Drowned Lands, Dead Fish, and the Greater Good: The Trent-Severn Waterway in the Early Twentieth Century

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science

TRENT UNIVERSITY

Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

History M.A. Graduate Program

January 2026

ABSTRACT

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Environmental infrastructure transforms the surrounding physical and cultural landscapes. In Canada, it has long been an integral part of settler colonialism. It severs Indigenous ties to the land and furthers colonial goals. This thesis examines the complex history of the Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW) during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when it drastically changed the region. Research using oral history, newspapers, and legal documents corrects a narrative that positions the TSW as a common good. The TSW is alleged to have served the people, but who benefitted? The experiences of riparian residents varied as Anishinaabe First Nations endured a multilayered form of violence, distinct from their settler counterparts. What was often a nuisance for settlers could be life-altering for Anishinaabeg. However, amidst these changes, residents demonstrated resilience. Communities actively shifted the TSW to tourism as they adapted to a transformed landscape.

Keywords: environmental history, Trent-Severn Waterway, flooding, settler colonialism, environmental injustice, Anishinaabeg history, lumber, tourism, conservation, Ontario, Peterborough, Nogojiwanong.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people and institutions. Thank you to everyone who took the time to talk with me, listen to my ideas, and let me listen to theirs.

The land through which the Trent-Severn Waterway flows was pivotal to me as a student and person these past few years. Walking my dog through its forests and paddling on its lakes provided me opportunities to reflect on my work and its broader themes. Thank you to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg for their stewardship of this land and water that I was honoured to call home.

Thank you to Trent University for the education you provided me, your beautiful campuses, and the endless support of your community. The Trent University Library and Archives were especially important to me and a special thank you to Karen Suurtamm for her help and guidance in navigating the archives.

The Peterborough Museum and Archives were another wealth of information for this thesis. Thank you to Jon Oldham for his help and advice in finding interesting archival materials.

A special thank you to my incredible supervisor Finis Dunaway, without whom this thesis would not have happened. Thank you for pushing me, asking me the right questions, and introducing me to so many theories, ideas, and amazing historians. Thank you to Stephanie Rutherford for allowing me to be part of the Mapping 4 Change team and for all her support and advice throughout this project. Both Finis and Stephanie, as well as their respective works, opened my eyes to the endless possibilities of history and led me to falling in love with environmental history.

Thank you to Jackson Pind for agreeing to be my external/internal committee member. Your comments, questions, and suggestions helped me make this thesis stronger.

Thank you to Jennine Hurl-Eamon for trusting me and allowing me to grow as a teaching assistant. The many opportunities she provided me were a much-needed distraction from my thesis.

A special thanks to all at Traill College for providing me with a home away from home, and especially to Catherine O'Brien, who not only answered hundreds of questions but was always around to talk to. Without such an amazing space, moving away from home would have been much more difficult. Some of my fondest memories will be summer afternoons spent writing on the porch of Kerr House.

There are so many people who helped make Peterborough home, but special thanks to Matt Douglas. He made my second year at Trent fly by and even though we probably undermined each other's productivity, I would share an office with him any day.

To my parents, thank you for your endless support and advice. Without knowing that you had my back, I never would have made the jump to Trent. Thank you for your visits and for having me back in Montreal whenever I needed to come home.

To Dana, my sister, I never would have survived graduate school without our endless phone calls and your generous offers to read over many papers. I would not have made it through high school, CEGEP, or my bachelors let alone my master's without your support.

To Tali, my partner, thank you for making this move and this leap with me, for talking over so many historical topics, for listening to me read over countless hundred

year old newspaper articles, and for reminding me there is a life outside school. Seeing you at the end of every day made our apartment on Bethune St. into a home.

A special thanks to my dog Luna whose companionship carried me though a lot of writing. Our daily walks gave me space to reflect on this project, explore my new home, and meet my neighbours in a city I now love.

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INTRODUCTION

Locks, Lakes, and Rivers

The Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW) is a landscape of complexity. It stretches across almost four hundred kilometres between Port Severn on Lake Huron's Georgian Bay and the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario. Amidst this distance there is a diversity of infrastructure, including locks, canals, lakes, and rivers. These bodies of water are strung together to make up a navigable route connecting two Great Lakes (Figure 1). Symbolically, the TSW once connected the large urban centres of Eastern Canada, including Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston, and Montreal to the Canadian West. Today, however, the TSW serves a much different purpose. Once intended to be a national linchpin, its relevance on the national stage has diminished. But this change has not lessened its appearance, and today the TSW remains settled into its landscape, as much a part of the Canadian shield as the drumlins it runs through.

The perception of tranquility that surrounds the TSW now was not always the case. For almost a century, the TSW's construction transformed the physical landscape, upended both human and non-human communities alike, and facilitated settler colonial goals. Water levels were raised and lowered for the lumber drives, damaging important habitats for the animals living in and along the TSW. While multiple species struggled to adjust to fluctuating water levels, other issues such as increased pollution worsened their situation. Linked to their environment, human communities were also deeply affected as many of their lifeways were disrupted. As the environment changed so did the cultural and social landscapes of the TSW.

The TSW reshaped power structures, first prioritizing lumber barons and then the tourism industry. Amidst this upheaval, communities adjusted. Both Anishinaabeg and settler communities found ways to thrive in the tourism environment and created opportunities for themselves. When the last lock was built in 1922, it signalled the beginning of something, not the end. While politicians may have breathed a sigh of relief, communities were unable to; the damage had only just begun and communities had decades of work ahead of them to adapt and find new ways to survive and try to thrive in a changing environment.

The TSW could not have been built without the support of a narrative that enabled its construction. Residents were aware of the environmental changes occurring due to the ongoing construction. But they were promised that whatever damage done was a necessary sacrifice for the region's greater good. The benefits promised were economic and colonial in nature as the TSW was purported to enable resource extraction as well as continual settlement. While the TSW did enable these elements, the overarching narrative of progress disregarded and downplayed the damaging consequences. While the TSW was being sold as a piece of infrastructure to benefit the larger population, the greatest beneficiaries were in fact wealthy settlers. Meanwhile, it was Anishinaabeg communities who were left out of the greater good narrative and bore the brunt of the TSW's consequences.

Nature and Infrastructure

Central to the history of the TSW are questions surrounding what is natural and unnatural. Is the entire waterway a piece of infrastructure or only the parts with concrete

walls? The TSW operates in a grey area and complicates traditional binaries. The lakes and rivers that are not immediately part of the TSW but part of the larger watershed are similarly difficult to pin down. Many may perceive these places as removed or distant from the TSW's infrastructure, yet these surrounding bodies of water are an indirect but integral part of the waterway.[1] The resulting effect of this transformation is not that the lakes or rivers are unnatural, nor is it that the canals and locks are part of the surrounding nature. Rather it is an outright rejection of the absolute, simple categories of humanmade and natural. The TSW blurs the boundaries of natural and unnatural, wild and urban. Like its landscape, the TSW's history is complex. It is one of settler colonialism, political fights, lumber camps, river drives, fisheries, regattas, cottages, resorts, monumental constructions—stories of success and stories of failure.

Bobcaygeon and Commemoration

Historical and commemorative works often start the TSW's story on August 2, 1833. On this day, construction began on the first lock of the TSW in Bobcaygeon, Ontario, under the direction of James Bethune.[2] Beginning the TSW's story at this point has important implications. It brackets the TSW's history and obscures usage of the waterway before settler arrival. Anishinaabeg and other Nations used this route for millennia before the imposition of colonial infrastructure. Evidence of this comes in the form of oral history and archaeological studies. Since time immemorial, Indigenous

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[1] Parks Canada, *What is Water Management?* (2024), https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/on/trentsevern/info/infonet/gestion-eau-water-management.
[2] James T. Angus, *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway, 1833-1920*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 13; Parks Canada Agency, *Plaque at Bobcaygeon*, 2008, Photo. https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=560&i=53286.

Nations have and continue to use the waterway as a form of transportation, resource gathering, trade network, and home. Before the presence of any colonial infrastructure, there were trade routes stretching across eastern North America that relied on the complex web of natural waterways upon which the TSW now sits.[3] Additionally, the TSW is not the first instance of infrastructure in the watershed. Fish weirs at present day Atherley along the TSW predate the first lock by millennia.[4] When this history is obscured, the TSW's interference with Indigenous lifeways and the environment is buried beneath a settler colonial narrative of improvement for the greater good.

While historical works on the TSW should not only begin in 1833, the year does represent an important marker of a new period. The first lock at Bobcaygeon precipitated a century of building, political fights, environmental injustice, and a process of construction that was synonymous with settler colonialism. It was a century that left the physical and cultural landscapes of the region radically transformed. The process of construction was not straightforward, but rather a convoluted series of trials and errors. In 1833, the men who petitioned for construction of the Bobcaygeon lock were private businessmen focused on building their own small transportation route, but they sparked a larger movement. After the lock was completed, interest quickly grew. Local settlers and politicians along the TSW envisioned a waterway that could open the region to trade and commerce. At this point in time, the TSW's loudest advocates focused on the local

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[3] Gidigaa Migizi, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This Is Our Territory* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: ARP Books, 2018); James Conolly, "Hunter-Gatherer Mobility, Territoriality, and Placemaking in the Kawartha Lakes Region, Ontario," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology / Journal Canadien d'Archéologie* 42 (Fall 2018): 185–209.

[4] R. James Ringer, "The Atherley Narrows Fish Weir Complex: A Submerged Archaic-to-Historic-Period Fishing Site in Ontario, Canada," *Revista de Arqueologa Americana*, 26 (2008): 137.

benefits of a waterway centred on the Trent River. As interest continued to build, different groups formed and pushed for planning of the waterway to begin.

Growing interest eventually culminated in the report of Nicol Hugh Baird, a young man tasked with surveying the route.[5] While Baird did focus on local benefits around the Kawarthas, Trent River, and Rice Lake, the nationalistic undertone reflected grander motivations. In his report, Baird emphasized the importance of the TSW for the success of the region. He hinged the TSW's necessity on two primary factors. Firstly, it served as a convenient method to transport goods in and out of the region. This benefit was paramount to settle interior Ontario and form self-sufficient settler colonial communities. Without the TSW, transport was prohibitively expensive and impeded successful settlement. The second key issue was the ability to connect Upper and Lower Canada with regions west of Georgian Bay and Lake Huron. The TSW would help settle this region and transport their resources to eastern markets.[6] This point hinted as to the nation-making aspect of the TSW. It was not just for local benefit, but for the soon-to-be nation.

Baird's language and narrative revealed how settler colonialism was entwined with the construction of the TSW. Settler colonialism refers to the structures of control that support European colonial domination, structures that still exist today. These larger systems of power often promote the genocidal aim of erasing Indigenous Nations and destroying Indigenous lifeways.[7]

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[5] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 7, 21-24.
[6] Nicol Hugh Baird, *Report on the Most Eligible Route for a Canal between Lake Simcoe and the Rice Lake* (Ontario, 1836), 9-11, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/aeu.ark:/13960/t5p84zq0n.
[7] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006): 387–409. doi:10.1080/14623520601056240.

Like the education system and other institutions, the TSW worked to separate Anishinaabeg from their lands and waters.[8] The TSW and other pieces of infrastructure indicate the powerful link between settler colonialism and control of land. It is partly this link that resulted in such drastic environmental changes. The presence of settler colonial structures, both physical and intangible, leave environments damaged and transformed.[9]

Baird's report laid clear the extent to which the TSW was embedded within settler colonialism. His primary reasons for building the waterway were part of the larger colonial project of Canada.[10] Baird made the TSW seem a necessity, as he claimed that without this infrastructure, this region and the west could not be settled. Baird hinged the region's entire economic viability on the TSW. While these driving reasons gradually changed over its history, this underlying narrative remained consistent. The TSW continued to rely on the idea of a greater good to justify its presence.

Baird's vision of a commercial corridor for nation building never came to pass, but he was correct in his assessment of the potential lumber industry. Despite discussing the region's resources broadly, Baird focused on lumber as the primary commodity to be extracted.[11] His vision of a booming lumber industry materialized after a few years thanks to the growth of a railway network in the Trent watershed. While the TSW suffered economically in the 1840s, it thrived in the 1850s when a flurry of railways was built

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[8] Jackson Pind, *Students by Day: Colonialism and Resistance at the Curve Lake Indian Day School* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025), 4-5, 8.
[9] Cole Harris. *A Bounded Land: Reflections on Settler Colonialism in Canada* (University of British Columbia Press, 2020), 3-18. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.trentu.ca/10.59962/9780774864435-002; Kyle Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society* 9 (September 2018): 125–44, https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109; and Winona LaDuke and Deborah Cowen, "Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 119 (April 2020): 243-268.
[10] The link between Canada, colonialism, infrastructure, and resource extraction is explored in Rafico Ruiz's book *Slow Disturbance: Infrastructural Mediation on the Settler Colonial Resource Frontier* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478012139.
[11] Baird, *Report on the Most Eligible Route for a Canal between Lake Simcoe and the Rice Lake*, 9-10, 16.

between the TSW and ports of Lake Ontario. The railways facilitated a thriving lumber industry as they worked in tandem with the TSW to extract lumber from the region's forests and transport them to larger markets. The railways did not only transport lumber; they also moved goods and people to and from the TSW. During this time, interest in the TSW as a national network waned as railways undermined the need for the TSW's completion. But, as forests were depleted and the lumber industry declined in the mid-1870s, railways charged more on other goods to make up for lost revenue.

As it became more expensive to move goods in and out of the region, interest in the TSW's completion was revived among riparian communities.[12] This concern helped spur another phase of building and more steamboats were introduced to the TSW's waters. These two elements significantly altered the region, as the late 1800s witnessed the growth of a thriving steamboat network across the watershed. While the steamboats were commonly used by tourists, riparian communities also benefitted as travel between towns was made easier.[13]

However, even with the steamboats, the TSW never became the trade hub that many had hoped for. By the twentieth century, developments in shipping technology had rendered the TSW obsolete as a transportation route. In addition, growing railway networks to the west meant that the TSW was no longer required for that transport. A few politicians and businessmen held on to the hope that the TSW would one day see ships loaded with grain, but these aspirations steadily dwindled. There was no nail in the coffin

[12] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 107-109.
[13] This topic is discussed in Chapter 3 and is a large part of the growing tourism industry.

per se, just a gradual realization that this vision would not come to pass. By 1920, dreams of the TSW as a key route to move prairie grain were all but gone.[14]

During this time, and especially around the turn of the century, the TSW's priorities, which had always been fluid, made a clear shift away from industry to tourism and recreation. This shift signified a monumental change for the TSW both culturally and economically, but amidst this change, there remained threads from the TSW's very beginnings. Cultural elements that predated settler infrastructure continued into the twentieth century as the TSW's capacity as a network remained paramount to its function.

Issues with Current Commemoration

Shortly after the federal government completed construction on the last lock in 1920, they moved forward with efforts to commemorate the TSW's complex history. They took little time and only nine years later, in 1929, the TSW was officially part of the National Historic Sites system.[15] In keeping with the TSW's history, the Bobcaygeon lock was the first part of the system to receive this designation.[16] The quick turnaround from completion to historical commemoration is ironic considering the visions of a thriving industrial network many of its originators once held. If someone had told Baird and other proponents that, less than a decade after completion, not only would the TSW

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[14] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 316, 327, 375, 401.
[15] The turn of the century witnessed an effort to market and advertise Canada and its 'nature' as a tourism destination. See E. J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude Publishing., 1983). For a more critical approach see Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "The Cultural Politics of Ecological Integrity: Nature and Nation in Canada's National Parks, 1885-2000," *International Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue Internationale d'études Canadiennes*, 39–40 (January 2009): 161–89, https://doi.org/10.7202/040828ar.
[16] Parks Canada, Directory of Federal Heritage Designations (2023), https://parks.canada.ca/culture/dfhd.aspx.

not be a commercial artery, but instead it would be a historical site, they would have been in disbelief.

However, despite historical commemoration, the TSW was far from static. Alongside constant construction and maintenance, it continued to have environmental, cultural, and economic ripple effects within the region's riparian communities. Such is the nature of a waterway. With elements such as water management being contentious among riparian communities, its ebbs and flows continued to affect their land, hunting, crops, and fishing. The TSW may have been finished from a construction standpoint, but it continued to inflict violence against the Anishinaabeg communities along its shores. The narrative set out by Parks Canada contradicted their lived experience.

The commemoration itself only reinforced the violence and injustice that communities, especially Anishinaabeg, experienced as it furthered a settler colonial narrative. The plaque, erected in 1938 at Bobcaygeon, was both a product of the past and present when it read "Commemorating the construction in 1833 of the first Bobcaygeon lock … the beginning of the improvement of the natural waterway connecting Lake Ontario with Georgian Bay."[17] Labelling the TSW as an improvement continued the narrative set out by Baird almost 100 years earlier when it presented the TSW as an integral part of the region's economic success. In doing so, the plaque ignored the mistakes made and the damage done to the region and its communities during the process. In addition, the plaque's phrasing reflected the settler colonial technocratic attitudes of the twentieth century when it marvelled at the TSW's engineering prowess. The term improvement reflected a modernist attitude which saw value in the TSW as a

[17] Parks Canada Agency, *Original HSMBC plaque*, 1938, Photo of plaque. https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=560&i=53286.

monumental engineering achievement.[18] As communities were surrounded by flooded lands and dying fish, they were told that the TSW was a triumph, a shining badge of honour for a young nation.

The misrepresentation was no accident. Canadian Heritage Sites, like the National Parks which Parks Canada also oversees, are a vital part of nation building pedagogy. Their goal is not to accurately represent the past but to support a nationalist narrative. The plaques are not simple commemorative objects with no bearing on national identity. Instead, they actively inform Canadians on their relationship to the land and their history.[19]

When Parks Canada represented the TSW as an improvement to the landscape, they made it a monument to engineering and colonial achievements, even though for many, it is anything but that. For many, a more apt description comes from scholar Madeline Whetung who described the TSW as a "monument to – slow violence."[20] Like 1833, the year 1920 is used to bracket the TSW's history and give the impression that its past consequences end there. The 1929 Historic Site designation, and the subsequent narrative that the commemoration propped up, is part of the TSW's process of slow violence. The 1929 designation served to undermine Anishinaabeg relationships to the land and bolster the settler colonial narrative that was begun all those years ago.

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[18] Tina Loo, "High Modernism, Conflict, and the Nature of Change in Canada: A Look at *Seeing Like a State*," *Canadian Historical Review* 97 (March 2016): 36.

[19] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands. "Dog Stranglers in the Park?: National and Vegetal Politics in Ontario's Rouge Valley." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47 (Fall 2013): 97 https://doi.org/10.1353/jcs.2013.0005.; Claire Elizabeth Campbell, "Governing a Kingdom: Parks Canada, 1911–2011," in *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011*, ed. Claire Elizabeth Campbell (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2012): 2-3 https://doi.org/10.1515/9781552385272-001.

[20] Madeline Whetung, "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law: Nishnaabeg Relational Politics Along the Trent Severn Waterway," *Global Environmental Politics* 19 (August 2019): 18 https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00513.

Historiography

The foremost work on the TSW comes from James Angus with his book *A Respectable Ditch*. Angus approached the TSW with a clear temporal and thematic frame by focusing solely on its construction. With this framework in mind, Angus begins his book in 1833 with the lock at Bobcaygeon and ends it in 1920 with the completion of the Couchiching lock near Orillia. Angus' book is an impressive achievement in research on the TSW with immeasurable detail and is consulted by TSW scholars and throughout this thesis. While I do consult his book, this thesis diverges from certain key points that Angus makes.

There are several limits to Angus' analysis and theoretical approach. The first is that Angus does not address settler colonialism and its entanglement with the TSW. Angus begins his book by observing, "In some respects the history of the Trent-Severn Waterway resembles the history of Canada. One parallels the other."[21] This statement is correct in that the history of the TSW does mirror that of Canada. But what Angus fails to address in his book is one of the key ways in which its history parallels that of Canada's, through settler colonialism. The TSW as a piece of infrastructure is both a product and a tool of colonialism. At points, it compounded consequences of colonialism, such as by worsening food insecurity. At other points, it facilitated colonialism, including by allowing settlement of interior Ontario. But Angus never addresses these issues.

Moreover, Anishinaabeg Nations, whose traditional territory the TSW runs through, are absent from Angus' book. Due to his focus on the construction itself, it could

[21] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, xi.

be understandable that Anishinaabeg communities are not central to his work. However, there are several areas of analysis where the lack of Indigenous history is a glaring omission. This includes his discussion of flooding without including Hiawatha or Curve Lake First Nations, both of whom had their land flooded during construction. Angus' discussion of tourism without mentioning the pivotal role that Anishinaabeg guides played is another instance where the lack of Anishinaabeg history is confounding. These oversights demonstrate that Angus did not grapple with the power dimensions and colonial relations of the TSW.

Angus' avoidance of these topics is coupled with the inherently optimistic tone that he strikes. His rhetoric mirrors that of Parks Canada's commemoration when he portrays the TSW as an overall improvement to the landscape. Angus is not oblivious to the sordidness and destructive effects of the TSW. He discusses environmental disasters with anecdotes of fish dying. He engages with the corruption of builders like James Bethune. Neither does he place the politicians or self-serving individuals on a pedestal as he acknowledges their shortcomings and true motivations for building the TSW.[22] As Madeline Whetung says, Angus' work "is a story of white-settler men's corruption, self-interest, and, … overall disregard for the pre-existing laws within the territory."[23]

Angus' book is the most well-known work on the TSW, but there are other scholars, like Madeline Whetung, who have conducted more critical examinations. Whetung, whose methodology has influenced my work enormously, offers arguably the most cutting analysis of the TSW. In "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law", Whetung focuses

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[22] Angus is highly critical of the process in which the TSW was built. Throughout *A Respectable Ditch,* he references it as a political lobbying tool used by politicians to garner public support.
[23] Whetung, "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law," 17.

her critique on the TSW's interference with Nishnaabeg relationship to the shorelines. Whetung takes a gendered approach to the TSW, using Anishinaabeg women's relationship to the shoreline to demonstrate how the TSW undermined them. She makes heavy use of oral history through her Anishinaabeg methodology. Using this approach, Whetung takes a more cultural history angle to the TSW, focusing on the people instead of the infrastructure. Whetung's mixed methods approach combines Anishinaabeg and settler methodology. By comparing the two, Whetung can question and critique the TSW's pervasive settler colonial narrative.[24]

While I build on elements of Whetung's approach and consult it several times, I do engage some different themes. Whetung's approach is less historical and more grounded in gender studies, geography, and anthropology. As such, Whetung takes a less historical approach to the TSW and focuses on a much more specific issue. While Whetung does use concepts of environmental injustice and historical work, her analysis is grounded in the present day. This thesis differs from her article but I do not critique it, the same way I critique *A Respectable Ditch*. Instead, my research and analysis in the following chapters aim to build on and complement Whetung's work.

Daniel Francis is another important scholar of the TSW. His work, which comes in the form of interviews and a subsequent report for Parks Canada, provides a vast wealth of knowledge on the TSW and is referenced throughout this thesis. In 1979, Francis interviewed 43 people related to the TSW in some form or another. Francis' interviewees are generally elderly, meaning most discuss events of the early twentieth century with some recalling events as far back as the 1890s. The interviewees are both

[24] Whetung, "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law," 17.

Anishinaabeg and settlers, which means that Francis gathers input from a diverse set of sources. Francis' report based on the interviews takes a cultural history approach, with some labour history as he often discusses interviewees' experiences working in lumber, tourism, and a variety of other jobs.[25] Francis focuses on understanding the culture of the TSW, how it shaped communities, and how residents centred their lives around it. Francis avoids taking any strong stances in his report, as he aims for a descriptive history of the TSW.

While the TSW is still relatively understudied with a critical approach, there are several scholars who are changing that, including Whetung and Ben Kapron.[26] Both Whetung and Kapron join the growing area of critical river scholarship and river infrastructure histories. One of the most well-known examples of this larger body of work is historian Brittany Luby's book *Dammed: The Politics of Loss and Survival in Anishinaabe Territory*. Luby's book explores the consequences of hydroelectric development in the Lake of the Woods Region. *Dammed* covers an impressive breadth of topics in its examination of the slow violence enacted by hydroelectric development with issues such as the degradation of fish populations and manoomin (wild rice) stands. While Luby focuses on the consequences of the hydroelectric infrastructure, there is an emphasis on communities' resilience and survival. Luby examines how communities developed ways to manage many of the consequences and continue cultural practices.[27] At the moment, *Dammed* is the foremost river history in the Canadian context.

