arsenal-and-larimer)

<sup>5</sup> Schindler, D.W., 2001. *The cumulative effects of climate warming and other human stresses on Canadian freshwaters in the new Millennium*. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*. 58: 18-29.



the maintenance of the dam, Wellington County will assume additional public liability if the structure should fail in the future.

Support for the decommissioning of Hillsburgh Dam would be a strong action for the County of Wellington to take to protect its valued freshwater brook trout fishery and most importantly in ensuring the West Credit River and adjacent communities are more resilient to climate change. This direction would be in keeping with Wellington County's demonstrated environmental leadership with terrestrial environmental management. It would also demonstrate that the County was moving from being simply a "Green" community to being a "Green and Blue" community.

The Hillsburgh Dam and Bridge Environmental Report stated, "*The analysis concluded that either Alternative C - Option 2 or Alternative D - Option 2, which includes the construction of an offline pond, are the preferred alternatives from a natural heritage perspective. These alternatives have the least negative impacts to the natural heritage features and provide positive benefits to the Natural Environment in the long term*"<sup>6</sup>.

We believe that Alternative C - Option 2 or Alternative D - Option 2 would provide BOTH a standing water feature with improved biodiversity and complexity AND restoration of a second water feature, a healthy stream and stream corridor that would make the stream, its coldwater community and water quality more resilient to increasing climate variability, thereby demonstrating Wellington County's strong commitment to a healthy environment. These options are also the lowest long-term costs to both the Town and County.

We ask the County of Wellington to look beyond the pure aesthetics of a pond feature, to the greater long-term health and vitality of a revived and highly valued brook trout fishery and natural environment, both now and far into the future.

Trout Unlimited Canada and the Ontario Rivers Alliance strongly support and endorse the decommissioning of Hillsburgh Dam, and the construction of an offline pond, as it is the best long-term solution for the river and ultimately for the County and its citizens.

We would be pleased to meet with you in the near future to make a formal presentation and to discuss this further in the hopes of finding the best alternatives for the County, local communities, and the riverine ecosystem of the West Credit River. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Jack Imhof  
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Cc: The Honourable Glen Murray, Minister of Environment and Climate Change,  
[Minister.MOECC@ontario.ca](mailto:Minister.MOECC@ontario.ca)

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<sup>6</sup> *Hillsburgh Dam, Town of Erin, Environmental Assessment – Natural Environment Report, 6.0 Conclusion, October 13, 2016, AA12-137A. P-65.*



Trout Unlimited Canada



Truite Illimitée Canada

The Honourable Kathryn McGarry, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry,  
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