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[25] Daniel Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway", 358 (Parks Canada, 1980), https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.873712/publication.html.
[26] Benjamin Kapron, "Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway," *Arcadia* 4 (Spring 2025), https://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/9935.
[27] Brittany Luby, *Dammed: The Politics of Loss and Survival in Anishinaabe Territory* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020).

Methodology

I consulted a variety of archival sources to conduct the multifaceted analysis that historians like Luby achieve. These sources include correspondence, legal cases, pamphlets, commissions, government reports, and books. In addition, interviews with residents from the region and other sources of oral history are consulted heavily throughout this thesis. The combined usage of archival material and oral history enabled me a nuanced analysis of the TSW that underscores its cultural and social consequences. This approach avoids a descriptive history such as *A Respectable Ditch* and Francis' report. The TSW has a great deal of archival material produced about it, partly due to its cultural prominence as a National Historic Site. My combined approach of archival and oral history is based on Whetung's article "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law." Whetung's work on the TSW is ground-breaking due to her ability to look past the nationalistic narrative of the TSW and critique it using a 'mixed method' approach.

I also draw on several sources of oral history. These include Elder Gidigaa Migizi/Doug Williams' book *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This is Our Territory*. Gidigaa Migizi's book is an account of Nishnaabeg political history based on oral history provided by Gidigaa Migizi and edited by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.[28] While the focus of this oral history is not the TSW, there are several pertinent chapters, and the book provides crucial context for the region.

Jack Hoggarth's book *Waashkiigmaang Nbi Wi-Nagamo: Our Curve Lake First Nation Water Song Sharing Oral History* is another source of oral history focused on

[28] Gidigaa Migizi, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg*.

Curve Lake First Nation and the surrounding area. In 2013 and 2014 Hoggarth conducted interviews with Anishinaabeg men and women from around the TSW. His questions revolved around community members' experience, history, and knowledge regarding the water's health. Hoggarth's work was part of a larger project concerning improved water management in the region and was completed in collaboration with Curve Lake First Nation, the Canadian Water Network, and several academic institutions.[29]

Another source of oral history that is consulted are the Cobb Files, a series of interviews created by George Cobb, a local Peterborough historian. Trent University commissioned Cobb to conduct these interviews in 1966, and the project lasted until 1969. Like *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg*, the Cobb Files do not focus solely on the TSW but the broader region. The work began a year before the Canadian Centennial in 1967 and as such may be influenced by a nationalistic narrative and should be used cautiously. The Cobb files are now stored in the Trent University Archives. They are consulted at various points throughout the thesis.[30]

But the oral history sources I consulted most often are the Parks Canada Transcripts, a collection of interviews conducted by Daniel Francis in 1979–1980. Parks Canada, the agency that controlled the TSW as this point, commissioned Francis to conduct these interviews and therefore they should be treated with caution. Interviewees often criticize the TSW but these critiques are not often the focus of Francis' questions. Parks Canada passed these interviews on to Trent University and they are now stored in

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[29] Jack Hoggarth, *Waashkiigmaang Nbi Wi-Nagamo: Our Curve Lake First Nation Water Song Sharing Oral History* (Community Publication funded by Canadian Water Network, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).
[30] Fonds 82-006 – George Cobb tapes, Trent University Library & Archives, Trent University, Peterborough, ON.

the Trent University Archives.[31] These interviews are all completely focused on the TSW and as such are one of the most heavily utilized sources in this thesis.

Oral histories are limited by the interviewer and the questions they ask. Jackson Pind identifies this issue with the Cobb files. Pind observes that George Cobb never asks if his interviewees are Indigenous, and as a result their Nation and important aspects of their background are not discussed.[32] The same issue extends to Daniel Francis and the Parks Canada transcripts. In his interviews Francis does ask about reserves, especially Curve Lake, but never explicitly asks about an interviewee's Indigeneity. Nor does he ask about their experience living along the TSW as a member of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. As a result, neither Cobb nor Francis identify the unique struggles and experiences of Anishinaabeg residents. While both groups are riparian residents, settlers and Anishinaabeg experienced the TSW very differently. Through a lack of questioning, this is lost in Cobb and Francis' interviews.

Aside from oral histories, newspaper articles are central to this thesis. Articles are drawn from a variety of local newspapers such as the *Peterborough Evening Review*, the *Lindsay Daily Post*, the *Peterborough Morning Times*, and several other smaller newspapers from towns along the TSW. These articles provide an informal archival source and often contain details that do not appear in official records. This is especially true in sections like "Local Brevities," which appear in local newspapers. These sections each consist of several seemingly inconsequential articles, each a sentence or two long, about small events around town. These events can be as trivial as a resident breaking their

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[31] Collection 80-017 – Parks Canada Transcripts collection, Trent University Library & Archives, Trent University, Peterborough, ON.
[32] Pind, *Students by Day,* 8.

leg, a relative visiting from out of town, or even a big fish that was caught nearby. The Local Brevities sections are like oral histories in the sense that they are helpful in uncovering information often left out of official narratives of the TSW.

Theoretical Approach

Historical work on the TSW falls under the conceptual umbrella of river histories, despite it not being solely about a single river. Thematically, river histories offer the most robust theory, and many address and even focus on the issue of river infrastructure. Like many works of history that focus on rivers, my work is influenced by Richard White's *The Organic Machine*.[33] White is well known for his use of the concept of energy to understand the history of humans working the Columbia River. But amidst this study, White rejects the idea that the Columbia was 'pure' or 'natural' before human intervention or impure afterwards. White therefore studies the relationship between humans, the Columbia river, energy, and work while avoiding the binary of natural and unnatural.[34]

In modelling White's approach to the damming of the Columbia River, the TSW is not presented as dead or dying after construction. This could be an easy trap at times, especially in discussions of depleted fish populations and animals such as muskrats dying in the winter. There are visceral images of dead fish floating in lakes, but amidst this death, new life such as carp and walleye also entered the ecosystem. While their introduction had consequences for the riparian communities, their presence also

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[33] Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).
[34] Benjamin R. Cohen, "Escaping the False Binary of Nature and Culture Through Connection: Richard White's 'The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River,'" *Organization & Environment* (Thousand Oaks, CA) 18 (2005): 446-449, https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026605281188.

contradicts any consideration of the TSW as dead. Kapron takes White's approach to the TSW with his focus on "other-than-human survivance." In his work, he uses this focus to examine ways in which the TSW itself resisted human imposition of infrastructure. Kapron uses examples of flooding and dam walls breaking to present a TSW that is constantly changing and not static.[35]

Since *The Organic Machine*, scholars such as Whetung, Luby, and Craig Fortier have studied Canadian river systems and built on White's approach. They did so by emphasizing the continuous relationship of Indigenous riparian communities to the water. In Whetung's article on the TSW, "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law," she emphasizes that despite the damage done to this relationship, Nishnaabeg continue to maintain a relationship to the rivers and lakes.[36] Luby takes a similar approach to Whetung when studying the Winnipeg River. Luby counters the archival record with oral history to demonstrate that despite laws passed, Anishinaabeg communities continued to practice lifeways and points to certain events as forms of cultural survival.[37] Craig Fortier similarly emphasizes this distinction in his article "The Humber Is a Haunting." Despite focusing on the theme of death more than White, Whetung, or Luby, Fortier is careful not to portray Indigenous relationships with the Humber as dead.[38]

Outside of history, anthropologist Eve Tuck has argued for an approach that runs parallel to White's. Tuck repudiates the tendency of scholars to focus on narratives of "damage" and instead pushes for "desire"-centred narratives. Tuck argues that by only

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[35] Kapron, "Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway."
[36] Whetung "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law." 18.
[37] Luby, *Dammed*, 36-39.
[38] Craig Fortier, "The Humber Is a Haunting: Settler Deathscapes, Indigenous Spectres, and the Memorialisation of a Canadian Heritage River," *Antipode* 54 (January 2022): 261.

researching stories of damage, scholars relegate disenfranchised communities to the past.[39] A balance is required here, and scholars such as Luby and Whetung have done an excellent job of striking that balance. To go too far in the direction of desire-centred narratives would risk emulating Angus' work which does not even touch the damage done. I aim to heed Tuck's letter while also discussing the TSW's damage to communities. The desire-centred narrative is especially apparent in the third chapter which examines the ways in which riparian communities adapted to the TSW. As discussed by other scholars, this continued relationship should not undermine or overshadow the consequences of the TSW but instead add nuance.

In terms of damage done, the two main focuses of this thesis are flooded lands and the human-induced ecological changes.[40] Flooded lands have been studied extensively in historical works on rivers and natural disasters. Stephane Castonguay has written about several rivers in Quebec, including most notably his article on flooding in the Eastern Townships.[41] Castonguay's approach builds on the concept of natural disasters being culturally produced.[42] Understanding the cultural element of natural disasters is paramount in understanding the ways in which floods disproportionately

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[39] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79 (Fall 2009): 413.

[40] "Human-induced ecological changes" is an all-encompassing term for the environmental changes caused by the TSW. In this thesis it includes but is not solely: environmental degradation, loss of native species, habitat loss, and the introduction of invasive species. Ecological stresses refer to the challenges faced by the environment due to these changes.

[41] Stéphane Castonguay, "The Production of Flood as Natural Catastrophe: Extreme Events and the Construction of Vulnerability in the Drainage Basin of the St. Francis River (Quebec), Mid-Nineteenth to Mid-Twentieth Century," *Environmental History* 12 (October 2007): 820–44, https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/12.4.820. Note: the Eastern Townships are a region in southeast Quebec.

[42] Kenneth Hewitt, "The Idea of a Calamity in a Technocratic Age," in *Interpretations of Calamity: From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, ed. Kenneth Hewitt (Winchester, MA: Allan & Unwin Inc, 1983), 3–30; Theodore Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ocultrent-ebooks/detail.action?docID=281170.

affect marginalized communities. The cultural element of natural disasters works alongside the concept of environmental injustice. Both theoretical ideas are intertwined with the TSW.[43]

Environmental injustice refers to how environmental risks disproportionately affect marginalized communities. In other words, these groups are "burdened with environmental hazards."[44] In a settler colonial context, such as the TSW, environmental injustices often affect Indigenous communities. Kyle Whyte argues that this link occurs because settler colonialism is often a root cause for environmental injustice. Whyte focuses on Anishinaabe people and the ways in which settler colonialism interferes with their ongoing relationship to the environment, which Whyte defines as collective continuance. According to Whyte, Anishinaabe people view themselves are part of a larger network and set of reciprocal relations within their environment, one where humans are not necessarily special or unique. Collective continuance is the maintenance of these relationships; it includes fluidity and adjustment as a society adapts to new contexts. When settler communities enter Indigenous spaces and try to create their own ecologies, they disrupt and interfere with Indigenous ecologies.[45] Environmental injustice is a key theme in the second chapter as the TSW's interference with the environment was especially disastrous for Anishinaabeg Nations.

Slow violence is another theoretical term that aids in understanding the link between the TSW and environmental injustice. Partly due to the drawn out nature of the

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[43] Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," 125–44.
[44] David N. Pellow, "Environmental Inequality Formation: Toward a Theory of Environmental Injustice," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (January 2000): 582, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764200043004004.
[45] Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," 125-129, 135.

TSW's construction, many of its consequences can be difficult to comprehend. Environmental degradation is oftentimes a slow and gradual process which can render it invisible to many.[46] For Anishinaabeg communities, the eventual loss of many native species linked to the TSW had complex and generational trauma. Both Kapron and Whetung have explored this concept at length with the TSW. Whetung especially has examined the continued slow violence against Anishinaabeg communities with her focus on shorelines and collective continuance.

The history of manoomin also demonstrates the effects of slow violence.[47] Manoomin is a pivotal historical actor in this work, and any work on the TSW, due to its previous abundance in the region. Once considered a "breadbasket," the region around the TSW contained multiple spots that it thrived in. The enormous loss of manoomin stands was a cataclysmic event, and the TSW's role in its downturn was enormous. Manoomin is a prime example of slow violence as it demonstrates the consequences of the TSW for communities. At the same time, manoomin also represents an example of resilience and the importance of not portraying the rivers and lakes as dead. Manoomin stands have begun to bounce back with the help of Anishinaabeg community members. Manoomin is one of the region's most important historical actors and plays an important role throughout this thesis.

Drowned Lands, Dead Fish, and Steamboats

[46] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
[47] Samantha Mehltretter and Andrea Bradford, "Environmental Change, Environmental Care," in *Manomin: Caring for Ecosystems and Each Other*, ed. Brittany Luby et al. (University of Manitoba Press, 2024), 89–106, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781772840926-012.

The story of the TSW is not only one of rich, wealthy, land-owning settlers.[48] Despite it being them who built the first lock, petitioned for the introduction of game fish, and opened resorts, among many other actions, it was riparian communities who had their fields and reserves flooded, who bore witness to hundreds of dead fish floating in the lakes, and who watched manoomin stands disappear under high water. It was riparian communities who developed new ways to live on the TSW as they adapted to a rapidly transforming environment around them.

Despite the claims of the greater good narrative, the TSW did not mark an improvement to the landscape. For the region's riparian communities, the TSW was built without their consultation and developed into a disastrous construction to which they were forced to adjust. The TSW is emblematic of settler colonial violence against the environment and Indigenous peoples. While today, the waterway is a popular recreation corridor that is utilized by and brings joy to many people, its entanglement with settler colonialism and the violence that it continues to perpetuate cannot be hidden. Lands that were flooded almost two hundred years ago remain underwater, salmon have not returned to its rivers, and until only a few years ago, Anishinaabeg communities had yet to receive any of the compensation they deserved.

The following chapters outline a small portion of its history focused on the turn of the twentieth century. However, despite the tight temporal framework, themes from this period are rooted in the deep past and persist today. The temporal focus is a product of the available sources and of the unique time in its history. Many of the largest collections of oral history are focused roughly on this period. In addition, the end of the TSW's

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[48] This is in reference (agreement) to Madeline Whetung's comment regarding *A Respectable Ditch*.

construction and its last few years represent a pivotal time in its history. The damage it inflicted on communities was in full force at the beginning of the twentieth century. Lands continued to be flooded and dead fish floated to lake surfaces at ever increasing amounts. The early twentieth century was not a positive time for humans and non-humans alike.

However, despite the enormous damage being done, many sources speak of this period with an optimistic tone that cannot be ignored. The positivity is attributed to two key themes, the shift to tourism and the greater good narrative which runs throughout the TSW's history. The shift to tourism was a product of larger trends in Canada but also represented a conscious and explicit decision by many inhabitants. The new tourism economy enabled residents a greater amount of choice and agency in their lives. Despite these positives, it was not as overwhelmingly good as many sources and narratives claim. The greater good narrative obscured the TSW's damage and positioned the shift to tourism as a new economic necessity for the region's good.

Today this narrative continues strong. Bolstered by historical works such as *A Respectable Ditch* and the heritage work of Parks Canada, many of the TSW's consequences remain obscured. In the following chapters I aim to muddy the narrative and add nuance to the TSW's past. The shift to tourism happened during a time of strife and conflict that has not gone away. The TSW is not healed nor is its story finished.

CHAPTER ONE

The Drowned Lands

Between government and private funding, compensation claims, buying out property, paying workers, and countless other expenses, an enormous amount of money changed hands around the TSW. Ill feelings, suspicion, and bad behaviour because of this money were almost inevitable. In April 1910, an article in the *Peterborough Evening Review* revealed a story of corruption. Several landowners who had sought and received compensation claims accused a barrister and government valuator of "raking off" twenty percent of their allotted amount.[49]

The case never amounted to much and eventually fizzled out. A few days after the initial article another headline announced that "Clarry And Dickson Are Exonerated."[50] In the TSW's history, this story is largely inconsequential but it demonstrates something important for the cultural and social fabric of riparian communities. It indicates the palpable tension caused by the TSW's construction. The landowners who brought the case to court may have lost the legal battle, but their accusation revealed the stress they experienced. Farmers, landowners, hunters, and countless other individuals had to contend with new realities and legal systems because of the TSW's impact on the flow of water. The TSW's control of water levels for the greater good was supposed to improve the lives of riparian residents, but instead it caused tension and strife.

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[49] Witness Claim There Was A Percentage Arrangement," *Peterborough Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 2, 1910, A8. Internet Archive, archive.org.
[50] "Clarry And Dickson Are Exonerated," *Peterborough Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 7, 1910, A7.

Landowners represented a small portion of riparian residents who struggled with water levels due to the TSW. Throughout its history, the flow of water is something that all residents harnessed, fought with, and depended on. The movement of water facilitates the movement of people, goods, and the production of industry for which the TSW was built. This movement of water is best understood as energy. When planners and management worked to control the water, their goal was to harness energy. The historian Richard White explores this concept in *The Organic Machine*. The book's title alludes to the idea of a river as a machine that produces energy through the movement of water. The same concept applies to the TSW, which is made up of hundreds of bodies of water and pieces of infrastructure. Like the Columbia River in *The Organic Machine*, the TSW acts as a machine.

Water as energy is a continuous thread in the TSW's story both before and after its construction. White also emphasizes this continuity of energy: the construction of infrastructure is not the beginning of the river as a machine, nor is it the end of the river as a river. Rather, it is a continuation of the ways in which the river is used by humans and non-humans alike. Likewise, with the TSW, the construction of infrastructure represents neither the beginning of the waterway nor the end of the rivers and lakes it encompasses. The bodies of water changed, that is undeniable, but the flow of energy remained present. The construction of infrastructure is a human alteration to these pre-existing systems of energy.[51]

What is the alteration? The flow of water continued, but the way it does so was changed by human management that controlled and manipulated water levels. In many

[51] Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

regions of the watershed, especially upstream, water levels rose. This was not an unintended consequence of the TSW. Indeed, the raising of water levels made possible the hoped-for benefits and services of the TSW.

But the raising of water upstream meant that riparian residents felt the effects of construction unevenly. Those downstream would be promised flood protection and a steady flow of water. But in turn, those upstream, usually in less populated areas, were left at the mercy of those downstream. In dry months, urban areas drew water from lakes upstream and left them with little. In wet months, the dams closed and residents upstream contended with high waters and flooding. There was energy to be had, but not for everyone.

Raising water levels in the TSW's reservoirs can be understood as storing potential energy. Then when people needed energy, for example to carry log booms downstream, that potential energy was released and utilized. The same goal applied to the mills and hydroelectric generators along the TSW. Both require the release of energy from the stored potential energy in the reservoirs. This released energy becomes kinetic energy derived from the movement of water.[52] The higher the water levels in the reservoirs, the more potential energy stored, and the more control people have over the amount of kinetic energy used.

The storage of potential energy in these reservoirs is not just about dispensing kinetic energy when required downstream. It is also about holding back energy when it is too much for those downstream to handle. This is where the TSW's function as flood

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[52] Verena Winiwarter, Martin Schmid, and Gert Dressel, "Looking at Half a Millennium of Co-Existence: The Danube in Vienna as a Socio-Natural Site," *Water History* 5 (July 2013): 107 https://doi.org/10.1007/s12685-013-0079-x.

prevention comes into play as the reservoirs store excess energy and dispense it at manageable increments downstream. But saying the TSW prevented floods is not just inaccurate; it is false. In actuality, the TSW caused flooding.

As the TSW's construction and subsequent management flooded riparian residents, TSW and government officials dismissed the damages. They had successfully positioned the raised water levels as a necessary sacrifice for the sake of the TSW, which allowed them to flood with impunity. Residents whose land was flooded became victims in the face of progress. Planners and government officials stood by the greater good narrative which justified these consequences. Water levels had to be raised, and water flow had to be controlled for the good of the region. It was an unfair and unjust position to put residents in. Those adversely affected were pitted against the good of the collective. However, despite efforts to justify and dismiss the consequences, many residents used legal avenues to protect their rights with varying degrees of success.

A tense tone developed between government officials and the riparian residents who sought compensation. Government officials rarely wanted to pay out a full value. Meanwhile, many riparian residents lacked the resources for legal counsel or experience with the Canadian legal system. Residents often felt taken advantage of in these negotiations. Anishinaabeg communities were even worse off. As the TSW flooded reserves, it bolstered Canada's settler colonial efforts as communities were forced onto even smaller tracts of land. While farmers and residents struggled to navigate the legal system for compensation, Anishinaabeg communities held even less power as government officials utilized the reserve system to weasel their way out of paying compensation.

The usage of lakes upstream as reservoirs was purposeful. Planners of the TSW from the outset understood the lakes upstream would have their water levels raised to increase the holdings of potential energy. They were able to do so with the greater good narrative despite the immediate reality that riparian communities faced.

Reasons for High Water Levels

While the overarching reasons for the control and raising of water levels are clear, the specific motivations must be discussed. Many parties constantly debated the storage of potential energy in the reservoirs and the ways in which management dispensed it. The history of the TSW is one of constant debate; as parties came and went, the tension never left. The dams and locks of the TSW became a stage upon which the region's power struggles played out. Some parties wanted consistency throughout the seasons, others wanted high water levels at certain times, and others resented any human interference with these water levels and preferred the seasonal fluctuations that had always touched the waterway. But not all parties held equal weight, and throughout the TSW's history the most influential parties generally had the final say regarding water levels. This influence usually came in the form of financial, political, or popular support, and often an interplay between those three.

As discussed in the Introduction, the TSW had an erratic beginning. Throughout the early years between 1833 and approximately 1850, private individuals built the dams and locks that made up the initial TSW. However, the mid-nineteenth century saw the rise of the lumber barons in the region. These powerful individuals and their companies quickly bought up the pre-existing infrastructure and amassed a great deal of control. At this point

in the TSW's history, the lumber companies carried the most power in the region. Due to the influence their wealth and power offered, management kept water levels at the heights desired for lumber to pass through.

The desires of the lumber companies mirrored the seasonal fluctuations. After all, they had operated for many years before the construction of any such infrastructure. Lumber companies would send men into the woods during the winter months. During this time, the men would work deep in the forests, living in shanties close to their lumber stands. In the springtime, they took advantage of the spring melt and sent the logs down smaller rivers into the larger lakes downstream. Some of these lakes included Buckhorn and Stoney. From there, they towed logs into urban centres, primarily Lakefield, Lindsay, and Peterborough, to use their mills. Many considered the final drive along the Otonabee to Peterborough the zenith of the ordeal.[53] The whole region would be aware of this seasonal cycle, and it marked many people's lives. Often reporters broadcasted the first or last drives of the season along with the lumberjacks' progress.[54]

The seasonal cycle of the lumber drives represents a perfect example of the "machine" metaphor of the TSW and the ability of humans to utilize it. Nevertheless, the growing scale of the lumber drives required ever increasing human modification. As the lumber drives grew, so did the hydro resources required. By the late nineteenth century, the lumber drives had become so large that every year they flushed all the water out of the reservoirs. This left other parties such as cottagers, hunters, trappers, steamboat lines, and even hydro companies frustrated. Lumber companies only cared about having

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[53] Daniel Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway" (R61-2/7-358E: Parks Canada, 1980): 25 https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.873712/publication.html.
[54] "First Drive of the Season," *Peterborough Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), March 23, 1910.

enough water to complete their river drives which they finished by the mid-to-late summer. From that point on, most river drivers returned to the woods for more logging.[55] This left many parties frustrated with the low water levels in the late summer and fall. Oftentimes the river drivers drew so much water that rivers such as the Scugog ran dry and prevented steamboats from travelling their usual routes.[56] Tension and conflict in these years became the norm.

That lumber barons developed the most influence over the TSW's water levels was never an accident. The potential growth of the lumber industry was one of the primary reasons for the construction of the TSW. The industry drove the greater good narrative. This is visible within the planning documents of the waterway. Nicol Hugh Baird clearly stated this intention when he argued for the TSW's construction. When he listed the potential benefits, Baird said that having a waterway facilitated the transportation of lumber, and, in turn, helped cut down on the amount of dangerous river driving required. Calming the rivers avoided a heavy toll paid both in loss and damage to lumber as well as the loss of human life.[57] For this reason, the lakes became reservoirs. By containing the water upstream and then dispensing it in manageable amounts, logs could either float down calmer rivers or be towed along the canals. Instead of the immediate rush of energy, Baird wanted the water stored as potential energy and used when needed. But this was not yet a departure from the seasonal fluctuations. Baird wanted to tame the annual rhythm but not get rid of it.

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[55] Moses Marsden, "George Cobb Tape #9," interview with George Cobb, June 20, 1965, 3, in George Cobb Tapes, Trent University Library and Archives, Peterborough, Ontario.
[56] James T. Angus, *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway, 1833-1920*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 115-118.
[57] Nicol Hugh Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake* (Peterborough, 1836), 16, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/aeu.ark:/13960/t5p84zq0n.

A modernist attitude was apparent in his comments as he discussed the industrial potential of the region. Baird emphasized the quantitative and financial value of the land along the TSW. He even went so far as to claim that the property value of the land would "rise at least 100 per cent the moment these operations shall commence."[58] Throughout the report, Baird revealed this attitude as he continuously referenced the potential financial value of the land. He used terms like "fertile" and marveled at the untouched resources available.[59]

Baird's financial motivation comes across most clearly when he discusses the oak stands to be logged. There again he sees the TSW as a mechanism to reap the maximum value from the land as he argued that the waterway made logging more cost effective. Baird was referring to the reduced damage as well as the ability to easily transport labour and machinery upstream to access the oak stands. Baird claimed that if built, the TSW provided a chance to harvest oak and reap the financial rewards.[60] These comments from Baird reveal how deeply intertwined the lumber industry and the TSW were.

This is important to keep in mind as the high waters are discussed. Other industries, including hydroelectricity and steamboats, adapted and thrived on the TSW, but the lumber industry stands alone with the level of influence it once exerted, especially on high waters. While other industries may have risen around the TSW, it was the resource extracting lumber industry that initially transformed the landscape and environment. Because of the lumber industry, water became something to be controlled and harnessed.

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[58] Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake*, 16.
[59] Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake*, 8, 10.
[60] Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake*, 9.

The lumber industry did not disappear and continued strong into the early twentieth century. However, as tree stands diminished, the lumber barons began to lose their influence. Other invested parties, such as the steamboat lines, hydro companies, and cottagers became more powerful. While the power dynamics of the TSW shifted, many riverine communities remained at the whim of decisions made without their best interests in mind.

The high waters and flooding that occurred due to the lumber companies resulted in permanent damage. Unfortunately for riparian communities, the decrease in the lumber industry's influence did not make the issue significantly better. By 1906 the federal government stepped in to assume control over the TSW and improve the regulation of water flow.[61] Growing hopes of the TSW's hydroelectric potential motivated this power grab.[62] The move was welcomed by most industries as it consolidated control of the watershed and stabilized water management after decades of frustration and conflict among the major powers.[63]

Cottagers, resort owners, hydro companies, and steamboat lines always resented the enormous shifts in water levels when the lumber companies controlled the TSW. With the lumber companies' influence waning and the government assuming control, many of these invested parties lobbied for more influence. Advocacy groups formed to defend their own interests. One example is the Water Conservation Authority who upon hearing that the federal government was taking over, formed a committee to lobby for smaller

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[61] Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway," 18.
[62] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 142.
[63] "Water Supply for the Trent Valley Canal," *Peterborough Daily Examiner* (Peterborough, Ontario), September 7, 1904, in Box 38, Folder 5, Pammett Collection, Peterborough Museum and Archives, Peterborough, Ontario.

seasonal fluctuations. A need for more consistent navigational capabilities spurred this group.[64]

The year 1906 witnessed a reshuffling of the TSW's power structures. But this shift in power was not inherently good news for many of the riverine communities upstream. While the government tempered the rapid fluctuations, the problems of high water remained. On average water levels were still higher than before, and this remained one of the greatest challenges of the TSW for these communities. Riparian residents continued to struggle with water levels despite industries' newfound satisfaction. The tension after the lumber companies lost their influence did not improve; it only shifted.

Flooding and Culture

The idea of flooding as a natural disaster is a human construct that entails waters rising to above their regular levels and flowing over the riverbanks, filling up a large, usually dry area with water. Flooding is a natural part of a river's seasonal fluctuations. In Ontario, most flooding happens in the spring as snowmelt fills up watersheds. After humans settled in the floodplain, the regular fluctuations often became a point of tension between people and their environment, and one they wanted to control. It is this conflict that led to a new nexus of interaction between people and their environment.

The geographer Kenneth Hewitt posits that calling a flood a natural disaster implies a conflict between humans and their environment and isolates it from the sphere of human activity. Not only is it isolated but when it does interact with the human sphere it is disruptive and damaging. These events are generally considered unpredictable in nature

[64] Correspondence from R.R. Hall to W.T.C. Boyd, September 8, 1904, copy in Box 38, Folder 5, Pammett Collection.

and thus shift blame away from humans. People still have a role to play, only now it is one of responses and preparations. It is now on humans to prepare accordingly.[65] With this language humans and their environment are now at odds with one another. On one hand are communities with an orderly way of life, and on the other is the disruptive environment with its natural disasters.

The consequence of this understanding has real world ramifications. The historian Ted Steinberg demonstrates that this interpretation often allows government officials to abdicate responsibility for the consequences of a natural disaster and to continue as if nothing had ever happened. When an event is positioned as a natural disaster, it provides a degree of helplessness that is almost comforting. What can be done in the face of nature's force?[66] This attitude then allows government officials to avoid responsibility for nature's consequences. It even allows organizations a haphazard way of dealing with the damage, especially when helping marginalized communities.[67] In essence, government officials take advantage of the tension developed between people and their environment. The enemy becomes nature not the government that failed to protect its citizens.

This tension is not inevitable and can either develop or be avoided through human intervention. In many places, humans adapted to the seasonal fluctuations, embracing them and having positive interactions with their environment. The historian Stephen Castonguay shows how this was the case in the small city of Sherbrooke in the Eastern

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[65] Kenneth Hewitt, "The Idea of a Calamity in a Technocratic Age," in *Interpretations of Calamity: From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, ed. Kenneth Hewitt (Winchester, MA.: Allan & Unwin Inc, 1983), 12-15.
[66] Theodore Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25-46.
[67] Steinberg, *Acts of God,* 173-196.

Townships of Quebec.[68] Located at the confluence of the Magog and St. Francois Rivers, Sherbrooke offers a case study of how residents adapted to annual floods. Those living in the floodplain became accustomed to the flooding. Each spring, they moved furniture to the top floor, used boats to get around, and approached the annual high waters with good humour. However, as Castonguay shows, the construction of flood prevention infrastructure disrupted this relationship residents had forged with water. The new infrastructure succeeded in reducing the number of floods. But, consequently the floods intensified and became more devastating. Residents in the floodplain, after being promised the floods would be stopped, no longer felt prepared when they came. As a result of this lack of preparation, the damages worsened, and deaths became more common.

This happened in 1909 when a series of floods hit southern Ontario. The *Peterborough Daily Examiner* reported dams breaking in Port Hope and St. Thomas.[69] While not part of the TSW, this front page story reflected the tension riparian residents who now depended on the TSW would have felt. While the residents had once approached the floods with humour and optimism, they now felt fear and anger. This anger was directed at flood management for failing them and towards the environment for the damage it had caused. Because of this cultural shift, the floods were now seen as natural catastrophes that should not happen.[70]

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[68] Stéphane Castonguay, "The Production of Flood as Natural Catastrophe: Extreme Events and the Construction of Vulnerability in the Drainage Basin of the St. Francis River (Quebec), Mid-Nineteenth to Mid-Twentieth Century," *Environmental History* 12 (October 2007): 820-44.
[69] "Lives Endangered In Bad Floods," *Peterborough Daily Examiner* (Peterborough, Ontario), February 25, 1909, A1. Internet Archive, archive.org.
[70] Castonguay, "The Production of Flood as Natural Catastrophe," 822-837.

Like Sherbrooke, early on the TSW's riparian communities did not view the annual high waters as natural disasters. For riverine inhabitants of the TSW, flooding was a way of life as it was along many of Canada's rivers. Newspapers reported the annual spring floods with a tone of banality, treated as simply another part of the weather. The logging industry, as discussed earlier, adapted to the spring high waters. The annual floods were not only not a catastrophe, but the absence of a spring thaw would have constituted a disaster itself. Without spring runoff, lumber companies would be unable to funnel their logs downstream. Other groups, aside from humans and industries, also became well adjusted, even dependant on the annual fluctuations. Fish and smaller mammals such as muskrats moved around freely in the warmer months before finding spots deep enough to stay through the fall and winter.[71] The spring freshets flooded their homes with fresh water, freeing them. Like the inhabitants of Sherbrooke, these communities, both human and non-human, adapted to the seasonal fluctuations of water and evolved their lifeways around them. The seasonal water levels became a nexus of interaction between people and their environment, but not a bad one.

However, human interference with the waterway damaged these relationships, much the same way it did in Sherbrooke. As floodplains downstream became increasingly populated, the TSW did protect these new urban areas from the seasonal floods. However, the larger, infrequent floods devastated other regions of the watershed.

The TSW caused non-seasonal flooding immediately after pieces of infrastructure were constructed. There is a tendency to associate flooding with the natural world, but

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[71] Stan Nichols, "Transcript #14," interview with Daniel Francis, August 21, 1979, 37-38, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection, Trent University Library and Archives, Peterborough Ontario.; Jack Fulton, "Transcript #20," interview with Daniel Francis, September 11, 1979, 35-42, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.

this overshadows floods that stem from human intervention. In the case of the TSW, while urban communities became protected from floods, rural communities experienced even worse flooding. The flood mitigation that the TSW promised was not designed for everyone.

The construction of the TSW upended the stability of seasonal patterns. Human and non-human residents had been unbothered by spring freshets, but the sweeping effects of the waterway became a different story. The new TSW infrastructure created tension between humans and their environment as well as between communities and TSW management. Feelings of fear and angst coloured reports of the floods. Newspapers would often report on the growing 'excitement' of dams failing or breaking under the pressure of high water levels.[72] When the water levels had once been outside of people's control, the resulting attitude was one of resignation. However, now that someone controlled the water levels, riverine inhabitants had someone to direct their anger towards, and rightfully so in many cases. Someone had to be held responsible.

The adverse effects impacted communities unequally. If floods are understood as a cultural product based on perception, it is paramount to address conflicting views and power relations. Different groups based on socioeconomic status, race, and other factors experienced flooding very differently. The TSW's riverine communities are not a homogeneous group. Generalizing them would risk obscuring important experiences and events that communities outside urban cores underwent.

As Hewitt and Steinberg demonstrate, categorizing floods as natural disasters obscures the human element and isolates them from the human sphere. But natural

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[72] "Local Brevities," *Morning Times* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 20, 1904, A6. Internet Archive, archive.org.

disasters are cultural phenomena, they are our way of understanding these events. Castonguay's interpretation of natural catastrophes as cultural phenomena understands them as the product of social structures.[73] This means that if natural disasters are partly the product of social structures which disenfranchise certain communities, this will be reflected in the consequences of natural catastrophes themselves. Herein lies the link between natural disasters and environmental injustice.

The concept of environmental injustice means that marginalized communities experience the adverse effects of environmental change more deeply than other communities. In the context of the TSW's role in settler colonialism, the consequences for Anishinaabeg communities are twofold. On one hand, Anishinaabeg communities experience the same TSW induced violence as settler communities. On the other hand, they experience a unique form of violence, one induced by the TSW as a part of the larger settler colonialism structure. When settler colonial activities, such as building a dam, cause a natural disaster, the effects on non-humans who Anishinaabeg communities feel deep kinship and responsibility to is a slow and deep form of violence.[74]

Both concepts are visible within the TSW. Consistently, as will be shown, marginalized communities felt the effects of the new construction far worse than did other communities. This is due to inherent factors such as poorer communities being more vulnerable, but also due to the colonial process of the TSW. Intertwined with colonialism, the TSW was built to benefit settlers, and not only interfered with Anishinaabeg communities' connection to the land but also worsened their quality of

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[73] Castonguay, "The Production of Flood as Natural Catastrophe," 821.
[74] Kyle Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society* 9 (September 2018): 125–44. https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109.

living. This same colonial system made achieving compensation for flooding difficult for these communities. The TSW as a function of empire also affected rural communities outside the urban cores. TSW management did not prioritize these communities as they felt that the changes were necessary for the benefit of towns like Peterborough and Lindsay, and for industries.

Those Whose Land Was Flooded

The TSW flooded many communities within the watershed for several reasons. But what happened to those whose land was flooded? Many residents held the government responsible for the high waters and fought for compensation for the damages and land lost. But the experience of those seeking compensation was not uniform.

For the Anishinaabeg communities along the TSW, primarily Hiawatha and Curve Lake First Nations, seeking compensation became a difficult process. Unlike other parties, who will be discussed, these Anishinaabeg communities were unable to utilize the legal system in a fair manner. This is due to the colonial system in which the TSW was very much a part and product of. The issue was never that government officials or waterway management did not realize the effects on Anishinaabeg communities. The issue was that they considered these communities' sacrifices necessary expenditures in the face of progress and the greater good.

The federal government found ways to avoid paying Anishinaabeg communities the damages they owed them. When Curve Lake First Nation sought compensation for flooded land, the government sought to dismiss the settlement. To avoid accountability, government officials cited some of the colonial injustices Curve Lake endured during the

nineteenth century. In 1818, the first land cession treaty, Treaty 20, was signed, and the British government set aside land for the eventual creation of Curve Lake First Nation (then Mud Lake) and Hiawatha First Nation.[75] Then in 1838, five years after the beginning of construction on the TSW and twenty years after their land was set aside, the government officially created the reserves. However, in the case of Curve Lake First Nation, they did not own the land on which they lived yet. Instead, in 1837, as part of the ongoing colonial project, the land that was set aside for them was given to the New England Company, a religious mission. The New England Company held the reserve land until 1898, when they transferred it to the Department of Indian Affairs.[76] So it was only decades after Curve Lake had the land set aside for them that community members became official residents of their own land.

The government used this history to argue that they did not owe Curve Lake any damages. In a letter addressed to Mr. Scott of the Department of Indian Affairs, L. Bray, a surveyor, explained this history of land ownership over the reserve. Bray first pointed out how the land had been granted to the New England Company in 1837, not to Curve Lake First Nation. He then went further and argued that in 1898 the land still did not belong to the Anishinaabeg. Bray claimed that the land was held by the Department of Indian Affairs in a trust for the Curve Lake Band; it was only in May 1900 that the government officially granted permission for the Band to live on the reserve. Because the

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[75] J. R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 101-103; "Provisional Agreement with the Rice Lake Chiefs for the Surrender of 1,951,000 Acres of Land," November 5, 1818, in Treaties, Surrenders and Agreements, Library and Archives Canada.

[76] Madeline Whetung, "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law: Nishnaabeg Relational Politics Along the Trent Severn Waterway," *Global Environmental Politics* 19 (August 2019): 23, https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00513.

relevant flooding occurred in 1837, Bray argued the government owed no damages as the land did not belong to Curve Lake First Nation at the time of flooding.[77] Bray passed the issue along to A.W. Williams, a law clerk, who doubled down on Bray's findings. Williams agreed with Bray that Curve Lake First Nation had no legal basis because of the timeline in which they acquired the land. Williams cited a previous case, *Olmstead vs the King 53 S.C.R. 450* to back up his and Bray's argument.[78]

The case that Williams cited was from June 19, 1916, regarding the Rideau Canal. Property owners along the Rideau waterway claimed that when canal workers raised the water higher than the agreed upon level, they flooded their land. The Supreme Court dismissed their case for two reasons.

The first reason was that the owners purchased the land in 1904, but the initial flooding had occurred in 1890. The property owners purchased the land with the intention of recovering financial renumeration for the land lost in 1890. This was something that the government wanted to discourage. The government argued that the right to sue the Crown could not be transferred between individuals. In addition, they argued that the petition for compensation had to be done within six months of the damages. This was obviously impossible in the case of the Rideau Canal damages, with property purchased over ten years after the damages occurred.[79]

The second reason cited for dismissing the claims was that as a public work, the Rideau Canal had a special allowance to cause some damages. When considering the

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[77] Correspondence from L. Bray (surveyor) to Mr. Scott of The Department of Indian Affairs. February 7, 1917, copy in Box 5, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.
[78] Correspondence from L. Bray A.S. Williams to Mr. Scott of The Department of Indian Affairs. February 16, 1917, copy in Box 5, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.
[79] Olmstead v. The King 53 S.C.R. 450, (Supreme Court of Canada) June 19, 1916, https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/scc/doc/1916/1916canlii595/1916canlii595.html

greater good the canal offered, damages from its construction or management did not hold any weight.[80] Like the TSW, the Rideau Canal was propped up by a greater good narrative.

However, it was unjust for the Canadian government to use the Olmstead case as a precedent for dismissing Curve Lake's claims, because both the history and context were completely different. The land that Curve Lake First Nation claimed compensation for was set aside in 1817 for their use, before any flooding occurred. For this land to then be transferred to the New England Company, a religious mission, was already a colonial injustice. So, when government officials argued that Curve Lake did not officially own the land at the time of flooding, they built on and used the previous colonial injustices. The case was then dormant for almost a century until 1999 when litigation became active again.[81] The violence of the TSW was not simply felt at the time of construction.[82]

But the Curve Lake community did not passively accept the 1917 decision. While they did not have legal frameworks available to them, individuals such as Chief Joe Whetung found methods that forced the government to listen. Chief Whetung used the Williams Treaty Commission in 1923 to voice his displeasure at the government's lack of action concerning the lost land. Chief Whetung responded to commissioners questioning the community's need to hunt and trap on surrounding land. He explained to commissioners that the high waters from the TSW drowned approximately six hundred acres of marshland. This loss was devastating to the community as marshland was used

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[80] Olmstead v. The King 53 S.C.R. 450, (Supreme Court of Canada).
[81] Canada. Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. *Status Report on Specific Claims as of* 2024/06/21.
[82] As shown by scholars Madeline Whetung and Ben Kapron, these damages have continued into the present.

for hunting and trapping and provided both a source of food and income. Unfortunately, A.S. Williams, the chair of the commission, cared little for Chief Whetung's explanations. After acknowledging Chief Whetung's comments, he moved the topic along.[83] While Curve Lake First Nation was not passive, as they filed legal complaints and challenged official decisions, ultimately little was done to remedy the situation.

Curve Lake First Nation's experience with flooding was unique to their position as Anishinaabeg people along the TSW. The government granted other claimants' compensation, albeit not without a fight, thanks to their position as settlers. However, the inherent colonial nature of the legal system meant that the government did not grant Curve Lake compensation the same way they had done for other communities. If the government had granted the land to settlers in 1817, they would not have transferred the land to a religious mission for decades, as had happened to Curve Lake. The colonial system that allowed this transfer of land made it nearly impossible for Curve Lake to claim damages. The violence and damage of the TSW built upon one another and affected the Curve Lake community for generations.

In some cases, though, Anishinaabeg communities did manage to achieve some compensation. Hiawatha First Nation successfully fought for compensation when Rice Lake rose and flooded the surrounding land. The government granted them eight dollars per acre. However even then, the amount awarded was two dollars less than the amount recommended by the local Indian Agent, who advised ten dollars per acre. The eight dollars per acre amount was given because no farmer on Rice Lake had gotten more than

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[83] Indian Affairs, "Bound Volume Of Testimony Given To A Commission, Chaired By A.S. Williams, Investigating Claims, By The Chippewas & Mississaugas Of Ontario, To Compensation For Land Not Surrendered By The Robinson Treaty Of 1850," 1923, Library and Archives Canada, 213-16.

that amount. So, officials believed that offering them the same amount as the farmers had received was generous enough.[84]

But still even in this story of success, Hiawatha First Nation was forced to navigate the system through their Indian Agent to find compensation. In addition, they did not receive compensation for other forms of damage experienced. Manoomin, a staple crop for the Anishinaabeg which grows in shallow water, is vulnerable to rising water levels. This will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter, but Hiawatha's attempts for compensation are relevant here. Hiawatha First Nation had their manoomin stands drowned by the dam built downstream. They filed a complaint, which was recognized by the Department of Indian Affairs but ultimately ignored. No compensation came of this issue.[85] While land was something to be compensated in the eyes of the government, a staple crop for the Anishinaabeg was not.

The fact that farmers achieved compensation for drowned crops while Hiawatha First Nation did not receive compensation for manoomin crops is evidence of the disregard with which the government perceived Indigenous foodways. As will be discussed later, this is also seen with the effects of the TSW on biodiversity.

For non-Indigenous claimants, seeking compensation was easier but still varied. When a larger, more populated area sought compensation, the process was more straightforward. In 1908, the Township of Emily requested compensation for a road on the west side of Chemong Lake. The road was flooded after the dam at Buckhorn raised

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[84] Correspondence between D. McLean and L.K. Jones, November 11, 1910, copy in Box 5, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.

[85] Department of Indian Affairs, "Mud & Rice Lake Agency - Complaint From The Rice Lake Band That The Dam At The Hastings On The Tent River Has Raised The Water Level & Destroyed The Rice Crop," 1884, RG10, Volume 2254, File 50,043, Library and Archives Canada.

waters in 1906 and 1907.[86] Deliberation took several years, and the Township of Emily hired a legal team based out of Lindsay, Ontario. After being contacted, the Department of Railways & Canals hired their own valuator to estimate the damage done, which was standard practice at the time. The Township of Emily had declared that the damages amounted to $3,000.00. Jas Dickson, the valuator, came back more than two years later with an estimate of $1,975.00.[87] The Township of Emily accepted the offer but was not thrilled, reiterating that they believed they were owed "the amount of $ 3,000.00, but in order to effect a settlement we hereby offer and agree with the Minister of Railways & Canals to accept the sum of Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-five Dollars in full settlement of all claims for damages to the roads herein mentioned."[88] The tone of the letter makes it clear that the landowners had simply had enough and wished to be done with the legal battle. The feeling of being hurried into settlements less than what claimants hoped for was an all too common theme.

The Municipal Corporation of the Township of Emily had the resources and hired lawyers to negotiate the settlement for them. While this was a strength of the collective, they still had weaknesses as individual landowners. Dickson had broken up the compensation by landowner, and each landowner finally received a cheque. Each landowner had to get by without compensation for over two years. This could have been the reason that the group settled for Dickson's valuation despite being less than two thirds of the amount they had requested.

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[86] Correspondence from R.J. MacLaughlin to M.J. Butler, Nov 30, 1908, copy in Box 38, Folder 7, Pammett Collection.
[87] Correspondence from J.H. McClellan to D.K. Jones, April 7, 1911, copy in Box 38, Folder 7, Pammett Collection.
[88] Settlement Acceptance from the Municipal Corporation of the Township of Emily, April 4, 1911, copy in Box 38, Folder 7, Pammett Collection.

But not all of those who requested compensation benefitted from the type of collective strength a Municipal Corporation offered. Many farmers and rural property owners along the TSW were disadvantaged by their isolation. For many of these property owners, the high waters that affected them did not touch many people, such as in the case of the road in the Township of Emily. This meant that achieving compensation could be difficult for them. Often, they lacked the legal resources a wealthier party had and the attention a larger population could draw. There was a strong sense among many farmers and poorer property owners who had been affected by the rising waters that the government took advantage of them. When these property owners reached out to receive compensation, the government attempted to negotiate for smaller settlements. Property owners felt slighted by this attitude, feeling that the government had attempted to take advantage of their lack of legal expertise.

Tension is visible across most cases for compensation. But the sentiment of being hoodwinked is most apparent in cases of isolated landowners. In the conflict between landowners on Pigeon Lake and government officials this sentiment is observable. In 1913, Annie and Richard Davis filed for damages due to changes made to the Buckhorn Dam. In their claim, they said that the water levels raised in Pigeon Lake during the floods had ruined eighteen and a half acres of land used for oats, hay, and pasture, as well as rows of trees ruined, and lumber lost. It was not the first time that the Davises had sought compensation. After an initial round of floods in 1909, Annie Davis executed a Release that in addition for damages being paid, the Crown was required to maintain the water levels at nine and three quarters feet, the highest level of 1908 without flooding. Fred Wilkins, the valuator hired by the government for this case, admitted that the water

levels rose higher than the agreed level in 1909, 1912, and 1913.[89] The Davises ended up settling for $500.00 for the damages of all three floods, based on the recommendation of Wilkins.[90]

However, in another letter, from a law firm the Davises had hired, it became clear that they had not felt comfortable with the way in which Wilkins and the exchequer court had processed their claim, nor the amount of $500.00. Once they had accepted the amount things moved much faster than the Davises had anticipated. The Davises believed that they would have another chance to contest the claim, and this would be a multi-step process. Instead, Wilkins and the exchequer court filed the claim without the Davises' understanding. The Davises grew desperate and hired the law firm Wood & Wearing, whose attorney wrote to the Department of Railways and Canals to explain the situation:

> We have no intention of contesting the Release but as we said in our letter to the Deputy Minister of Justice we consider it absolutely unfair that these people should be taken advantage of by the Government. They are farmers and of course are not experienced in business matters and at the time the Release was executed by them they were afraid that unless they did so they would run a danger of losing the money altogether. The writer was out of the city at the time and the Release was executed by them from fear of not getting any money at all.[91]

The tone of the letter is scathing. Wood & Wearing accused the government of shortchanging the Davises and attempting to avoid paying them what they were owed. By using language such as 'taking advantage of' Wood & Wearing declared that the government was not simply negligent but aware of the Davises' lack of expertise and

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[89] Correspondence from Fred W. Wilkins to R.H. Fraser, Nov 6, 1913, copy in Box 6, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.
[90] Tentative Damage Claim Agreement for Annie & Richard Davis March 17, 1913, copy in Box 6, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.
[91] Correspondence from Wood & Wearing Barristers to A.W. Campbell Deputy Minister of Railways & Canals, April 27, 1915, copy in Box 6, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.

preyed upon them to save the Crown money. The situation also parallels the earlier case of the Township of Emily. In both cases, the claimants seem to have settled for an amount they believed to be insufficient. The Davises' reason is clear: they needed the money and feared losing what little they had been offered. It is difficult to determine the specific property owners in the Emily case, but it would be an educated guess that some of these property owners settled for the amount offered due to similar financial pressures.

The Davis case was not an isolated incident. Property owners often felt rushed into settlements lower than they believed they deserved. The case of Sidney H. Cluxton, a landowner from Harvey Township on Pigeon Lake offers another example. In 1913, Cluxton claimed that the construction of the Buckhorn dam twenty five years previous had repeatedly damaged his land due to improper management of water levels. The damage peaked in the year 1912, when Pigeon Lake was at its highest level in living memory. The damage was undeniable, owing to the unstable sandy ground on which Cluxton's lakefront property rested. Trees were uprooted and washed away, debris was everywhere, and two acres of a sandy park on the shoreline disappeared under the waves. The damage was estimated at $700.00 and Cluxton claimed the value of his property dropped by $1,000.00. However, after negotiations he only asked for $600.00. Cluxton was anxious, and by making the deal for $600.00, he believed he could receive the much needed resources to mitigate future damages.[92] Cluxton was unable to wait much longer and needed to prepare for the future.

Cluxton and the Davises both felt pressured to accept lighter deals than they wanted. In communication with his superintendent, L.K. Jones understood Cluxton was

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[92] Correspondence from L.K. Jones to J.H. McClellan, February 8, 1913, copy in Box 6, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.

taking a smaller amount because he felt financial stress to get the deal done. The Davises' lawyers' accusation towards the Department of Railways and Canals echoed the same issues. Financially strapped individuals who needed compensation as soon as possible had to settle for inadequate deals. Unable to wait out a lengthy legal battle and without expertise, the government took advantage of these individuals.

A Pain in the Side of the Government

But while some property owners felt isolated and pressured, there were many who found support. As seen with the case of the Township of Emily, being part of a larger group offered some benefits. Knowing this, affected property owners organized into collectives to strengthen themselves. For instance, the Drowned Lands Association is a case of this collective action that resisted the government's efforts to undercut property owners. The dates of existence of the Drowned Lands Association are unclear; however, it is safe to say they existed sometime between the late 1800s and early 1900s. The first mention of the Drowned Lands Association comes from a visit the association made to Ottawa to present their cases to legislature in 1900. This was reported in a small article from March 2, 1900, in the *Lindsay Weekly Post*. The article described the drowned lands committee arriving in Ottawa and meeting with the Minister of Public Works as well as several local MPs. The article claimed that the committee was shown around and treated well by their hosts.[93] There are two related conclusions from this article. While this was on page seven of the newspaper and tucked away in the Local Brevities section, the deputation garnered enough influence that their visit to Ottawa to meet with the Minister

[93] "Local Brevities," *Weekly Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), March 2, 1900, A7. news.ourontario.ca.

of Public Works made the newspaper. However, the lack of prominence in the newspaper reiterates the urban-rural divide. This was a topic that was less important to those in Lindsay. But the mere fact that it was reported, and that the deputation had a visit, affirms that the Association held some degree of importance.

There is further evidence that the Association's deputation attached importance to those outside town. In another article several days later on March 26, 1900, in the *Peterborough Daily Review*, we learn of a meeting held to discuss the deputation's visit.

> "A meeting of the farmers owning drowned lands along the Otonabee was held in the Council chamber on Saturday afternoon. There was a large attendance. The chief business was the settling up of matters in connection with the excursion recently made. The farmers are keeping the care well before the notice of the Government."[94]

The article is buried on page four within a Local Brevities section. Its placement suggests that it might not be important to those within the city of Peterborough. However, the content references that the meeting was very important for the farmers along the Otonabee. The large size of the meeting suggests that many farmers felt invested in the outcome of the Deputation's visit to Ottawa. In addition, the article's author emphasized the farmers' insistence in keeping the government's attention. This suggests that the meeting was lively, and the farmers fought hard for their compensation. The community clearly felt engaged with the flooding and subsequent compensation claims. As with other interactions between affected residents and the government, tension continued to develop between the association and government officials.

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[94] "Local Brevities," *Peterborough Daily Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), March 26, 1900, A4. Internet Archive, archive.org

Privately, government officials considered the Association a nuisance. In a letter regarding a separate dispute over the valuation of another property damaged by the raising waters, the topic of the Drowned Lands Association arose. The author L.K. Jones mentions that the property had once been owned by the late W.J. Hall. Jones brings this up as it was Hall who had once led the Drowned Lands Association. Jones posits that because of Hall's influence, despite being deceased, the present landowner fought for more money than their property was valued at. Jones describes Hall as

> for years… the Chief agitator with respect to the matter of receiving compensation from the Government for damage in this connection. Mr. Hall was for years secretary of the Drowned Lands Association, which had for its object the pressing of the claims of the farmers in this respect upon the Government. It was owing to the fact that Mr. Hall's farm was damaged to perhaps a greater degree than any other farm along the Otonabee River, that prompted him to take such an active interest in the matter of obtaining for himself and others, redress from the Government in connection with the damage done to their respective properties, by reason of the construction of the dam at Hastings, and the consequent raising of the waters of the Trent Canal.[95]

The language in this letter makes several things clear. Firstly, they considered Hall a pain in the side of the government. Describing him as an agitator parallels the newspaper articles description of the farmers' persistence in maintaining the attention of the government. Jones also mentioned that Hall became an agitator because of the damage on his land, suggesting that the effects of the TSW could be so detrimental as to radicalise someone. Additionally, the letter reiterated that government officials knew of the Drowned Lands Association. The Association did not have just one meeting in Ottawa before being forgotten about. The negative light in which they discussed Hall is further evidence of the underlying tension the TSW's construction caused.

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[95] Correspondence from J.H. McClellan to L.K. Jones, April 5, 1909, copy in Box 6, Folder 9, Alan Bruger Fonds 21-001.

It is difficult to assess the impact that the Drowned Lands Association had. Hundreds of claims were made during that period, and there is no way to quantify the support the Association gave property owners during the negotiation process. However, knowing that officials perceived Hall as a nuisance, and that the Association held enough sway to be hosted in Ottawa, suggests that they held a degree of influence both locally and federally.

The Port Hope Debate

Hall's negative perception was not unique to him or the Drowned Lands Association. Nor did this tension exist simply between claimants and government officials. The tension between those seeking compensation and those who viewed them as a danger to the greater good of the TSW also seeped into the public discourse. While some newspaper articles such as the ones discussed earlier portrayed the Drowned Lands members in a positive or at least neutral light, this was not universal.

One such instance where this tension appeared in the public sphere happened in the discourse during the Port Hope debate. In the early 1900s, parts of the TSW remained unfinished. One of these portions was the connection between Rice Lake and Lake Ontario. This connection became a point of fierce debate when it came time to complete the TSW. The original plans for the route laid out by Baird suggested the waterway continue into Lake Ontario from the east side of Rice Lake, through Trenton and the Bay of Quinte to build along a pre-existing railway route.[96] Baird's initial proposal continued to be the prevailing plan across most official proposals and reports, such as Samuel

[96] Baird. *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake*, 14.

Keefer's Report for the Board of Works dated to 1846. While Keefer debated the numbers and other parts of the route, he continued with the assertion that the TSW should connect to Lake Ontario through the Bay of Quinte. Keefer's report was republished in 1882, showing a consistent desire to open the route through the Bay of Quinte.[97]

However, as the nineteenth century drew to an end, noise from Port Hope started to rise. Port Hope is a town about forty kilometres west of the Bay of Quinte. While Port Hope is closer to Rice Lake than the Bay of Quinte, it had never been considered for the TSW owing to hilly terrain in the way. Several prominent residents of Port Hope began to argue that the TSW should open into Lake Ontario through their port.[98] The economic motivation itself is obvious. The TSW – Lake Ontario connection would have brought Port Hope a flood of business and relevance.

As the Port Hope debate raged on, it revealed the narrative beginning to congeal around the TSW. This narrative is one that positions the TSW as necessary for the greater good. The groups that advocated for the Port Hope route also pushed for the TSW's completion. After so many years of construction dragging on, many communities simply wanted the TSW finished. This desire was intertwined with the growing tension and conflict.

As the debate continued, proponents for both Port Hope and the Bay of Quinte filled newspapers with their respective arguments. In April 1904, the V.P. of the Port Hope association, J.F. Clark, was reported to have engaged in a theory concerning men pushing for the Trenton route as part of a larger case of fraud. Clark said "Peterborough

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[97] Samuel Keefer and James Lyon, *Report on opening out navigation from Rice Lake to Bay of Quinte* (Peterborough, 1882), https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.92766.
[98] "President Powers Speaks," *Morning Times* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 21, 1904, A1.

men have purchased Trent Valley lands and water powers in the hope of securing heavy damages when the canal floods these lands or interferes with their flow of water, hence their strong advocacy of the Trenton route against what they know to be the best interests of the country and their own district."[99] On the surface, Clark accused those pushing for the Trenton route of doing so for their own personal gain. But, more fundamentally, Clark discredited those whose land the TSW flooded. To Clark they were not victims; he considered them dishonest people standing in the way of progress.

Clark was not the only one who saw opponents of the TSW as obstacles to progress. In public discourse those who opposed construction became opponents to the common good. In newspaper articles such as "Why So Caustic?" the author opened with "any writer attacking the Georgian Bay canal scheme should apologise" and that people who lived along the waterway are "hungering for their chance."[100] This reiterated the notion that those opposing the construction were selfish and undermined the common good.

Flooding By Design

The TSW's construction drowned the lands of communities and property owners along its shore. This was not an accident but rather by design. For the TSW to function as a waterway, it created reservoirs upstream as a method of storing water and potential energy. But this meant that for the TSW to benefit urban areas, less populated regions along the reservoirs bore the brunt of the environmental changes.

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[99] "Port Hope Canal Route," *Morning Times* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 21, 1904, A1.
[100] "Why So Caustic?," *Peterborough Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), June 19, 1909, A2.

The TSW was not constructed in a vacuum. It made up part of an ongoing colonial project that touched almost every aspect of life, especially the environment. It was these pre-existing structures and systems which meant that when the TSW caused floods, it hurt Anishinaabeg and rural communities the most.

Anishinaabeg communities did not have legal frameworks to seek compensation available to them in the same way that many settlers had. This was a result of their position as Indigenous Peoples in Canada. And for many settlers, the process was still not straightforward. The government did not negotiate with these claimants in an equitable way, instead saving money when claimants lacked the resources for a lengthy legal battle.

This tension was exacerbated by an underlying attitude that viewed the TSW as a public good. As a result, many people perceived owners of drowned land not as victims but as obstacles of progress. This was not unique to the TSW. As seen in the Olmstead case cited by government officials, waterways and their management held special privileges to harm private individuals as a function of a public work. But who was really benefitting?

The drowned lands represented just one effect of the TSW on these communities. As expected, this interference and transformation of the waterway had complex and wide-ranging consequences. The upheaval of this system disrupted the ecosystems and affected non-human actors as well. As will be seen, humans and their environment are intertwined, and riverine communities felt the ramifications of these changes for non-human actors as well.

CHAPTER TWO

Carp in the Canals and No More Manoomin

In late June 1935, an article appeared on the front page of the *Lindsay Daily Post* that highlighted a degree of panic over invasive carp in the TSW. Titled "Carp Jumping Falls at Local Locks," the article described hundreds of fish taking advantage of unusually high waters to jump the locks and make their way into Lake Scugog. As local communities panicked, fishermen were "racking their brains trying to figure out some method to eliminating this menace…"[101] The worry and anxiety around carp were emblematic of the broader issues that riparian communities faced.

As residents of the TSW grappled with the presence of new infrastructure, the natural world underwent enormous transformations. Both humans and non-humans lived a delicate balance in the TSW's watershed. While changes are natural, the TSW's construction altered its environment to an unprecedented degree. Some species died, some thrived, and others entered the ecosystem for the first time. Humans and non-humans continued to weave old and new relationships, both interdependent and confrontational. Like other natural disasters these TSW-induced ecological stresses reflected the culture of the time, and as with other natural disasters each community experienced it differently. The human induced ecological changes were complex. The newfound stresses included native species disappearing, invasive species entering, a

[101] "Carp Jumping Falls at Local Locks," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), June 28, 1935, A1. Internet Archive by the Lindsay Daily Post, archive.org.

lessening diversity of species, and habitat destruction.[102] All of these consequences flowed out of the TSW's construction. This chapter highlights several of these issues as well as communities' responses to them. It is now scientific consensus that building freshwater infrastructure has enormous environmental consequences for a watershed. These include many of the ecological stresses induced by the TSW, including habitat destruction, allowing invasive species, access to new bodies of water, and the decline of native species, both flora and fauna.[103] For riparian residents in the early twentieth century, this was unknown territory and they struggled to figure out what was going on. The loss and arrival of non-humans was an especially important change. Carp and walleye were both newcomers but they sparked vastly different reactions. Meanwhile the decline and sometimes complete loss of salmon, eels, manoomin, muskrats, and lake herring upset many residents. As with other natural disasters, these ecological changes were heavily shaped by the settler colonial context in which the TSW was built. The lack of consultation with Anishinaabeg communities and persistent settler colonial attitude only worsened the problem.

River Infrastructure and Environmental Changes

The impact of dams and hydraulic infrastructures on their environments is well documented. Pieces of infrastructure, such as those that make up the TSW, create vast areas of still water. This is a by-product and function of making bodies of water

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[102] Moharana Choudhury et al., "Human-Induced Stresses on the Rivers beyond Their Assimilation and Regeneration Capacity," in *Ecological Significance of River Ecosystems*, ed. Sughosh Madhav et al. (Elsevier, 2022), 281-98, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-85045-2.00019-4.
[103] James S. Albert et al., "Scientists? Warning to Humanity on the Freshwater Biodiversity Crisis," *Ambio* 50 (January 2021): 85–94; Edgardo M. Latrubesse et al., "Damming the Rivers of the Amazon Basin," *Nature* 546 (June 2017): 363–69, https://doi.org/10.1038/nature22333.

navigable. These changes upend natural habitats and interfere with the previous balance. Rivers, as other beings do, have their own natural characteristics, that include a multitude of variables and attributes. These characteristics create a complex web which ecosystems have evolved around. Coined the "master variable," streamflow is the key defining feature of a river system. Multiple other important characteristics depend on streamflow, including water temperature, habitat diversity, and geomorphology.[104] It is these variables that a watershed's biodiversity rests upon. It is also these variables that the construction of the TSW altered. Streamflow equalled energy to be harnessed and controlled, which were stated goals of the TSW. But if streamflow is the master variable, what happens to biodiversity when humans assert control over this variable? In the case of the TSW the result was over a century of rapid changes and transformations. Both humans and non-humans were forced to adapt quickly to their new reality. As non-humans endured the ecological stresses, so did humans. Some embraced these changes, while others tried to desperately curb some of what they witnessed. Reactions were varied and reflected each community's social and cultural context.

When discussing the ecological changes, Richard White's approach in *The Organic Machine* of avoiding narratives of death and dying has theoretical as well as practical grounding.[105] The stresses did not constitute a mass extinction. In the TSW some species undoubtedly disappeared from the region, but at the same time, others thrived, and new species entered the ecosystem. The TSW is not an anomaly in this case; often the most significant and predictable consequence of building hydraulic infrastructure is

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[104] N. LeRoy Poff et al., "The Natural Flow Regime: A Paradigm for River Conservation and Restoration," *BioScience* 47 (December 1997): 769 https://doi.org/10.2307/1313099.
[105] Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

not a mass extinction but instead the introduction of alien species.[106] In the context of the TSW, some species entered the ecosystem as a direct consequence of the infrastructure while others are indirectly linked. However, their introduction should not be read as a silver lining. Because, as new species are introduced to a system, native species almost always suffer. Native species struggle to adjust to the onslaught of environmental changes while at the same time enduring increased competition from new species.

The TSW-induced ecological changes reshaped habitats in ways that revealed the ecosystem's interconnectedness. Alongside fauna, flora in the watershed also felt the effects of the TSW's construction. Once again, the TSW's interference with the natural streamflow was enormously consequential. A regular and uninterrupted flow that coincides with the seasons is pivotal to the maintenance of a native habitat. The construction of multiple dams interrupted that flow and undermined certain species of native flora, such as manoomin.[107] All of these changes coincided with each other. Alien species benefitted from native species suffering as it made way for them. Native fauna depended on the native flora to provide their natural habitat. Destruction of that habitat compounded the other problems they faced. While this phenomenon is well researched from an environmental science lens, the social and cultural implications have received less attention.

The consolidation of power over the TSW by government organizations worsened the human induced ecological changes. Problems that come with waterways are often exacerbated when larger organizations take control. Larger entities change waterways

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[106] Jia H. Liew, Heok H. Tan, and Darren C. J. Yeo, "Dammed Rivers: Impoundments Facilitate Fish Invasions," *Freshwater Biology* 61 (June 2016): 1421-24 https://doi.org/10.1111/fwb.12781.
[107] Kelsie Timpe and David Kaplan, "The Changing Hydrology of a Dammed Amazon," *Science Advances* 3 (November 2017): 8 https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1700611.

enormously without a vested interest in the consequences of these changes. It takes riparian communities to notice changes occurring around them and react accordingly.[108] As a colonial infrastructure project, the TSW was built to serve urban areas, therefore the organizations that controlled the waterway operated out of these urban areas.

This is not meant to romanticize the changes made to the TSW before the consolidation of power. Individuals such as Nicol Hugh Baird and James Bethune were by all accounts riparian residents whose decisions had disastrous effects on the TSW and its communities. However, the subsequent worsening of these environments was largely due to those in charge being several degrees removed from the waterway.

The Greater Good Narrative

The human-induced ecological changes comprise another view of the nature-society nexus that undergirds the TSW. As seen with other "natural disasters," such as the drowned lands, the changes were a product of the broader cultural context. A key aspect of this cultural context is the narrative that positioned the TSW as an object of greater good. This narrative was driven by the colonial nature of the TSW which established the waterway for the good of the metropole, not for the riparian communities. This same narrative appeared in the case of the drowned lands, where it allowed those in power to undermine and dismiss the experiences of those adversely affected.

While it is the same narrative, it manifests differently with the biodiversity crisis that resulted from the construction of the TSW. This is because at times, the biodiversity crisis threatened the greater good narrative in ways that were harder to dismiss than the

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[108] Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1992), 332.

drowned lands. Riparian residents came face to face with the biodiversity crisis. Whether it was hundreds of dead fish floating in a lake, Little Lake developing a stench, or fishing guides no longer able to provide for their clients, the biodiversity crisis was impossible to ignore. It affected both rural and urban areas and in turn, the greater good narrative helped drive many of the conservation efforts. However, as was the case with the TSW's colonial context, conservation efforts did not benefit everyone equally. Game fish, the target of wealthy tourists, were prioritized over food sources such as herring or manoomin. Issues such as the smell in urban areas were dealt with early on before other problems. The greater good narrative helped curb select parts of the biodiversity crisis and reflected the TSW's power dynamics.

Walleye, Carp, and the Vanishing 'Lunge'

New species that entered the TSW presented a host of issues, but often it was human intervention that made matters worse. Invasive species were often treated by management in a militaristic sense, seen as an enemy to be eliminated. The introduction of new species undoubtedly poses challenges for an ecosystem. However, often further efforts to eradicate these species and "stabilize" the environment worsen the issue by not allowing the environment to settle on its own. Historically, invasive species often end up adding to the total biodiversity and efforts to curb their population numbers and spread are usually unsuccessful.[109] Invasive species continue to be discussed in a militaristic tone and treated with contempt today, despite the evidence that over a long period of time the

[109] Mark A. Davis et al., "Don't Judge Species on Their Origins," *Nature* 474 (June 2011): 153–54, https://doi.org/10.1038/474153a.

effect is not apocalyptic.[110] While the long term effects are not disastrous, in the immediate aftermath of a species introduction residents are often rightfully troubled. A new species presents issues and a reshuffling of the environment, even if too much blame is attributed to their arrival. The TSW offers an interesting case of invasive species. Multiple new species entered, and native species suffered. However, the treatment of a species depended less on their status as "invasive" or "native" and more on their usefulness to settler colonialism.

Game fish and the conservation efforts that followed their introduction demonstrate that government environmental initiatives did not reflect the broader population's needs. When government agencies purposefully introduced game fish into the TSW's watershed, it led to devastating results. The creation of the Trent Waterway Development Association (TWDA) was largely responsible for these moves. The TWDA was founded in 1920 with the objective of promoting tourism and commercial activity on the TSW. It was their organisation that pressured the Ontario government to stock the TSW with game fish.[111] A desire to grow the tourism industry motivated the TWDA's actions, but unfortunately and reflective of the issues with centralized power, they were ignorant of the ripple effects their decisions would have.

Riparian residents faced head on the damage that the introduction of game fish caused. Walleye, or pickerel as they are sometimes called, presented some of the greatest challenges to residents who fished the TSW. Stan Nichols was a retired fishing guide who worked the Kawartha Lakes from the 1920s through the 1940s. When asked about

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[110] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Dog Stranglers in the Park?: National and Vegetal Politics in Ontario's Rouge Valley," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47 (Fall 2013): 108, https://doi.org/10.1353/jcs.2013.0005.
[111] James T. Angus, *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway, 1833-1920* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 403-04.

the introduction of walleye, Nichols said that after a few years, "They were so thick they overcome all the other fish …. They'd eat pretty near all our fish right out of the lake. That's why our bass was down, the lunge was down and these herring, they'd eat them all. There isn't one left. … But we have no herring. These herrings was a lovely fish…"[112] Nichols clearly placed blame on walleye for pushing out native species. Muskellunge (or muskies) and bass had both become regarded as game fish, prized for their fighting ability and size. But while their loss was certainly felt, it was not as significant as the loss of herring, which were wiped out of the TSW. A small fish that used to teem in the TSW's waters, herring provided a vital food source for residents. Nichols was far from the only interviewee to recall their disappearance. Jack Fulton, a retired fisherman, reminisced about the days his nets would come up full of herring. Fulton also blamed the introduction of walleye for wiping them out. He estimated it took two years after the introduction of walleye before herring were gone. Fulton joked that if he "caught one of those today, I think I'd have it mounted … one of those little minnows."[113] While he approached the situation with humour, Fulton's joke speaks to the enormous decline in herring population, and his sentimental tone conveys the fish's importance.

The process of introducing walleye was not straightforward. Fulton explained how initially when the provincial government introduced walleye, they made two key mistakes. First, the walleye they introduced were young and small, easy prey for predatory fish such as perch, who already lived in the TSW. Their second mistake was that they introduced them in the shallow weedy bays where perch thrived. Initially the

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[112] Stan Nichols, "Transcript #14," interview with Daniel Francis, August 21, 1979, 58-59, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection, Trent University Library and Archives, Peterborough Ontario.
[113] Jack Fulton, "Transcript #20," interview with Daniel Francis, September 11, 1979, 35, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.

walleye did not encounter much success in their introduction as the perch ate all the spawn. The provincial government powered on despite the environment's initial rejection of the non-native species. They introduced larger walleye in areas of the TSW without perch and other natural predators. These changes allowed them to take hold, and it only took a few years before walleye became dominant in the waterway.[114] As a large and predatory fish, they feasted on many of the smaller species available to them and thrived in their new ecosystem.

The relationship between walleye, herring, and communities demonstrates the power dynamics at play within the TSW. For those who depended on the TSW to provide food, the disappearance of herring would have been a devastating loss. It was sports fishermen, privileged individuals who could afford to fish recreationally, who benefitted from the walleye. As the TSW transitioned from its industrial roots, it became clear who the waterway was now for. As walleye became part of the TSW's common good, herring were left behind.

The rise of game fish in the TSW resulted from a series of explicit decisions by government officials to introduce and promote certain species over others. But while the government was focused on these species, others entered the TSW of their own accord. Carp is the most famous and successful of these species. As discussed earlier, it is now understood that invasive species are a near inevitable consequence of hydraulic infrastructure. At the time however, the introduction of carp shocked the unsuspecting residents.

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[114] Fulton, "Transcript #20," 40-41.

When carp arrived in the TSW, many residents worried that they would push out other species. This worry never went away and only persisted as the carp population grew. In 1962, a newspaper article titled "He remembered it well…" appeared in the *Lindsay Daily Post*. The article described the anecdotal memory of a retired doctor who grew up in Lindsay around the turn of the century. The story went "He remembered the legend of the 'vanishing lunge' which had its origin around Blackstock where a man who was keeping carp for experimental purposes awoke one morning to find them gone – they had fled their Scugog Lake pen and from then on lunge were reported to have started to disappear from its waters."[115] "Lunge" in this anecdote is short for muskellunge. The anecdote is correct that carp entered the TSW in the early twentieth century and that many escaped from farms in Lake Scugog. But the importance of the article lies in its tone, not its historical accuracy. The article sets the stage for understanding attitudes towards carp. It demonstrates that even decades after their introduction, residents resented carp for their perceived role in the muskellunge population's drop. Like walleye, carp were blamed for the disappearance of other fish. However, unlike walleye, carp were never welcome. Neither herring nor carp provided a strong enough benefit to settler colonial society and were thus left behind by the greater good narrative.

The TSW was one of many North American watersheds that carp entered. The spread originated with enterprising businessmen and landowners who imported thousands of carp from Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. The very first confirmed import of carp is up for historical debate. Some claim it occurred in 1831 when Captain Henry Robinson brought over several carp for his pond in New York State near

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[115] "He remembered it well," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), June 23, 1962, A8.

the Hudson River. Regardless of who holds the claim of "first," the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed thousands of carp brought into poorly secured fish farms. These farms often experienced dam and wall breaks, which allowed fish to escape into watersheds across Eastern North America. By the 1850s, carp were well established in the Hudson River watershed, considered by contemporaries in New York State to be "entirely naturalized in some of our waters."[116]

As carp rapidly spread throughout North American watersheds, the TSW lay waiting, primed by the construction of dams and locks. Carp requires a variety of water depths, but the most important is shallow, recently flooded areas to spawn in.[117] The dams and locks of the TSW created vast still areas of water, the perfect habitat for carp. The spread allegedly began in York County, a historic county between Toronto and Lake Simcoe. In 1896, carp broke free of a pond in York County and spread to Lake Simcoe before entering the TSW's system. Once carp entered the TSW, its network of canals, rivers, and lakes enabled the fish to easily travel through the watershed. By the 1910s, canals and other parts of the TSW held enough carp that residents and local government took notice. In 1913 thirty-one tons of carp were taken out of the water by the Peterborough Lift Lock, and by 1915 carp were reported in almost every one of the Kawartha Lakes.[118] By this point, residents were aware of the issue and petitioned the government to remove the fish.

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[116] Hugh R. McCrimmon, "Carp in Canada," *Fisheries Research Board of Canada, Ottawa* 165 (1968): 17.; J. R. Dymond, "The Introduction of Foreign Fishes in Canada," *Internationale Vereinigung Für Theoretische Und Angewandte Limnologie: Verhandlungen* 12 (January 1953): 453.
[117] McCrimmon, "Carp in Canada," 2.
[118] McCrimmon, "Carp in Canada," 29.

For many residents their first time seeing the new species was often a moment of curiosity and fear, evidence of how much the faunal disruption stood out. This can be seen with the news of a carp spotting in Lake Scugog, a lake connected to the TSW. On July 4, 1922, a short article titled "Youth Caught Freak Fish" was published on the front page of the *Lindsay Daily Post*. The article told the story of a boy who caught a strange fish in Lake Scugog. It was described as "a pound and a half fish that is quite a curiosity. It has a head like a sucker, horns like a catfish and is speckled like a trout, and is somewhat longer than a bass."[119] The next day the *Lindsay Daily Post* published another article on the front page titled "Caught Carp in Scugog." The "freak" fish was identified as a carp which the article claimed to be the first caught in Lake Scugog. The article also went on to explain that carp were well established in Kirkfield and Lake Simcoe. It even mentioned a fishery near Lindsay where fishermen shipped carp to the United States to be canned.[120] It is near impossible to tell if the carp caught in 1922 in Lake Scugog was really the first catch. But the tone of the article demonstrates people's attitude towards the fish. Riparian residents were intimately aware of their non-human neighbours, so when carp arrived people took notice. The article labelled carp a "freak," and a "curiosity," neither of which are flattering words.

The second half of the article revealed some of the reasons for this vitriol towards the fish. The reasoning is almost identical to the anecdote from 1935: "Fishermen," the article explained, "state that carp are a curse to the inland waters as they destroy the spawn and help to deplete the waters of lunge and other fish."[121] The article doubled

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[119] "Youth Caught Freak Fish," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 4, 1922, A1.
[120] "Caught Carp in Scugog," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 5,1922, A1.
[121] "Caught Carp in Scugog," A1.

down on the contempt, labelling carp a 'curse' and painting them as an invasive, greedy species. But it did not give any reasoning for why carp had to withstand more anger than walleye, another species that was introduced. The presence of carp became a threat to the greater good that the TSW provided. Residents understood that the introduction of carp into the ecosystem was bad for the other species that lived within the TSW's watershed. These other species of fish were tied up in the narrative of the TSW providing a greater good. These species, which included muskellunge, bass, trout, and some fauna, characterized the TSW's greatest benefits. This was heightened as all levels of government prioritized the tourism and sports fishing industries. By pushing out desirable game fish, carp undermined the economic vitality of the TSW.

Carp disrupted the TSW's ecosystem in many ways. They thrived in shallow lakes thick with vegetation that provided the perfect habitat for spawning. Unfortunately, manoomin also thrived in these warm shallow waters and made up much of the vegetation that carp flourished in. This became a problem as carp ate the manoomin roots and destroyed vast swaths of the plant. This affected Anishinaabeg communities whose food systems had deep ties to the pre-existing ecosystem. While the broader riparian communities knew of the issues that carp raised for manoomin crops, they did not have as much at stake as Anishinaabeg communities did. Merritt Taylor, an elder from Waashkiigmaang, mentioned this in an interview with Jack Hoggarth. Taylor said that the carp "uprooted those seeds and the rice wouldn't grow very good because of the level of the water."[122] Taylor did not demonstrate the same vitriol that many other sources do, but

[122] Merritt Taylor, quoted in Jack Hoggarth, *Waashkiigmaang Nbi Wi-Nagamo: Our Curve Lake First Nation Water Song Sharing Oral History* (Community Publication funded by Canadian Water Network, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 17.

he still expressed frustration. Carp eating manoomin roots was part of the long list of destructive effects the TSW created for Anishinaabeg communities.

But interestingly, it continued to be settlers who spoke about carp with the most anger. The difference in reaction between settlers and Anishinaabe is unsurprising. Concepts of "native" and "invasive" species originate from European and colonial ideologies. Anishinaabeg teachings understand these concepts differently. For Anishinaabe the plants and animals who enter ecosystems are not species but nations who have migrated. In addition, the responsibility rests on humans, not the non-humans, to understand why these nations have migrated.[123] The Anishinaabeg approach still acknowledges the problems with new species but does not produce the same level of anger.

Meanwhile, the contempt held by settlers was exacerbated by the fact that few people in the region enjoyed the taste of carp. During a period that saw several newspapers report the influx of carp in the waterway, the *Lindsay Daily Post* published a recipe for the fish. The recipe was a direct response to several articles in the days leading up that had expressed concern over the growing carp population. A reader wrote to the newspaper with the recipe and had their letter published in a section of the newspaper titled "The Realm of Women." The reader claimed they wanted to help by providing the following recipe:

> Take a pine board 12" by 8" smooth on one side. Butter the board well and shake pepper and salt on it. Clean carp, spread a piece of butter the size of a walnut over it with the necessary salt and pepper. Bake in a moderate oven until the carp is well done. Turn the carp off the board, throw the carp into the fire and eat the board.' The Ladies will no doubt feel grateful to the author of this recipe. The only trouble

[123] Nicholas J. Reo and Laura A. Ogden, "Anishnaabe Aki: An Indigenous Perspective on the Global Threat of Invasive Species," *Sustainability Science* 13 (May 2018): 1446-47, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0571-4.

> was that the type of pine board wasn't clearly specified; a soft Maple might have been better.[124]

This article was written at least fifteen years after the introduction of carp into the region. Clearly time had not helped develop a local taste for the fish as carp never took off as a Kawartha delicacy. The reader may have had a good sense of humour regarding the situation, but their letter is indicative of one of the fundamental problems with carp in the TSW. Residents simply did not see any value in the fish. They were not prized for sports fishing nor were they desired as a source of food. This left carp in a tricky situation. Considered useless and destructive to residents, their only value came when they were shipped off to larger metropoles such as Toronto and New York.

The rash introduction of game fish and the accidental invasion of other fish was not a solely destructive event. While communities did mourn the loss of certain species, and their loss was problematic, they also showed resilience and adaption. Walleye became a popular source of food alongside muskellunge and bass. Ernest Brown, another retired fishing guide, described the walleye as a "dandy fish to eat."[125] Today people embrace walleye as a delicacy, but carp never became a local mainstay on dinner tables. However, eventually residents did find ways to capitalize off them. Commercial fishing for carp emerged in the region. Many fishermen netted tons of the fish and shipped them to southern markets in Toronto and the United States where there was a demand for them.[126] An organized commercial carp fishery even opened near Lindsay several decades

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[124] "The Realm of Women," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 15, 1935, A4.
[125] Ernest Brown, "Transcript #18," interview with Daniel Francis, August 20, 1979, 16 in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.
[126] "Canada's Carp Find New York Market," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 28, 1923, A3; "1400 Pounds of Carp Were Shipped From Caesarea," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 19, 1935, A1.

after the more informal efforts to sell them.[127] It is perhaps this ability to capitalize off carp that led to a decrease in the vitriolic attitude towards them. This should not be characterized as a positive development. Instead, it speaks to the new reality for non-humans in the TSW. The TSW was made into an object of public good and for a species to be tolerated in the ecosystem it had to provide value to riparian communities.

The TSW continued to make obtaining food increasingly difficult. Had the game fish and carp been introduced without further intervention, the ecosystem may have settled on its own, and communities could have adapted and accommodated these changes. But the introduction of the game fish represented a small part of the overall problem. As mentioned earlier, a disconnected management created further issues as decisions exacerbated ecological stresses. Harkening back to the drowned lands, the issue once again became that of water levels.

Drowned Lands and Dead Fish

From an immediate perspective, the TSW appeared to be managed locally. Lock attendants were assigned to each dam and lived close to their assignment. It was these attendants who would take out or put in logs to adjust the levels. To do this they would increase the number of stop logs at a dam which essentially raised the height of the dam; this would in turn increase the water levels upstream. However, these attendants had little autonomy and operated as extensions of the centralized management in Peterborough who instructed attendants on how many logs to have in the water. TSW management's mandate was wholly focused on maintaining the navigational aspect of the waterway.

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[127] McCrimmon, "Carp in Canada," 47.

This frustrated many residents who felt that TSW management mishandled water levels.[128] Residents were right to feel frustrated. These decisions made from an office in Peterborough carried geographically wide ranging consequences for residents of the watershed. Herein lies further evidence of the colonial nature of the waterway. The TSW management operated out of a centralized location and made decisions for the entire watershed based on calculations to allow transit along the canals without input or consideration of residents. With TSW management being removed from the effect of their immediate decisions, they often failed to accurately plan for the consequences of those decisions. Many fishing guides and community members expressed intense frustration with the ways in which TSW management controlled the water levels.

Oftentimes officials abruptly dropped water levels in the Kawarthas and other reservoir lakes to replenish the canals. Other times, when the region had experienced an unusually large amount of snow or rain, TSW officials held high water levels in the lakes to avoid raising the canal levels too high. These abrupt changes killed large numbers of non-humans. Hort Nichols recalled his father becoming increasingly aggravated with TSW officials over this issue. Nichols described how when water levels in the lakes were high, larger fish such as pike and muskellunge would follow their prey into the shallow bays they otherwise could not access. Then, when canal officials drew water from the lakes to supply the canals, the water levels suddenly dropped and trapped larger fish in the shallow areas. Nichols recalled a time when officials dropped the water levels resulting in close to a hundred dead muskellunge floating on the surface.[129] Hyperbole or

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[128] James McGrath, "Transcript #6," interview with Daniel Francis, July 26, 1979, 66-67, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.
[129] Hort Nichols, "Transcript #9," interview with Daniel Francis, August 3, 1979, 33, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.

not, any large number of dead fish suddenly appearing would have been upsetting for residents. An article from 1909 in the *Peterborough Daily Examiner* described in gruesome detail the result of one of these mass deaths:

> There are no fewer than eleven maskinonge (muskellunge) decaying in the warm sun in a plowed field up Norey's creek a mile or two from Pigeon Lake. During the very high water this field was flooded and the lunge made their way all over it depositing their spawn. But they had not reckoned on the lumberman who wished to take advantage of the high water to float his timber out to the lake. By the closing of the water off rapidly in the lower dam, the fish were left high and dry on the plowed land. Great quantities of maskinonge spawn will perish this season as it is now on dry land.[130]

Muskellunge and their spawn died because of TSW management drawing too much water from the lakes for the lumber drive and other navigation. Had management not rapidly drawn off so much water, the spawn may have been born and left the shallow area as water levels gradually receded. Residents tried to make management aware of what was happening to the fish. In the case of Hort Nichols' father, he went to canal officials and complained about the muskellunge being killed by the way they dropped water levels. Nichols' father showed dam officials the hundreds of dead muskellunge floating in the lake, but they countered with the greater good narrative. According to Nichols, the dam official told his father, "What's a few dead muskie if we're going to flood the city of Peterborough."[131] The dam official made clear to Nichols' father that his main priority was to serve the urban core. If lives such as those of the muskellunge were lost, that was considered a reasonable price to pay. In the case of the dead muskellunge in 1909,

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[130] "Maskinonge Die On Plowed Land," *Peterborough Daily Examiner* (Peterborough, Ontario), May 28, 1909, A8. Internet Archive, archive.org

[131] Nichols, "Transcript #9," 34.

accident or not, the lumber drive killed the muskellunge. Once again, fish became a casualty to the TSW's greater good.

Alongside fish, many mammals suffered due to the fluctuations in water levels. Beavers and muskrats, animals which built their homes on the water, were unable to keep up with the changes. When management dropped water levels, they starved these animals. Jack Fulton explained how muskrats would build their homes in a way that allowed them to dive underneath into open water for food. Then during the winter, ice would form around the home but not underneath it, allowing muskrats to continue diving for food all winter. However, when TSW management dropped the water levels in the fall in anticipation of winter, muskrats who had already built their homes found themselves too far from the water. Then, when the water froze, unable to access open water underneath their homes, the muskrats would starve. Fulton, who trapped regularly as a source of income, said the drop in population numbers was enormous, estimating his seasonal catch decreased from 5,000 to approximately 50.[132] The TSW's fluctuations made life incredibly difficult for animals who had adapted to seasonal variability.

Anishinaabeg, the TSW, and Slow Violence

The biodiversity crisis was especially destructive for the Anishinaabeg communities along the TSW. As it was with the drowned lands, the biodiversity crisis affected Curve Lake First Nation in two ways: loss of food sources and loss of income. Like the issue of drowned lands, the pre-existing colonial context of the TSW

[132] Fulton, "Transcript #20," 36-37.

compounded these losses. Natural catastrophes are cultural products, and the culture that produced the biodiversity crisis was that of a colonial system.

Anishinaabeg communities' daily activities and lifeways were deeply tied to the water. Economic activities, mainly fishing and trapping, revolved around the TSW. There had always been concern over the legal right to fish and trap within the TSW since the beginning of treaty negotiations with colonial powers. Treaty 20, signed in 1818, made no mention of hunting or fishing rights, but this did not insinuate a lack of concern. Chief Puukwakwud of the Eagles Clan spoke to Colonel Claus of the Indian Department in 1818 saying, "We hope that we shall not be prevented from the right of fishing, the use of the water and hunting where we can find game."[133] When both parties left fishing and hunting rights off the treaty, this represented an understanding that these rights would not be interfered with. This understanding was broken by both the Ontario and federal governments. The Ontario government's fish and game laws of the late nineteenth century heightened tensions, as Anishinaabeg operated under their understanding of Treaty 20 wherein they had no restrictions on hunting and fishing.

Tensions peaked in 1901 when Ontario introduced new amendments to the Fish and Game legislation that outlawed the sale of game without a license. In response, the tribes of Mud Lake, Rice Lake, Scugog, and Alnwick banded together as an allied group. Together they hired a lawyer and began to build a case to maintain their right to hunt and fish on these lands.[134] The case was being built at the same time as tensions heightened over hunting rights to lands northeast of the Great Lakes. The degree to which this case

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[133] Mae Whetung-Derrick, "Oshkigmong: The Curve in the Lake - a History of the Mississauga Community of Curve Lake: Origins of the Curve Lake Anishnabek," *Peterborough Historical Society Occasional Papers* no. 35 (Peterborough, ON: Peterborough Historical Society, 2015): 6.
[134] Whetung-Derrick, "Oshkigmong: The Curve in the Lake," 16.

affected the eventual Williams Treaties of 1923 is unclear. However, it was undoubtedly part of a growing tension at the time. Other legal events include the investigation by Robert V. Sinclair into claims by the Chippewa and Mississaugas over this region.[135] Then, while tensions steadily increased, came the Williams Treaty of 1928, which further undermined their access to land for fishing and hunting. Anishinaabeg communities were hemmed in by environmental and legal pressures, both of which were products of colonialism. Government officials were aware of this growing pressure.

Testimony from the Commission for the Williams Treaty proved that Anishinaabeg communities made government officials aware of the problems the TSW caused. As mentioned in Chapter One, Chief Whetung used this opportunity to explain to commissioners the ways in which the TSW flooded their land. He also took the chance to explain to commissioners that when the TSW's construction raised waters, it interfered with many of the mammals that lived in the shallow waters and along the shorelines. In accordance with Jack Fulton's interview, Chief Whetung explained that when the TSW raised water levels, it flooded the natural habitat of many mammals such as beaver and muskrat. The surviving animals thus moved further inland or to other more sustainable habitats. Chief Whetung explained this to the commission, saying:

> I'd like to mention that before these dams were built for the raising of the water, the game was out further on the lakes and creeks, and we were free to hunt then, although not right on what was then the shores, but now the game is pushed back into the private property and we can't get at it. The water is raised and what used to be marsh is deep water, and that's all the place we can go.[136]

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[135] Daniel E. Shaule, "The 1923 Canada-Ontario Agreement and the Williams Treaties," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 40 (Fall 2020): 190.

[136] Indian Affairs, "Bound Volume Of Testimony Given To A Commission, Chaired By A.S. Williams, Investigating Claims, By The Chippewas & Mississaugas Of Ontario, To Compensation For Land Not Surrendered By The Robinson Treaty Of 1850," 1923, Library and Archives Canada, 213-216.

Similar to Anishinaabeg's experience with drowned lands, the colonial context of the TSW ensured that they experienced the biodiversity crisis differently than did settlers. Encroachment on their land and efforts to confine their hunting and trapping to their reserves worsened the situation. Had animals migrated upland when water levels rose and Anishinaabeg were able to simply follow them, it would have been a different story. But, when animals relocated due to the pressures of the TSW, restrictive colonial laws aggregated the difficulty of hunting and trapping for Anishinaabeg communities.

While tensions built in the lead up to the treaties, Anishinaabeg continued to be the subject of undue attention through fish and game laws. When game wardens accused Anishinaabeg of hunting or fishing illegally, the accused were not simply rule breakers, they were Indigenous rule breakers. This happened across Canada. As resource development efforts spread and intensified, governments also increased their conservation efforts. The pressure of resource development and new conservation laws increased the chances of conflict between Indigenous Nations and colonial officials. Poaching laws in Canada originated from British understandings of property and class. When these laws were applied in the colonial context of Canada, they coincided with constructs of race and settler colonial domination.[137]

Officials and media fixation on race is evident in this 1922 article from the *Lindsay Daily Post* titled "Looked for Fish Nets; None There." The article described an individual connected with the provincial police who had helped track down people breaking the fish and game laws near Belleville. The article mentioned "one excursion took Mr. Harnett

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[137] Nicole Gombay. "'Poaching' – What's in a Name? Debates about Law, Property, and Protection in the Context of Settler Colonialism." *Geoforum* 55 (August 2014): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.04.010.

several miles from the city, to a rendezvous of the Indians, where it was reported that illegal fishing was being carried on. A search was made for the nets, but without success, the Indians standing around in stoic fashion, with eyes glistening, and ready for action."[138] The language used contrasts with other instances of fish and game laws being broken, where the language was undramatic and matter of fact.[139] The heavily racialized language shows that settler officials perceived Anishinaabeg differently when policing fish and game laws, and as a result those residents experienced these laws differently than did settler populations.

As Anishinaabeg were mired in colonial interference of their relationship to the environment, they also felt the full effects of the biodiversity crisis caused by the TSW. Curve Lake First Nation's foodways operated in tandem with their environment. Their three staple foods were fish, wild rice, and fruit.[140] Two of these—fish and wild rice—were immediately impacted by the construction of the TSW. Clifford Hoggarth, an Anishinaabeg man from nearby Curve Lake, described the water as a "fridge" when he was a child. Hoggarth said "Our mom would tell us to catch a few bass or pickerel for supper, and that is what we did. We can't do that anymore…"[141] As such an important part of their food system, the destruction of fish populations was incredibly damaging to these communities. Herring were completely wiped out, and muskellunge populations became unstable, fluctuating year by year. All it would take is one early spring, or one

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[138] "Looked for Fish Nets; None There," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 25, 1922, A1.
[139] "This Lunge Was Costly," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), June 12, 1922, A1.; "The First Net of the Season Lifted at Medd's Creek," *Peterborough Daily Examiner* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 19, 1909, A4.
[140] Gidigaa Migizi, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This Is Our Territory* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: ARP Books, 2018), 99.
[141] Clifford Hoggarth quoted in Hoggarth, *Waashkiigmaang Nbi Wi-Nagamo,* 40.

hot summer day where the canals drew too much water, and hundreds of muskellunge could be killed. Descriptions of the muskellunge dying, floating to the top of the water or left to rot on drained land, would have haunted communities that depended on these fish for food. For settlers, their concern over muskellunge dying often centred around the impact on sports fishing. Settlers' concern was valid, however their experience seeing dead fish would have been different than the experience of those who depended on the fish for food.

The loss of manoomin compounded the negative impact of losing fish. Already having lost one food source, losing another was devastating. Manoomin was and is a pivotal part of the TSW's ecosystem. Its stands supported non-humans just as much as humans. Multiple animals, including insects, fish, birds, and mammals fed on the plant. The stands also offered safety for many of these animals. Birds rested on the stalks and migrating waterfowl targeted the stands as a safe place for rest and food. Mammals such as muskrat and beavers often built their homes amidst the stands as they provided them a safe habitat.[142] The loss of manoomin had ripple like effects for the Anishinaabeg communities. Not only a loss of food, manoomin represented traditions, community building, and was part of the complex web with other non-humans in the TSW.

The TSW's watershed was not unique in its loss of manoomin. Much of southeastern Ontario witnessed the destruction of manoomin stands. This loss began with the advent of settler colonialism and accelerated through the nineteenth and early

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[142] Samantha Mehltretter and Andrea Bradford, "Environmental Change, Environmental Care," in *Manomin: Caring for Ecosystems and Each Other*, ed. Brittany Luby et al. (University of Manitoba Press, 2024), 93, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781772840926-012.

twentieth centuries.[143] The accompanying pressure of settler populations was immediately destructive to manoomin stands. The largest issue from these new settlements was the hydraulic infrastructure that accompanied them, such as dams and mills. As discussed earlier, hydraulic infrastructure destroys native flora. Manoomin grows best in shallow areas, ideally under one and a half metres deep. The deeper the water, the more energy the plant is required to spend on its stalk and the less energy it has for the tillers and seeds that provide food. Human built structures such as dams raised water levels to a depth where manoomin was unable to develop and yield the tillers and seeds needed for food.[144] Therefore manoomin crops throughout the TSW struggled after the construction of hydraulic infrastructure. Even when manoomin crops were not flooded out entirely, the raised water levels meant that crops produced much less yield than they had before.

The introduction of carp is often brought up when discussing the disappearance of manoomin. In Merritt Taylor's interview referenced earlier, he expressed little doubt that carp ate up the roots of the manoomin causing crops to die.[145] Carp and manoomin demonstrate the interconnectedness of the TSW. Neither the introduction of carp, nor the disappearance of manoomin can be understood in isolation.

Growing Concern

The human induced ecological stresses did not become a concern to residents only in retrospect. Residents along the TSW observed the changes that occurred around them

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[143] Petr Cizek, "Guardians of Manomin: Aboriginal Self-Management of Wild Rice Harvesting," *Alternatives* 19 (May-June 1993): 31.
[144] Mehltretter and Bradford, "Environmental Change, Environmental Care," 97.; Jackson Pind, *Students by Day : Colonialism and Resistance at the Curve Lake Indian Day School*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025), 6.
[145] Merritt Taylor, quoted in Hoggarth, *Waashkiigmaang Nbi Wi-Nagamo,* 17.

and responded with immediate concern. Worry over the growing pressure of settlements on fish and animal populations in the region pre-existed the TSW. Conservation efforts date back to 1807 with the *Act For the Preservation of Salmon* which encompassed the entire Newcastle District, of which the Kawarthas were a part.[146] This act outlawed fishing for salmon with nets or similar contraptions and only allowed line and spear.[147] This was one of many conservation efforts to come for the region. But like those to come, it was rooted in colonial understandings of conservation. Conservation efforts became a colonial solution to what was a colonial problem. This pattern continued with the TSW.

Almost all riparian communities along the TSW were concerned with the newfound ecological stresses. But each community's reaction differed based on their positionality. Anishinaabeg and settler communities were both aware of the issues, but their understanding of the issues, as with other natural catastrophes, was culturally produced.

Settler communities responded positively to the conservation efforts. Papers would report on amendments to conservation acts, not as government overreach, but as a necessity for the region.[148] The health of the TSW became part of the region's greater good. If fish were dying in the TSW, this presented an economic concern due to the importance of tourism in the region. Settler communities responded well to these conservation efforts because the laws enacted by the Ontario and Canadian governments

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[146] Sean Berger, "Historical Ecology and Shifting Baseline Syndrome in the Kawartha Lakes, Ontario," (M.A. Thesis, Trent University, 2018), 49.
[147] "An Act For The Preservation Of Salmon" (Province of Upper Canada, March 10, 1807), Early Canadiana Online.
[148] "Protection is Good," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), August 16, 1922, A1.

reflected their position. They benefitted from the greater good narrative that drove these discussions.

Conservation efforts also drew on a settler colonial sense of dominion over nature. In the early twentieth century many settlers felt a religious sense of duty towards nature. The historian Tina Loo examines this feeling of dominion over nature through the story of Jack Miner, a rural environmentalist in southern Ontario. Loo's examination of Miner demonstrates the nuance between dominion over nature and exploitation of nature. Dominion comes with a sense of duty and conservation towards nature but is still embedded within a hierarchy that places humans over animals.[149] Miner's story demonstrates that while settler colonial society still placed humans above nature, it also motivated concern and distress over signs of environmental degradation. Images of dead fish would have prompted those sentiments.

While the economy and narrative of the greater good certainly dominated conservation efforts, there existed other motivations as well among settler communities. The pollution and degradation of the TSW impacted daily life in many urban communities. The interconnectedness of the TSW meant that whatever changes it experienced were not relegated to its most isolated parts. This was unlike the case of drowned lands, where urban communities were insulated from those effects.

Concern over pollution and its effects on the health and wellbeing of communities stretched far back into the 1800s. The timber industry was the subject of scrutiny as their pollution had already reached crisis levels by the mid-nineteenth century. Years of accumulated timber waste, especially sawdust, had wreaked havoc on the TSW. The

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[149] Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 63–92.

refuse accumulated in shallow bays, suffocating plant and animal life. This caused decomposing matter to float up and created a putrid smell. In Little Lake in Peterborough, the problem became so bad that residents moved away from the water just to escape the smell.[150] In 1859, the Ontario government sought to fix this by amending the Public Works Act and created fines for any mill owners caught polluting. Unfortunately, the fines were not enough of a deterrent, so mill owners did not stop dumping their waste. The problem was not fixed until 1870 when the Ontario government required mills to burn their waste and enforced these rules heavily.[151]

The 1807 *Act For the Preservation of Salmon* act as well as the 1870 enforcement of mill pollution demonstrated a strong will among locals to police the environmental degradation caused by the TSW and its accompanying industries. Unfortunately, advocates for the environment remained on the backfoot. In the case of the 1807 act, salmon all but disappeared from the TSW and surrounding Lake Ontario tributaries by 1890.[152] While officials had managed to respond to the issue of timber waste, sediment continued to accumulate in regions it should not be in. This was beyond their control, as the construction of the TSW had interfered with the natural flow of the river. At times the inverse problem occurred with not enough sediment being distributed. This happened throughout the TSW's system as dams captured sediment needed for the maintenance of habitats.[153] In this case by limiting the growing sediment of timber waste, officials successfully fixed a small issue but missed the forest for the trees. If the TSW and its

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[150] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 119.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Karim M. Tiro, "A Sorry Tale: Natives, Settlers, and the Salmon of Lake Ontario, 1780–1900," *The Historical Journal* 59 (December 2016): 1002, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X16000121.
[153] Poff et al., "The Natural Flow Regime," 773.

infrastructure remained in the watershed, the distribution of sediment throughout the TSW could never revert to its natural process.

Despite the failures, painting riparian communities as uncaring or oblivious is inaccurate and unfair. While salmon disappeared by the twentieth century, residents demonstrated a great deal of concern over the crisis. Part of this was the visceral nature of the fish dying. When the muskellunge were drowned, there were stark images of dead fish lying on fields and floating in the lakes.[154] Scenes such as these would have upset residents and prompted an emotional response. When these events happened, they often garnered attention throughout the community.

Newspapers reported on these events, whether in Local Brevities sections or as larger stand-alone articles. An article in the Local Brevities section of the *Peterborough Morning Times* read, "A walk along some of our river banks will convince every citizen that dead fish are numerous. The fact will not tend to reassure water drinkers."[155] The article demonstrates how visible the dead fish would have been. Residents of Peterborough, while an urban enclave, held a deep connection with the river that ran through their city. The river was not a separate entity removed from daily life. Instead, the river and its banks represented a place for residents to spend their time and unwind.[156]

Whether it was the stark image of dead fish or the fear of polluting their water source, communities were active in removing the dead fish from their water. In 1922,

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[154] "Maskinonge Die On Plowed Land," A8.
[155] "Breezy Local Brevities," *Peterborough Morning Times* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 13, 1904, A6. Internet Archive, archive.org.
[156] There is a lack of studies done on the benefit of urban parks in Canada. The topic has been partly explored by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands in her study on the Rouge Urban Park but was not the focus. For a non-Canadian example see Wei-Ting Chen and Sheng-Jung Ou, "Benefits of Urban Parks in Different Land Uses," *Engineering Proceedings* 91 (April 2025): 9-19, https://doi.org/10.3390/engproc2025091009.

when several fish were killed in the power plants above Peterborough, it was the Minister of Health who took charge and hired someone to remove the fish. It was estimated that "Over 1000lbs. of dead eel, 'lunge and bass were taken out in four days, and there is still more decaying parts coming down."[157] Residents felt troubled by the masses of dead fish that appeared in the TSW. For communities, this represented a health concern. In addition to the Minister of Health acting, this concern was seen in comments about the drinking water and worries about the foul smelling water. Residents made a clear connection between the health of the TSW and their own wellbeing.

There is also the emotional distress of the dead fish that washed up on their shores. The loss of these fish would have left a strong impression on residents, especially children who often spent their days on the banks of the TSW. Peter McGillen recalled the disappearance of the fish as he reminisced about his boyhood years in Peterborough in the early twentieth century. McGillen spent the 1920s playing with his friends along the canal by Armour Hill and the Peterborough Lift Lock. In a description akin to the 1922 article, McGillen recalled how "Hundreds of large eels were crushed between the logs. Oddly enough the eels seemed to disappear with the log drives. In the years we fished we caught only one."[158] McGillen's testimony demonstrates how the TSW forced residents to grapple with loss early on in their lives.

Through their daily lives, riparian residents knew the ecological stresses of the TSW. They attacked their senses with smells rising from the water and shocking visuals of decomposing fish. New fish species were impossible to ignore in their abundance, and

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[157] "Fish Were Massacred," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), June 29, 1922, A4.
[158] Peter McGillen. "The Brickyard Hill Boys," in *Peterborough: Land of Shining Waters; an Anthology; a Centennial Volume*, edited by Borg, Ronald J., and Ont Centennial Committee for the City and County of Peterborough. (Peterborough, 1967), 173.

the absence of others was often noted. But what really drove the largest changes in the twentieth century was the greater good narrative that governed the TSW. The powers may have shifted with time but there was always a dominant narrative that drove their actions. For the bulk of the nineteenth century, the TSW served the lumber industry. Regular flow was required for the lumber drives, not for the biodiversity. But this changed in the twentieth century. With the massively growing tourism industry, the dominant narrative suddenly switched. From afar, the laws passed in the first two decades or so of the twentieth century appear to be passed out of concern for the TSW's ecological health. Laws were there to protect fish populations and to make the nature of the TSW appear "untouched." What appeared as concern for the environment, though, was in fact concern for the economy.

Carp, Settlers, and Anishinaabeg

As this chapter closes, it is worth returning to one of its more intriguing historical actors. Carp demonstrates the difference between Anishinaabeg and settler perceptions of environmental change. The influx of carp provoked a great deal of anxiety for all riparian communities who were aware of the multitude of problems that accompanied their introduction. This awareness extended to the issue of carp eating up manoomin roots, including settler communities. In 1935 a flurry of articles appeared in the local newspapers concerning the growing number of carp in the TSW. In one of these articles outlining the concerns, it was explained that the carp were "feeding on the rice in the lower river and doing considerable damage to the fish spawn."[159] So settler communities

[159] "Carps Jumping Falls At Local Locks," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), June 28, 1935, A1.

knew that carp were eating the manoomin roots, but they perceived this issue differently than Anishinaabeg communities did.

For Anishinaabeg, the loss of manoomin meant the loss of food, the loss of traditions, and the loss of a non-human relative. Settlers simply did not hold these same concerns. This is demonstrated by the story of Fred Frayer, a commercial fisherman from Caesarea on Lake Scugog. During the summer of 1935, Frayer appeared in several articles concerning the panic over carp populations. Frayer knew of the issue with carp and manoomin and was quoted saying the carp would "root up the wild rice (manoomin) and consequently wild ducks are not nearly so plentiful around the lake."[160] He was cited as being given a special license to harvest carp from Lake Scugog. This was granted due to the detrimental effect carp were having on the lake, and the worries this problem might have on tourism traffic. But Frayer did not immediately remove the fish. Instead, he penned hundreds of them behind a wire enclosure in the lake. Then, he fed the fish wheat and corn to fatten them up for sale. After two to three weeks, Frayer and his brother collected the live carp from the lake and brought them to Toronto where they were sold.[161] Frayer's experience with the carp demonstrates the way that different groups perceived environmental disasters. Both Frayer and Anishinaabeg communities recognized the impact of carp on manoomin. However, where Anishinaabeg individuals saw the loss of food, Frayer mourned the aesthetic loss of wild ducks on the lake.

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[160] "Many Carp Cornered In Lake Scugog," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 12, 1935, A1.
[161] "1400 Pounds of Carp Were Shipped From Caesarea," *Lindsay Daily Post* (Lindsay, Ontario), July 19, 1935, A1.

Environmental injustice is apparent here. For Anishinaabeg, the carp interfered with their responsibility to the water and their ability to continue these roles.[162]

Additionally, instead of immediately removing the carp from the lake, Frayer held them within a pen to fatten the fish up. This can only be considered an effort to make more money off the fish when he sold them. This meant that Frayer decided that the risk of the carp breaking free from their pen and causing further havoc, as they had been known to do,[163] was worth it for financial gain. This is because what was at stake for Frayer was not nearly as much as what was at stake for Anishinaabeg communities.

This interference with food systems further demonstrated how the TSW was both a product and tool of colonialism. The creation of the TSW destroyed fish, game, and wild rice. Then, when the ecosystem was made vulnerable by the enormous changes, TSW management purposefully introduced non-native species. By prioritizing game fish, other fish were further depleted, some even pushed to a local extinction. Additionally, with growing populations and tourism, increased boat traffic threatened the remaining manoomin stands.

All this happened as Anishinaabeg communities fought to maintain their way of life. The New England Company pressured them for the majority of the nineteenth century to shift their source of food and income to farming instead of hunting, trapping, and fishing, as they had done for time immemorial.[164] Anishinaabeg communities resisted

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[162] Kyle Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society* 9 (September 2018): 125–44, https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109. See also Madeline Whetung,"(En)Gendering Shoreline Law," for more on responsibility concerning the TSW and Anishinaabeg Nations.
[163] McCrimmon, "Carp in Canada," 29.
[164] Whetung-Derrick, "Oshkigmong: The Curve in the Lake," 19.

this pressure, and few community members made the switch to agriculture. Instead, many utilized their hunting, trapping, and fishing skills to adapt in a new age.

CHAPTER THREE

A Shift to Tourism and the New Greater Good

The lumber industry's decline at the turn of the century sparked a period of change for the TSW. As the lumber industry faltered, it now failed to provide the TSW with justification as the region's greater good. However, the tourism industry soon replaced lumber at the top of the cultural and economic hierarchy. From then on, tourism drove the TSW's greater good narrative.

The TSW always required a greater good narrative. It needed something to justify the monumental changes and investment into its completion. When construction slowed, the need for a greater good narrative did not stop. The TSW was not static after completion; it required investment into upkeep and justification for the continued ecological stresses it induced. The TSW's structures needed value or they would inevitably fall into disrepair and risk demolition. After the lumber industry's decline, the TSW's survival hinged on being supported by a new greater good narrative. Tourism offered new generations a value to attach to the TSW.[165]

The TSW was not yet a National Historic Site, but the value attached to it as a tourism destination mirrored nationwide trends. Tourism as the TSW's greater good fit a national narrative seamlessly. Upper middle class tourism proliferated across Canada in the early twentieth century while ideas of Canada, nationhood, and nature developed. The TSW is not identical to other famous destinations such as Banff, and the development of

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[165] Frederick M. Helleiner, "A History of Recreation on the Trent-Severn Waterway," in *Recreational Land Use*, ed. J Marsh and G Wall (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 190, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773595637-014.

these areas is not uniform. The region around the TSW as well as its unusual history developed into a unique type of outdoors destination that performed its own manner of "nationing work".[166]

The shift to tourism profoundly affected the TSW and its riparian communities, but that influence was not unidirectional. Community members shaped much of this transition by actively engaging with the TSW's new reality as they sought to make the waterway work for them. Both communities and governments recognized that they were at a crossroads in the early twentieth century as the lumber industry was no longer sustainable on the waterway. With lumber barons harvesting their timber deeper inland and the improvement of other infrastructures, the TSW was beginning to make less sense as a transportation hub for the lumber industry.

At this point, the TSW faced an existential problem. The resource extraction industry had not only become less important in the region, but it was also less reliant on the waterway. These changes undermined one of the waterway's fundamental purposes—resource extraction and the movement of resources to distant markets. The plan had never been for the TSW to be so dependent on lumber; this reliance was related to another problem. Shipping developments had quickly outpaced the TSW's canals, dredged rivers, and other infrastructure which had been designed in the early to mid 1800s. The type of ships now used for the transportation of goods no longer fit in the TSW's narrow canals and shallow rivers. In addition, not only had ships become bigger, but they were also safer.[167] The dangerous stretch of Lake Ontario, west of the Bay of Quinte, no longer

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[166] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Dog Stranglers in the Park?: National and Vegetal Politics in Ontario's Rouge Valley," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47 (Fall 2013): 97,https://doi.org/10.1353/jcs.2013.0005.
[167] James T. Angus, *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway, 1833-1920* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 396, 404.

posed the safety issues it once had meaning it no longer needed to be bypassed.[168] These developments further undermined the TSW's place as an industrial and commercial corridor.

The existential level of this threat to the TSW is demonstrated by the fact that when it lost its viability as a transportation route it was nearly left unfinished. In 1920, once it became clear that its industrial potential was lost, many Members of Parliament (MPs) pushed against construction to complete the TSW. They felt that at this point the canal was being built solely for tourism. This spurred a level of scrutiny towards the federal government for spending money on the TSW. While federal money had been justified on the TSW as a route to help move western grain east, there was belief that as a tourist destination it primarily benefitted Ontarians, not Canadians.[169] While the TSW was eventually completed, this moment in history underscores the very real threat that the TSW faced.

By the 1920s, there was little doubt that tourism had taken over. As the TSW steadily lost its industrial purpose the number of resorts, cottages, and tourists only grew. But the TSW's allure benefitted from its decline as an industrial corridor. Management sold visitors on the idea of a pristine Canadian wilderness and a blend of civilization and nature unlike anywhere else in the country. The TSW drew on the recent growth of the outdoor tourism industry among the upper middle class across Canada as well as other former British colonies.[170] Genteel steamboats took these visitors on excursions as they

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[168] S.R. Armstrong and J.R. Stratton, *The Trent Valley Route, the Water-Way of Canada*, CIHM/ICMH Digital Series (Peterborough, 1898): 19.
[169] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 377, 401.
[170] For more on the growth of tourism across Canada at the time, see Jamie Benidickson. "'Idleness, Water and a Canoe': Canadian Recreational Paddling Between the Wars," In *Nastawgan*, ed. Bruce W. Hodgins and Margaret Hobbs (Canada: Dundurn Press, 1987), 163-182.; John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of*

left from the TSW's many quaint towns and luxurious resorts. Then they would tour the canals, rivers, and lakes as they admired the dark stands of trees that ran along the shoreline. There were immeasurable activities to be had as fishing, swimming, hunting, exploring, sports, and resting were presented as attractive pastimes for visitors.

A cultural shift accompanied the economic shift along the TSW. Lumber drives had once defined the TSW's society and power structures, but a new economic reality forced these structures to reorganize. Communities embraced these changes and, alongside government organizations, they adapted to the new economy. With their help, the TSW's tourism industry was redefined as the region's greater good. Much of their success with this transition came from building on many of the TSW's fundamental elements.

Tourism, Continuity, and the TSW

Important in understanding how the TSW continued to operate as the region's greater good is realizing that amidst this change there was also cohesion with its past. Despite the enormous changes, the shift to tourism did not necessitate a radical transformation. This is because the tourism industry operated on features of the TSW that had always been a priority. By building on these threads, the TSW's new priorities pivoted, but they did not fundamentally break from the past.

The desire to connect this region of interior Ontario to larger networks strongly motivated the initial impetus to build the TSW. This included connections to southern

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Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).; Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

markets in the United States, the St. Lawrence Seaway, Atlantic markets, as well as the potential for further expansion northwest. This desire to utilize the waterway to connect interior Ontario to a larger network was made clear several times. It was laid out both at the beginning of the TSW's construction as well as decades later during a flurry of building in the mid-nineteenth century. In Nicol Hugh Baird's initial report on the proposed route for the TSW, he underlined the necessity of its construction. Baird claimed that the TSW would offer "a thorough communication for the produce of the Western countries bordering on Lakes Simcoe, Huron and Michigan–particularly Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Huron Territories, and partially Ohio–all rising rapidly into the first scale of commercial importance."[171] Baird then mentioned the importance of access to the St. Lawrence Seaway and the eastern markets it provided, especially New York. The intention to use the TSW to connect interior Ontario to something larger was clear from the outset and was only reinforced as time went on.

In 1898, the Trent Valley Association (TVA) published a report that pushed for completion of the TSW. The TVA outlined fourteen distinct reasons for the completion of the waterway. Among these were multiple arguments that detailed the necessity to connect the region to wider markets. The TVA reiterated the desire to connect the Great Lakes to the Atlantic and argued that the waterway offered the shortest and safest route between the two.[172] They also mentioned numerous times that there were growing markets out west and forcefully declared, "ALL THE ROUTES now underway WILL BE REQUIRED for the transportation of the rapidly growing trade west."[173]

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[171] Nicol Hugh Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake* (Peterborough, 1836), 9, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/aeu.ark:/13960/t5p84zq0n.
[172] Armstrong and Stratton, *The Trent Valley Route, the Water-Way of Canada*, 8.
[173] Armstrong and Stratton, *The Trent Valley Route, the Water-Way of Canada*, 29.

In their respective reports both the TVA and Baird demonstrated a belief that the construction of the TSW would connect Ontario to exterior markets. This is one of the key themes through which the TSW became a part of the region's greater good. By making a connection to exterior markets – deemed an economic necessity – the TSW thus became a necessity itself. But what happened after the TVA's report in 1898 when the new economic reality of the TSW became harder to ignore, when exporting products via water was no longer a necessity? Many MPs lost interest and faith in the project as they failed to see a reason to complete the TSW if it did not serve as a commercial throughway. But despite the overall loss of faith, the TSW's construction continued. This was partly thanks to several local MPs who saw the potential of the TSW as a tourism destination.[174]

The TSW's tourism economy and culture built on this connectivity that people like Baird always wished for. Baird and the TVA argued for the dispersal of the region's goods to outside markets. This did materialize for a time, mostly with the lumber industry, but also on a smaller scale with other industries, such as a nepheline mine and some fisheries. It was when the TSW was marketed as a premier tourism destination that the region opened and extended its reach in ways that Baird had only ever dreamed of. The goods may have changed, but the scope was the same. Only now instead of delivering their goods to consumers, the consumers came to them.

The TSW finally became the network it was intended to be. In large part, this was thanks to its infrastructure and physical layout which enabled it to function as a network. Important in this design is the fact that the TSW is not so much a distinct line and more

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[174] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 402-403.

of a watershed. While a line can be drawn from the Bay of Quinte to Georgian Bay, this was not its true essence. Yes, there were unnaturally direct canals, but the TSW was also built from winding rivers and sprawling interconnected lakes. An analogy can be made to a main street in a town. There is one boulevard but there are also side streets, parks, and squares. The main street may be used by those passing through to get from one end to another, or a local resident coming home. But it is also used by locals to travel within the community. They might take a side street, hop on the main street for a couple of blocks, turn off onto another side street, and reach their destination. The TSW served the same purpose as a main street. While some people used it to travel through, or to leave the region for other areas, a vast amount of traffic was local. For example, a resident could have used it to get from their home on Lake Scugog to Peterborough. They would accomplish this by using the Scugog River to get through Lindsay, then into Sturgeon Lake, before taking the TSW to Peterborough. Lake Scugog might not be directly on the TSW, but it is connected by a navigable river.

For the TSW to function in this way, residents and visitors required an efficient and affordable method of transportation, a waterborne form of public transit. With a unique challenge of navigating tight canals and large lakes, steamboats fit the bill and quickly grew in the region. The steamboat industry's growth matched that of the recreation and tourism industries. Both industries benefitted from the accessibility that steamboats offered. Having a cottage or visiting a resort on a lake with a dirt road suddenly became relatively easy. Steamboats and tourism developed a mutually beneficial relationship. Cottagers required the steamboats to access their homes, and resorts could not have functioned without steamboats providing supplies and transport for

guests. The reverse was true as well. The wave of visitors in the summer provided a steady income supply that made the steamboats profitable.[175] But in the end, both the steamboats and new industries relied on the infrastructure of the TSW to provide a network in the same way the lumber industry had once relied on the TSW's canals and rivers to transport logs. The TSW remained necessary despite the industry change because its function as a network remained vital for the region's economy.

There is some nuance needed when discussing the idea that the TSW as a tourism destination became a network. The TSW already operated as a network long before Baird arrived. Maybe not one that could shuttle hundreds of logs or allow steamboats to travel from Rice Lake to Georgian Bay, but it was a network nonetheless. Moreover, the Indigenous peoples who lived in the region, primarily Anishinaabeg but also Haudenosaunee, had always used connections that relied on the waterway.[176] The TSW provided a route between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron, and functioned as a vital linchpin in the broader Great Lakes and northern Ontario networks. Archaeological work demonstrates that this is true as far back as 3000 years BCE. Archaeologist James Conolly proved that high density sites, that is sites with large, sometimes seasonal populations, were found at centrally positioned locations along the TSW. These locations included river mouths and confluences which allowed good mobility as well as access to food sources.[177] This usage of centrally located sites does not just include the distant past

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[175] Daniel Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway" (R61-2/7-358E: Parks Canada, 1980): 70, https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.873712/publication.html.
[176] Madeline Whetung, "(En)Gendering Shoreline Law: Nishnaabeg Relational Politics Along the Trent Severn Waterway," *Global Environmental Politics* 19 (August 2019): 20, https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_0051.; Jackson Pind, *Students by Day : Colonialism and Resistance at the Curve Lake Indian Day School*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025), 9.
[177] James Conolly, "Hunter-Gatherer Mobility, Territoriality, and Placemaking in the Kawartha Lakes Region, Ontario," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology / Journal Canadien d'Archéologie* 42 (Fall 2018): 189-191.

but also recent use by Anishinaabeg communities. While discussing archaeological finds on the TSW, Gidigaa Migizi, an Anishinaabeg Elder and historian from Curve Lake, mentioned that his people traded as far as Montreal and Fort Albany.[178] In addition to trade, the watershed's network was used to access hunting grounds hundreds of kilometres away from their homes. This is evidenced in testimony from the Williams Treaty Commission with interviewees like Joseph Whetung from Curve Lake. Whetung explained that his people had trapped lands north of Curve Lake, near present day Algonquin, for generations before any treaties were signed.[179]

The watershed that was to become the TSW already functioned as a network. Baird and others knew of this despite failing to give credit in their various reports.[180] The use of 'portages' and pre-existing routes in Baird's survey demonstrate their knowledge of the network.[181] In addition, when referring to a set of information collected, Baird even mentioned an Indigenous guide he worked with, referring to him as "my intelligent guide John Harris (an Indian trader)."[182] Despite a lack of overall acknowledgement, Baird clearly relied on local knowledge of pre-existing routes.

The existence and knowledge of an already present network is where the narrative that positioned the TSW as an improvement originated. There was a belief among those that built and planned the TSW that they had improved the pre-existing

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[178] Gidigaa Migizi, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This Is Our Territory* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: ARP Books, 2018), 84.
[179] Indian Affairs, "Bound Volume Of Testimony Given To A Commission, Chaired By A.S. Williams, Investigating Claims, By The Chippewas & Mississaugas Of Ontario, To Compensation For Land Not Surrendered By The Robinson Treaty Of 1850," 1923, Library and Archives Canada, 191-194.
[180] This was common in the era of surveying and map-making in Canada. See Janet Miron, "The Eagle Said, 'I Will Take You Home Again': Reclaiming Indigenous Histories from the Geological Survey of Canada, c. 1870–1910," *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 56 (May 2023): 93–122, https://doi.org/10.1353/his.2023.a899603.
[181] Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake*, 2-11.
[182] Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake*, 17.

network by building infrastructure and facilitating the extraction of resources. The TSW as a network represented one of many continuous threads from its past that manifested with the shift to tourism.

Despite continuity and similarities, there is a marked difference between these two uses. The watershed as a network before the TSW operated in a more symbiotic way with the watershed. Trade and travel before the TSW did not require a dramatic overhaul nor transformation of the flow of water. The "master variable" of the rivers was more or less maintained.[183] Tourism however, required that an order be imposed on to the watershed. Like logs, tourists could not portage. They needed locks and canals to travel the water's length while enjoying the comfort of their boat.

Tourism justified a transformation and dispossession of the landscape from Anishinaabeg Nations. Like the soon to be established National Parks system, the management and order imposed on the TSW was done to "reserve nature for people."[184] For tourism to thrive in this colonial context there needed to be a total and complete control of the TSW's network. Tourism was both a product of settler colonialism and a tool as it aided in the waves of settlement and urbanisation.

Tourism's Seasonal Rhythm

Riparian communities began to structure their annual rhythm around the tourist season. This represented another common thread from the days of log drives and river

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[183] N. LeRoy Poff et al., "The Natural Flow Regime: A Paradigm for River Conservation and Restoration," *BioScience* 47 (December 1997): 769, https://doi.org/10.2307/1313099.
[184] Claire Elizabeth Campbell, "Governing a Kingdom: Parks Canada, 1911–2011," in *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011,* ed. Claire Elizabeth Campbell (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2012), 4, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781552385272-001.

runners when those influenced the TSW's rhythm. Newspapers now reported on the first cottagers of the season the same way they had once reported the first log drive of the season.[185] The arrival of tourists represented a moment to be celebrated, a beginning to the busy season. Newspapers would often predict what level of tourist season the TSW could expect with optimistic headlines such as "A Thriving Season Looked For At Kawartha Lakes: Increase in Transient Traffic Expected – Cottagers Making Spring Preparations At Their Cottages – Heavy Run of Bass and Lunge is the Experts' Forecast."[186] Articles such as these filled newspapers in the spring months as riparian residents prepared for the onslaught of tourists. The tone of the anticipation in these articles was positive. So much of the local economy revolved around tourism that a good tourist season could promise prosperity for a family. It is therefore no surprise that the warmer months, which meant the arrival of tourists and their wallets, would have been welcomed by the riparian communities. Many of Francis' interviewees described how they would leave places like the lumber stands in the forests to come home to their communities and get work during the tourist season.[187] Even those with full time jobs would still follow a seasonal pattern, taking a hiatus in the summer months for jobs such as guiding.

Amidst the changing economy, people continued to remain mobile as they moved around to capitalize on seasonal opportunities the same way they always had. A few

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[185] "Local Brevities Section," *Peterborough Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 20, 1910, A2. Internet Archive by the City of Peterborough, archive.org.
[186] "A Thriving Season Looked For At Kawartha Lakes," *Peterborough Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), April 22, 1910, A8.
[187] Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway," 78.; Robert Fulton, "Transcript #5," interview with Daniel Francis, July 24, 1979, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection, Trent University Library and Archives, Peterborough Ontario.; Stan Nichols, "Transcript #14," interview with Daniel Francis, August 24, 1979, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.; V.J. LaPlante, "Transcript #17," interview with Daniel Francis, August 18, 1979, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.

decades before the transition, many riparian residents left their homes in the fall and winter to work in lumber camps before joining river drives in the spring and summer. As the region transitioned, people adjusted and calibrated their movement to the rhythm of the tourism season. Like the chaos of the river drives, tourism proliferated in the warm summer months. When asked about his work guiding on Rice Lake, Ray Pomeroy's response reflected this distinct rise in population and general business of the summer. He said, "These hotels were patronized all during the summer months… July and August particularly and into September and during June, maybe even early May by people."[188]

The late fall, winter, and early spring months would have been a stark difference to the summer crowds. In another Daniel Francis interview, when asked about work in the winter at McCrackens Landing, on Stoney Lake, Hilliard Crowe responded, "There was nobody around in the wintertime. Everything was closed up." When prompted by Francis on how people got by, Crowe answered "We just worked for the farmers around the country. … Just wherever we could get a job. Maybe cut some cord wood or some logs or something in the bush."[189] There is a distinct difference in their tone discussing the tourism season compared to the rest of the year. The winter was not dead in any sense of the word, but it was clearly a moment of hibernation for those in the region. It was a slower period as people prepared and rested for the busier and warmer months ahead. Seasonal fluctuations defined the lives of entire communities during this time.

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[188] Ray Pomeroy, "Transcript #31," interview with Daniel Francis, September 26, 1979, 45, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.
[189] Hilliard Crowe, "Transcript #41," interview with Daniel Francis, October 25, 1979, 23, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.

Marketing the TSW

As the region's economy began to largely revolve around tourism, local governments responded accordingly and invested in the new industry. Much of this investment came in the form of advertisements to draw in more tourists. For example, the Trent Waterway Development Association (TWDA) formed in 1920 to find a new economic purpose for the TSW. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is the same organization that also lobbied for the introduction of walleye. While the TWDA pushed for a variety of economic activities, tourism quickly became their main focus. Their advertising campaign was enormous and resulted in tens of thousands of pamphlets being printed and distributed across North America.[190] The TWDA and other organizations' advertisements help fashioned a new narrative for the TSW. Local governments and organizations marketed the TSW as a quintessential Canadian wilderness vacation. It was a respite from cities and an opportunity for visitors from urban areas to regain contact with nature. However, this interaction was to be done in a way deemed appropriate by settler colonialism. This was a carefully managed and sterilized image of wilderness centred around a colonial view of nature.[191] This was already witnessed in the earlier chapter with the prioritization of game fish. Fish and game laws, as well as the artificial introduction of walleye, were explicitly done to promote the growing tourism industry and draw in wealthy sports fishermen.

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[190] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 403.

[191] For more on this, see William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1 (January 1996): 7–28, https://doi.org/10.2307/3985059; Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "The Cultural Politics of Ecological Integrity: Nature and Nation in Canada's National Parks, 1885-2000," *International Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue Internationale d'études Canadiennes* 39–40 (January 2009): 161–89, https://doi.org/10.7202/040828ar.

Tourism pamphlets produced for the TSW provide insight into the stylized version of nature that was being sold to tourists. Take the pamphlet produced in 1901 by the Kawartha Lakes Association. The cover of the pamphlet shows a woman holding a net and a string of fish. Behind her is a picturesque Canadian lake; rocks poke out of the water and trees line the distant shoreline. She is dressed in fine clothes, a blouse, skirt, and fancy hat (Figure 2). The text around her reads "KAWARTHA LAKES.; Health, Rest, Joy.; Canadian Happy Lands for a Holiday."[192] To the left of this image a text describes what one can expect in the Kawartha Lakes.

> For a few weeks outing in quest of rest and health, the Kawartha Lakes are the ideal. So varied in environment, no person can go over the seventy miles without finding just the spot to their taste. Through the altitude of these lakes, the air is laden with the vitalizing ozone and argon which renews the physical frame, restores the nervous system, invigorates the mental faculties, and gives a new lease of bright, cheerful and happy life ... For cruising campers a trip over the Lakes makes a delightful holiday. They possess a beauty of their own, a wildness, a variety and a surprise. The exercise of paddling produces a physical vigor and a mental vitality that tones every fiber of your body and sends you home as fit as a fiddle.[193]

What the Kawartha Lakes Association sold in this pamphlet was a specific image of Canada and Canadian wilderness to urban visitors. It was one that emphasized the quality of the air and the health benefits of the region. It is an untouched, unsullied, and pristine wilderness, one that offers an escape from the ills of urbanism.[194] This image is the pinnacle of colonial concepts of wilderness, a concept which considered nature something to be untouched and not lived in, ignoring the Indigenous people who lived in

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[192] Kawartha Lakes Association. *KAWARTHA LAKES: Health, Rest Joy*, 1901, in Box 56, Pammett Collection, Peterborough Museum and Archives, Peterborough, Ontario.
[193] Kawartha Lakes Association. *KAWARTHA LAKES: Health, Rest Joy*.
[194] This image was not just being sold in the Kawarthas but across North America. See Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (University of Michigan Press, 2018); William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1 (January 1996): 7–28, https://doi.org/10.2307/3985059.

these regions for millennia. This was not a concept unique to the TSW but existed across North America. The beginning of the twentieth century saw a rise in middle and upper class urbanites looking for an escape. It was a colonial gaze that positioned nature as a haven from the city.[195] This gaze was fixed onto the TSW as much as any other destination in Canada.

However, the colonial aestheticization of the TSW did not fit perfectly with that of other Canadian wilderness destinations during this period. While national parks such as Banff wished to erase any presence of infrastructure,[196] this was impossible with the TSW where infrastructure was front and center. Nonetheless, management found ways to work around this. Pamphlets usually did not advertise the infrastructure itself, and workers were tasked with making the built environment blend into the landscape as seamlessly as possible. It was not just the surrounding nature that had to be idyllic; it was the entire TSW itself. Management was aware that they were selling a peaceful and tranquil product to visitors. While the tree-lined shores of the Kawartha Lakes fit in without much effort, other parts of the TSW needed some work. The TSW as a relaxing vacation destination could not co-exist with the TSW as an industrial corridor.

The locks were a point of emphasis in this transition. As visitors travelled the TSW, locks acted as a point of interaction between the infrastructure and tourists. It could be easy to forget one was on a massive infrastructure project while on Stoney Lake or the Severn River. But once visitors passed through the lock gates, they came face to face with

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[195] Heather Green, "'Game Which the Pampered Pleasure Seekers Seek': Hunting Tourism, Conservation, and Colonialism in the Yukon Territory, Canada, 1910–1940," *Journal of Tourism History* 13 (May 2021): 144-145.

[196] Mortimer-Sandilands, "The Cultural Politics of Ecological Integrity."; Theodore Binnema and Melanie Niemi, "'Let the Line Be Drawn Now': Wilderness, Conservation, and the Exclusion of Aboriginal People from Banff National Park in Canada," *Environmental History* 11 (October 2006): 724–50.

the imposition of environmental infrastructure. To maintain the peace and tranquility that had been sold to visitors, these points of interaction had to be as seamless as possible. During the days of river drivers, these points had been wild and rugged, but now lock officials were tasked with gentling the once rough ride. Donald Farmer, who used to work on the locks, explained the change when he said, "If you've got a barge with six guys on it and all the guys know what they're going to do, you can accept a much rougher ride than you can with grandpa and granny and the two grandchildren."[197] Farmer's quote reveals the extent to which the TSW changed and adapted. The very essence of the waterway is the flow of water. It is the singular most important variable, and it was changed to accommodate new clientele. This change reflected the colonial gaze of wilderness that the TSW had to match. Management would be hard pressed trying to sell picturesque Canadian wilderness if their customers were bucked off their boat at every lock.

According to Farmer, management also sought to physically change the spaces surrounding the TSW's infrastructure. In Lindsay, the industrial area around the lock was turned into a park. At other locks they built amenities like washrooms and picnic tables.[198] All this was done to make the TSW a more pleasant place to be, but it is also more than that. Farmer's comments regarding these changes reflect the broader transition in hierarchy on the TSW. Tourists and visitors were now the priority, not the lumber industry. Residents would have also benefitted from the changes. No longer surrounded by an industrial area, their local public spaces were beautified. But for these riparian

[197] Donald Farmer, "Transcript #10," interview with Daniel Francis, August 10, 1979, 31, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.
[198] Farmer, "Transcripts #10," 7-10.

communities, while they benefitted, the unfortunate reality was that it was not changed for them. Instead, the changes were made for the highest paying customers: the tourists and cottagers.

Economic Opportunities of Tourism

With the lumber industry, it was clear who benefitted. In general, the lumber barons walked away with the lion's share of the profits. But the question became much more complicated when tourism took over. It is easier to begin with understanding how the TSW continued to underpin the lives of riparian residents. Tourism became the new all-encompassing activity of the TSW and defined the lives of many communities. Other economic activities did exist: the nepheline mine opened, lumber continued albeit on a smaller scale, and countless other small businesses popped up. But amidst these other businesses, tourism had taken its place at the top. The TSW now served the tourism industry, both locals who profited as well as visitors who came to experience the TSW. It was now the benefits of tourism that justified any negative impacts of its construction. Much of this justification came from the region's economic reliance on tourism. Communities and residents developed countless ways to capitalize off the influx of tourists in the summer months.

Many of these small industries developed an interdependent relationship with one another. Each business and activity made up a part of this heavily interconnected system. Guides relied on resorts to supply customers, and resorts relied on guides to supply an activity. Meanwhile, neither guides nor resorts could function without steamboats delivering their customers. Many of these jobs became lynchpins to the entire tourist

economy. Businesses such as resorts, steamboats, fishing guides, and countless others became an indispensable part of a successful tourist season.

Resorts and hotels provide an example of just how deeply embedded tourism became in the TSW's culture. These businesses often became hubs of the tourism economy as they offered a point of interaction for all the TSW's elements. Guides, steamboat drivers, ice cutters, as well as people selling baskets, blueberries, manoomin, milk, produce, fish, and countless other goods would all stop by a resort at some point. Many of them made daily contact with these resorts.

The hotel industry slightly predated the tourist boom which began in earnest by 1880 before a decline around 1920.[199] There had always been a need for accommodation on the TSW, stretching as far back as the 1830s when Baird made his initial survey of the route.[200] But with the sharp increase in demand, the number and quality of these establishments rose in the early 1900s. The TSW soon became dotted with countless hotels and resorts. Some of them, such as the Viamede and the Mt. Julian Hotel, became iconic, mentioned fondly by multiple interviewees. Many of these resorts soon became generational family businesses as they established a long-lasting presence in the region, passed down for decades.[201] Some hotels would develop a specialty of sorts, such as the Viamede and the Watanassa, which became well known among fishing guides for catering to muskellunge fishermen.[202] Communities and relationships developed between

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[199] Frederick M. Helleiner, "A History of Recreation on the Trent-Severn Waterway," in *Recreational Land Use: Perspectives on its Evolution in Canada,* ed. Geoffrey Wall and John S. Marsh (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 195. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773595637-014.
[200] Baird, *Report On The Most Eligible Route For A Canal Between Lake Simcoe And The Rice Lake*, 3.
[201] Eva Ianson, "Transcript #1," interview with Daniel Francis, July 12, 1979, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.; Donald Fowler, "Transcript #2," with Daniel Francis, July 12, 1979, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.
[202] Whetung, "Transcript #26," 6.

the patrons, fishing guides, resort owners, steamboat captains, and countless other individuals that participated in the economy.

Sports fishing quickly became one of the TSW's most popular activities as many residents chose to guide tourists in the summer. Guides flocked to the major lakes of the TSW to cater to the large number of tourists who stayed at hotels and resorts. Places like Bobcaygeon and Burleigh Falls became strategic points from which guides gathered before they dispersed to various resorts. Bobcaygeon on its own was said to have forty to forty-five guides working at a time during the summer in the 1910s and 1920s.[203] Even smaller places like McCrackens Landing on Rice Lake would have eight to ten guides gathered on the wharf at the end of a day.[204] The number of tourists obviously contributed to the large number of guides, but so did a pre-existing Anishinaabeg and settler culture. Without this base the fishing would not have been nearly as successful.

Fishing was a way of life on the TSW, and guiding was an extension of that. Many guides already had family members, fathers, uncles, or older brothers who guided and showed them the ropes. When asked if it was difficult to get started in guiding Bill Thibadeau shut down the notion that it was a "closed circle." He went on to describe his experience as a young guide saying, "We all worked together. There was a lot of old timers guiding and then us young fellows was coming along and of course most of our fathers always guided, so they had no trouble at all. We were on the water from the time we were little fellows."[205] Thibadeau's experience is typical of many guides on the TSW. Fishing was so deeply embedded in their lives that guiding offered an attractive option

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[203] Bill Thibadeau, "Transcript #40," interview with Daniel Francis, September 24, 1979, 3, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.
[204] Crowe, "Transcript #41," 37.
[205] Thibadeau, "Transcript #40," 3.

for work. However, Thibadeau's claim that there was no closed circle should be scrutinized to an extent considering his father also guided. The circle would not have been closed to him but could have been to others without family members already embedded in the culture. Regardless, Thibadeau's description shows a robust culture of guiding with its own structures and mechanisms to aid in the development of young guides. The terminology Thibadeau uses–"old timers"–shows that this was a culture that greatly valued wisdom and experience. This makes sense considering the importance of traditional knowledge and skills required to guide.

Amidst the rise in wilderness tourism at the turn of the century, guides and clients developed unique relationships that ran counter to the usual power dynamics at play. It was not uncommon for wealthy tourists to feel unease as they now depended on guides whom they often considered beneath them. Out in the field, power structures that elites once sought comfort in were reversed as guides' knowledge provided them authority.[206] The TSW was no exception to this trend. Many of the clientele became repeat customers as they returned year after year and developed relationships with guides. When asked about his first guiding experience, Thibadeau explained that at the age of twelve he would "take out old Mr. Stanton … and just row him around you know. He was one of the old timers that used to come up here."[207] Thibadeau's comments and nostalgic tone prove that a relationship often developed between guides and their clients. This was a deeply

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[206] The relationship between guides and their clients is covered in these articles: Tina Loo, "Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880–1939," *Western Historical Quarterly* 32 (August 2001): 296–319, https://doi.org/10.2307/3650737.; Annie Gilbert Coleman, "The Rise of the House of Leisure: Outdoor Guides, Practical Knowledge, and Industrialization," *Western Historical Quarterly* 42 (November 2011): 436–57, https://doi.org/10.2307/westhistquar.42.4.0436.
[207] Thibadeau, "Transcript #40," 2.

personal business, one where guides and their clients spent hours at a time on the water together.

Despite the positive tone, guiding was not easy work and was often described as hard but enjoyable. It was a highly skilled job that demanded good knowledge of the land and good physical fitness. In the early years, guides paddled their customers around the lakes in a canoe or sometimes a rowboat. Eventually most guides switched to small motorboats as those became more available.[208]

Both Anishinaabeg and settler guides spoke about their experience in a positive light. However, the way they were treated by customers and resorts would have inevitably been different. In the Francis interviews Francis does not inquire regarding each guide's respective treatment based on their identity. But to presume that the lack of evidence equals a lack of difference would be a mistake. The TSW did not exist in a vacuum and instead reflected broader trends in Canada and across North America. Indigenous people were often desired as guides because many settlers perceived them as having a deeper knowledge of the environment.[209] But their subsequent treatment by those who hired them remains an unanswered question.

Steamboats

In the early twentieth-century, private motorboats remained prohibitively expensive, accessible only to the wealthy. This meant that unless individuals used canoes or sailboats, the bulk of travel was done by steamboats.[210] As log booms faded from the

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[208] Pomeroy, "Transcript #31," 46.
[209] Karl Jacoby. *Crimes against Nature Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 84, 162.
[210] Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway," 6.

canals, steamboats entered their "golden age," a period roughly lasting from 1890 to World War II. The timing with tourism is not coincidental, as the two forces enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship. Steamboats facilitated the movement of tourists within the TSW and in essence facilitated the tourism business itself. At the same time, tourists provided a stable customer base and made the steamboats a financially viable business. The TSW's tourism industry may have never reached the heights it did in the early twentieth century without the steamboats. Of course, it was not just tourists that utilized steamboats; riparian residents embraced the opportunities they provided. Residents used steamboats for daily errands, business trips, and summer excursions.

In any discussion about steamboats on the TSW, railways need to be included. While at one point the waterway would have competed with the railways, in the tourism industry the two methods of transportation cooperated. Railway lines shuttled passengers from urban centres such as Toronto, into towns like Peterborough, Lakefield, and Lindsay. From there, the steamboats took over and brought visitors to their various riparian destinations.[211] Steamboat and railway lines were not idle in this mutually profitable relationship as they encouraged it and actively sought out ways to cooperate. A pamphlet from the Kawartha Lakes Association captures this relationship perfectly. On the reverse side of the pamphlet there are three pages. The centre page has a map of the region, the left page has the train schedule as well as a detailed route for visitors from New York and Toronto, and the right side has the steamboat schedule.[212] The pamphlet with both schedules shows the extent to which they worked together as they even timed

[211] Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway," 70.
[212] Kawartha Lakes Association. *KAWARTHA LAKES: Health, Rest Joy*, 1901, in Box 56, Pammett Collection, Peterborough Museum and Archives, Peterborough, Ontario.

their schedules to match each other. Steamboat lines such as the Stoney Lake Navigation Co. advertised this symbiotic relationship in the newspaper. When Stoney Lake Navigation published their summer schedule, they detailed it as follows:

> Until further notice the steamers Stoney Lake or Empress will leave Lakefield on arrival of morning train from Peterborough. Returning to connect with the 4:40 afternoon train for Peterborough. And will leave Lakefield for the lakes on arrival the six o'clock evening train from Peterborough, leaving the lakes next morning in time to connect with the 9:30 train to Peterborough.[213]

Not only did Stoney Lake Navigation advertise their partnership in service with the railways, but their advertisement signals how different communities benefitted. Tourists were constantly moving between Rice Lake, Peterborough, Lakefield, and the Kawarthas. This was not a case of tourists simply gunning straight for their resort or cottage; instead, they spent time in the region's various communities. For example, many steamboats began in Peterborough then made stops at Lakefield before reaching multiple points on Stoney Lake.[214] The watershed bustled with tourists being ferried by the steamboats. The immense number of these boats and the options they offered demonstrate how far ranging their reach was. Visitors could access almost any part of the TSW they wished through a combination of steamboats and railways lines. The options were endless.

The network of steamboats was made possible due to the rise of tourism at the turn of the century. The TSW was not the only place to construct and develop infrastructure for tourists. Revelstoke, British Columbia, witnessed a similar surge as roads and trails were built to accommodate the rising number of visitors in the late

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[213] "The Steamer Stoney Lake or Empress," *Peterborough Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), July 2, 1909, A8.
[214] "Peterboro' To Stoney Lake," *Peterborough Daily Evening Review* (Peterborough, Ontario), July 29, 1909, A4.

nineteenth century.[215] A few decades later, Prince Edward Island also benefitted from growing tourism with an increased number of boats running between the island and the mainland.[216] Infrastructure and tourists went hand in hand.

While the steamboat industry profited enormously from tourism, the steamboats did not just serve tourists; they also benefitted local communities. The interconnectedness is important here. Steamboats did not only serve urban communities who wished to visit rural areas, it also worked the other way around. For example, farmers south of Peterborough, near Rice Lake, would frequently make use of the steamboats to travel into town for errands. Ray Pomeroy was an interviewee of Daniel Francis' who described in detail the usage of steamboats by riparian communities. Pomeroy had grown up in Gores Landing on Rice Lake and explained that a steamboat called *The Geneva* travelled daily between Gores Landing and Peterborough with a few stops in between. According to Pomeroy, the *Geneva* left Gores Landing every morning at 7:00am and arrived in Peterborough by 10:00am. Then the *Geneva* waited until 3:00pm to give people time in Peterborough before it departed again for Gores Landing. During that time, people usually shopped and ran other errands in town. While there was no food on the *Geneva*, Pomeroy's description presented a lively boat ride on the return trip with violins being played and people dancing in the late afternoon and early evening.[217] Local residents like Ray Pomeroy and his family used steamboats regularly when they operated. The steamboats can be considered as a form of public transit. This would have helped bolster

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[215] Jenny Clayton, "'A National Playground Both in Summer and Winter': Civic Groups, Ethnic Organizations, and Tourism Promotion in Revelstoke, BC, 1890–1920," *Histoire Sociale* 49 (June 2016): 389–408, https://doi.org/10.1353/his.2016.0010.
[216] Edward MacDonald and Alan MacEachern, "Rites of Passage: Tourism and the Crossing to Prince Edward Island," *Histoire Sociale* 49 (June 2016): 289–306, https://doi.org/10.1353/his.2016.0002.
[217] Pomeroy, "Transcript #31," 8-9.

a thriving economy as residents from smaller towns such as Gores Landing were able to access goods and services in Peterborough. There were numerous steamboats that catered to these smaller communities during this time. Moses Marsden, an Anishinaabeg man and former Chief of Alderville First Nation, worked as a river driver on the TSW.[218] Marsden spoke about the popular Hastings to Peterborough steamboat route. He emphasized how busy Rice Lake was with steamboats in the early twentieth century. Marden said it was common to see two or three passing by at a time.[219] Marden and Pomeroy's descriptions demonstrate the connectedness that steamboats offered communities. In an era when it was not possible to quickly drive between communities, the steamboats allowed riparian communities to become connected. Towns like Lakefield, Lindsay, Gores Landing, and Peterborough had the distance between them reduced by the steamboats.

Question of Choice

Many of these jobs, whether it be working on a steamboat or guiding tourists, gave residents options and autonomy. This contrasted with the logging industry where individuals were often at the mercy of larger corporations or wealthy individuals. The tourism industry offered an increased level of individuality. But still these jobs were not perfect.

This chapter has largely emphasized the positive aspect of the commercial shift towards tourism and recreation. This is not in error; communities embraced their new commercial opportunities, and many sources reference their experience with a positive

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[218] Pind, *Students by Day,* 8.
[219] Moses Marsden, "George Cobb Tape #9," interview with George Cobb, June 20, 1965, 11, in George Cobb Tapes, Trent University Library and Archives, Peterborough, Ontario.

tone. But there is a difficult and delicate balance at play here. How much choice did riparian residents have in the matter?[220] In the Williams Treaty Commission, Daniel Whetung raised the issue when discussing hunting. Whetung said that many young men from Curve Lake guided because "they make more money by guiding those Americans who come up here than in hunting."[221] Whetung's point is focused on the issue of access to hunting grounds but his response speaks to one of the issues with presenting the transition to tourism as an overwhelmingly positive shift without further analysis. There was not a plethora of other options at that time for many residents. As has been discussed, the TSW's economy had always been seasonal. Tourism related jobs simply replaced the lumber jobs that had existed previously. But despite the lack of options, why do interviewees still speak so positively about these jobs? There is certainly an element of nostalgia at play here, but there is also something more.

Tourism offered economic opportunity. Take Port Severn on Georgian Bay which served as the TSW's western outlet. James Angus' analysis of Port Severn offers a perfect example of the make or break situation many towns were in. Much like the Port Hope and Bay of Quinte debate, the Georgian Bay entrance to the TSW was the subject of a fierce fight. Ultimately, Port Severn was picked and in 1915 the lock opened to boat traffic. It quickly became one of the busiest locks in all of Canada, and at its peak saw an average of seventy-five boats per day pass through its gates. The lock revitalized Port Severn and made it the TSW's western hub of tourism and recreation. Countless cottagers and tourists passed through the town for supplies, goods, and transportation. The lock

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[220] The topic of rural communities balancing the benefits and issues of tourism is covered in Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 39–62.
[221] Indian Affairs, "Bound Volume Of Testimony Given To A Commission," 204.

secured Port Severn's economic future, but it almost did not happen. Had another town been chosen for the lock, Port Severn would have never recovered from the departure of the lumber industry, and residents would have been forced to leave the town for opportunities elsewhere.[222] Angus' analysis of Port Severn demonstrates one of the key reasons for residents' optimism regarding the tourism industry. The departure of the lumber industry could have ruined many of these towns had tourism not been there to pick up the slack.

The question of whether there was freedom of choice is a difficult one to answer on the TSW during the rise of the tourism industry. It is easy to dismiss the experiences of those who worked as guides, hotel employees, or other related fields, by saying that this was their only choice. But that would be inaccurate. Tourism related jobs were often highly desirable, in part because residents found ways to make a living while practicing traditional skills. These jobs were often seasonal which reflected a way of life many would have been used to in the early 1900s.

Part of the reason that residents considered these jobs desirable is because they were often derived from traditional activities. Fishing, one of the TSW's biggest tourism draws, was an activity deeply embedded in Anishinaabeg and settler communities' cultures. Anishinaabeg communities had fished the TSW's waters for time immemorial before the shift to tourism, and settler communities had been fishing since the beginning of settler colonialism. This opportunity to work jobs that operated within pre-existing traditions was capitalized on by riparian communities. When interviewees spoke of guiding, they did so happily and with a strong sense of pride. This comes across in Daniel

[222] Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, 382-84.

Francis' interview with Bill Thibadeau. When asked about what made a good guide, Thibadeau spoke at length about the importance of traditional knowledge.

> It's knowing the depths of the water and having an idea where the fish are at a certain time of year… whatever time of year you're fishing, whether it's in the spring or summer or fall. The fish move accordingly, so you gotta fish accordingly. And a guide knowing what he's experienced all these years, is about … they have the best chance of catching a fish today while they're scarce as anybody there is that I know of. Because we can go out and we can go into a place where there's five or six boats and we can catch fish and they can't. It's knowing the depth of the water and year after year, for so many years you've gotta know the weed beds. You've gotta know exactly where you're fishing and how the fish come in and out of them weed beds at certain times. Sometimes you'll go to a weed bed and you'll have to … you'll say 'well this isn't the right time, we gotta wait till 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock' and you just keep fishing till the fish start biting and they'll only bite for so long and quit. And then you go to another weed bed and wait until coming on evening and there'd be another time they'll bite.[223]

Thibadeau went on for a while longer as he bragged at times about the number of muskellunge he could still bring in even at his old age. But there is something deeper behind his lighthearted fish stories. They reveal a sense of pride in his work, pride that stemmed from the experience and skill required to be good at this job. Thibadeau reiterates several times the years of experience he and the other guides had. This was an activity that separated them from the outsiders; there were those who could and those who could not. Thibadeau's comments prove that the influx of tourists provided many residents work that they could be proud of. Guiding was not something that could be done by just anyone, it had to be done by a local with local expertise. Guiding put residents' skills at a premium and placed them in control.

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[223] Bill Thibadeau, "Transcript #40," 6-7.

Thibadeau is on to something with his emphasis on the importance of local knowledge. Residents of Curve Lake were quick to take advantage of these jobs which depended on traditional knowledge and skills. If tourists were willing to pay a premium for these skills, why should locals not capitalize on this opportunity? Mae Whetung-Derrick, a scholar from Curve Lake First Nation, has argued that "it was traditional skills that were always of foremost importance in the economy."[224] Whetung-Derrick is correct in this statement as these traditional skills were crucial in the TSW's tourism economy. Visitors were sold on a Canadian wilderness adventure. This was something that urbanites would have been willing to pay for and happy to trust in the expertise of locals. Oftentimes local culture was even marketed in this manner. In a pamphlet regarding the Kawartha Lakes, they were described as "in the musical language of the Mississauga Indians, is referred to as Kawartha gawmig papenadah mowinakeen, the Bright Waters and Happy Lands."[225] This sentence however reveals a dark side to the premium now placed on traditional skills. Much of this market was still created by a colonial gaze which viewed Anishinaabeg culture and the benefits of the TSW as intertwined. The TSW was believed to provide pristine nature and health, the "musical" language of the Anishinaabeg and the sunny happy interpretation of Kawartha were proof of this.[226] This reality reaffirms the settler colonial context within which the TSW existed. The tourism industry, while capitalized on by locals, was designed for and catered to settlers.

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[224] Mae Whetung-Derrick, "Oshkigmong: The Curve in the Lake - a History of the Mississauga Community of Curve Lake: Origins of the Curve Lake Anishnabek," *Peterborough Historical Society Occasional Papers* no. 35 (Peterborough, ON: Peterborough Historical Society, 2015): 20.
[225] Kawartha Lakes Association. *KAWARTHA LAKES: Health, Rest Joy*, 1901, in Box 56, Pammett Collection, Peterborough Museum and Archives, Peterborough, Ontario.
[226] Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011), 188.

But despite the inherent problems, locals capitalized on these expectations. In an interview with Daniel Francis, Stella Grier, who had a cottage on Stoney Lake, recalled that families from Curve Lake would come to sell goods to cottagers. Grier explained that when she was a child these families paddled their canoes from dock to dock as they sold goods such as blueberries and woven baskets. Grier recalled that the baskets were especially popular among cottagers.[227] In addition to these goods, manoomin became popular among tourists and was considered a local delicacy. Ernest Brown explained that American tourists were enamoured by what they called 'wild rice'. Brown described how Americans became captivated by manoomin.

> Americans used to come here, they'd want to buy it you know. You'd tell them what you were doing… gathering rice and they'd say 'gosh, have you got any?'. 'Bring me down four or five pounds' they'd say. Well at that time, it was only $1.00 a pound. But it was good rice. And then I'd pretty near run out myself. People would come here, they'd want a couple pounds you know, and stuff like that…. It didn't last.[228]

Brown and Grier's stories demonstrate the tension of the tourism industry and Anishinaabeg identity. Visitors held expectations for the TSW that were defined by a colonial gaze. Anishinaabeg communities knew this and took advantage of the opportunities it offered. While some might be dubious about celebrating the success of these communities due to the lingering colonial context, something else beyond simple economic prosperity was being achieved. Amid a well-documented colonial effort to assimilate Indigenous people into settler society, their continuing use of traditional knowledge undermined those efforts. By working as fishing and hunting guides, basket

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[227] Stella Grier, "Transcript #3," interview with Daniel Francis, July 20, 1979, 56-58, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.
[228] Ernest Brown, "Transcript #18," interview with Daniel Francis, August 29, 1979, 51, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection.

weavers, foragers, manoomin harvesters, and other jobs, Anishinaabeg were able to continue a way of life that colonial efforts had gone to great lengths to try and eliminate.

Mae Whetung-Derrick points out that this would have been an enormous hindrance to the efforts of the New England Company, the mission who controlled Curve Lake for the majority of the nineteenth century. This is because the New England Company attempted to force Curve Lake residents to prioritize farming as a means of income and sustenance. By shifting to tourism, Curve Lake residents developed new streams of income that utilized their traditional knowledge. With these opportunities, they did not have to live the settler colonial life the mission tried to impose upon them.[229] Other scholars such as Daniel Francis have also elaborated on this benefit to the new labour markets on the TSW. Francis argued that the emphasis on tourism and recreation created a society that emphasized interdependence between locals and visitors. Francis' argument then builds on Whetung-Derrick's as he emphasized the independence that fishing guides enjoyed, which enabled them to continue a seasonal pattern of employment.[230] Both Francis and Whetung-Derrick point to the shift towards tourism as a positive attribute for those who took up tourism related jobs. The independence as well as the ability to continue one's way of life were important factors for riparian residents. There is a reason that the interviewees cited in this chapter speak so fondly of their days working jobs such as guiding.

So, despite the shadowy context of colonialism hanging over the tourism industry, many enjoyed the changes it brought. As Francis' interviewees and Whetung-Derrick have both shown, these were desirable jobs.

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[229] Whetung-Derrick, "Oshkigmong: The Curve in the Lake," 20.
[230] Francis, "Towards a History of the Kawartha-Otonabee Sector of the Trent-Severn Waterway," 79.

Conclusion

The TSW's shift to tourism was multifaceted. To paint it as simply another form of colonialism would be inaccurate and would erase the agency of riparian residents who used the shift to undermine assimilation efforts. However, it would be equally wrong to frame it as inherently good. The tourism industry still existed within the context of settler colonialism that shaped it in many aspects. Additionally, the shift to tourism allowed the TSW to continuously be framed as an improvement to the landscape. This framing disregarded much of the damage done. Tourism became the raison d'être of the TSW, for tourism to operate the waters had to be a certain level for navigation, the locks had to appear a certain way, and the landscape had to adjust to the colonial gaze. The floods that happened, the fish and animals that died, the pollution, the money spent on maintenance, and countless other downsides to the waterway were now justified by the importance of the tourism industry. Despite the monumental changes experienced by the TSW, its fundamental purpose did not change. It was a network built to connect this region of Ontario to the broader nation, only now the customers came to them, and residents held more power than they had for decades.

CONCLUSION

Threads from the Past and New Beginnings for the TSW

Just off Nassau Mills Road between Trent University and the town of Lakefield is Lock 24. It is a typical lock of the Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW) with its wide green lawns that slope down to the stone canal walls. Among the cedar, spruce, and poplar trees are picnic tables, benches, and other amenities for visitors.

On a warm summer evening, there are no boats, yet the space teems with life. A family sets up their picnic while kids pass around a soccer ball. There are people fishing off the side, carefully spaced out along the canal, following the unwritten rule of not crowding a fellow fisher. No one here is trying to catch a record size fish, but rather it is the convenience and escape from urban Peterborough that attracts them.[231] The lock makes for a peaceful environment. Among the fishers are people who come to enjoy the park. Dog walkers use the long stretches of grass to run their dogs, throwing a stick or ball. Cyclists park their bikes and rest for a moment on one of the many benches by the water. Groups fire up their barbeques as the smell of summer dinners fills the air. Nearby, some friends gather for what appears to be a birthday.

Today, Lock 24 can be seen as a success story. Most cities and towns desire a park this beautiful and this popular among their residents. But two hundred years ago, this outcome would have been considered an abject failure. When James Angus described the first boat to sail through a completed TSW, he said "The early settlers in the Newcastle District would have been disappointed had they seen the 30-foot-long *Irene*

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[231] This is based off the author's conversations with people at Lock 24.

knifing its way westwards through the Kawartha Lakes, only a token image of their grand vision of steamboats bringing trade goods all the way from England to exchange for farm goods grown on their estates."[232] Angus' depiction is apt. Like a summer evening on Lock 24, these images are a far cry from the industrial corridor of river drivers and ships carrying grain that many had dreamt of. However, the present-day stage of the TSW is the result of gradual changes, not a distinct break from the past.

The TSW's journey to today is one of slow economic and cultural transition. For some workers on the TSW in the early twentieth century, they would not be surprised at its present state. When Donald Farmer put in picnic tables and restrooms at some of the locks, he would have had an inkling of what was to come.[233] The TSW's locks were not the only place that experienced this change. Many of its ebbs and flows reflected nationwide initiatives to build parks and bolster a growing upper middle class tourism industry.

With these fluctuations, the TSW was never static. Its riparian residents worked to transform the space to adapt to these changes. They built hotels and resorts, opened small businesses, and capitalized on the opportunities that this new reality offered. Entire cultural and economic ecosystems developed around the TSW. Each business that participated in this ecosystem played a pivotal part and without them, the system would have failed.

As the TSW and its communities embraced these changes, the landscape was transformed, and over the course of a generation, became almost unrecognizable. While

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[232] James T. Angus, *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway, 1833-1920* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 406.
[233] Donald Farmer, "Transcript #10," interview with Daniel Francis, August 10, 1979, 31, in Parks Canada Transcripts Collection. Trent University Library and Archives, Peterborough, ON.

the changes made during the TSW's shift to recreation were targeted at tourists and outsiders, locals also benefitted from the beautification of what was once industrial infrastructure. Riparian residents had once fought for space alongside the lumber stands but now the space is theirs. If it was a battle of attrition, they won.

The shift towards recreation and movement away from extractive resources is considered by many to be a good thing, but it also muddies the narrative. The TSW very much operates in a grey area, a zone of nuance and complexity. The image of the TSW on a summer evening is one of quaint nature, cedar trees along the side of the canal, and red-brick Parks Canada buildings that look just like the ones in Pukawaskwa or Banff. Underneath these images is something darker. The rivers and lakes never died but they are scarred, and they are still healing.[234]

The topic of water levels continues to be a point of tension in the Trent-Severn watershed but has eased in recent years. The Parks Canada team that manages the TSW has a long list of priorities that change with the seasons. Among these priorities are navigational capabilities, flood prevention, recreation, protecting ecological integrity, and generating hydroelectric power. These priorities are complex and rarely operate in tandem. Parks Canada is transparent that certain priorities, mainly navigational capacities in the summer, rank higher than others.[235] These competing priorities remain a point of tension in the region. Much as they always have, landowners continue to complain about the water levels on their shoreline properties, however, other priorities often rank higher

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[234] Benjamin Kapron raises this idea of the TSW's survivance in his article "Other-than-Human Survivance Against the Trent-Severn Waterway," *Arcadia* 4 (Spring 2025), https://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/9935.

[235] This information is publicly available on Parks Canada's Trent-Severn Waterway website. See https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/on/trentsevern/info/infonet/gestion-eau-water-management.

than the recreational needs of riparian residents. Therein lies the complexity of recreation becoming a top priority. Even within recreation, there are multiple conflicting interests. A cottage owner on Upper Stoney Lake might feel frustrated with low water levels as water is drawn from their lake. Meanwhile, a boater coming up through the Bay of Quinte will be happy to see that they can travel the TSW safely, thanks to water drawn from the upper lakes. In addition, as more water infrastructure has been built, those affected by the decisions of TSW management has only grown. This is visible in this flow chart of the Trent River watershed (Figure 3.) Even lakes that traditionally are not considered part of the TSW are now entangled with it.

Evidence of the continuing conflicts over water levels comes in the form of the Coalition for Equitable Water Flow (CEWF). The CEWF was formed in August 2006 as a coalition representing the riparian residents of fifty-five lakes within the Trent River watershed. Increased frustration among these riparian residents with TSW management led to its creation. Residents felt that TSW management neglected the ecological impact on their lakes when managing the Trent canal water levels. As such, the CEWF now works with TSW management as well as other government entities, such as the Ministry of Natural Resources, to promote their interests. This has helped develop a more integrated plan for water management, one that understands the interests of riparian residents who live not only directly on the TSW but within the entire watershed.[236] While the CEWF has gained a voice, it does not represent everyone but rather the interests of cottagers, a generally wealthy and privileged group.

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[236] "History and Goals – Coalition for Equitable Water Flow," https://www.cewf.ca/about-cewf/about/history-and-goals.

The need for the CEWF demonstrates that the TSW continues to spark conflict in the region. Manoomin is another key example of this. Manoomin stands in the watershed have come a long way since the TSW's construction initially decimated them but have yet to return to pre-TSW levels. Tension exists between cottagers in the Kawarthas and Anishinaabeg Nations, especially Curve Lake First Nation, who advocate for the plant. The TSW was fundamentally bad for manoomin due to the nature of its water control. In addition, damage to manoomin did not end with construction as the TSW's shift to recreation caused further issues.

The presence of cottagers and increased recreational usage almost immediately created new problems for manoomin.[237] Elder Gidigaa Migizi discusses this in his book *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This Is Our Territory*. Migizi explains how changes in cottage culture and technology worsened the plant's health. As steamboats gradually became less common, the rising number of personal motorboats became an issue. Motors ripped up plants and cottagers pushed for higher water levels for their recreational activities.[238] Today, many cottagers remain at odds with Anishinaabeg communities over manoomin. Many cottagers resent that manoomin gets in the way of their recreational activities, mostly those involving high speed motorboats, and dislike the 'weedy' appearance it gives the lake. They also wish that water levels were kept higher, something that puts them directly in confrontation with the plant, which thrives in

[237] The impact of the TSW on *manoomin* during the nineteenth and early twentieth century is discussed at length in Chapter two.
[238] Gidigaa Migizi, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This Is Our Territory* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: ARP Books, 2018), 85.

shallow water. Cottagers often prefer a deep lake that is free of vegetation.[239] Cottagers and recreation have struggled to co-exist with manoomin since the outset, and this is a direct result of the TSW. Without the TSW, although there would still be cottagers and settler communities, it would be nowhere near the same scale that there is today. Additionally, regarding water levels, the TSW created an expectation and culture of managing the lakes. The idea that manoomin is something that can be removed or that water levels can be raised to improve the lakes, is an ideology that parallels the TSW's narrative of improving the landscape. Like these narratives, the continuous attacks and pressures on manoomin as an indirect result of the TSW demonstrate the ongoing slow violence that has afflicted Anishinaabeg communities since the beginning of its construction.[240]

Anishinaabeg communities actively fought back against the damage done to manoomin. Black Duck Wild Rice (BDWR) is an example of this ongoing fight. BDWR is a family-owned grassroots enterprise based out of Curve Lake First Nation. James Whetung, the founder of BDWR, had learned about the process of harvesting manoomin, while also hearing of non-Indigenous people intending to capitalize off manoomin. Whetung felt compelled to act. As BDWR slowly evolved, he shifted his focus in the early 2000s from a business to a social enterprise as the Curve Lake community became more involved. Whetung even began to provide harvesting equipment to other members.

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[239] Drew Hayden Taylor, *Cottagers and Indians* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2019); Sarah W. Krotz, "The Affective Geography of Wild Rice: A Literary Study," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 42 (December 2017): 13-14.
[240] See scholars like Madeline Whetung.

Today, BDWR's main priorities remain the restoration of manoomin in the region and increased access for the Curve Lake community.[241]

Both BDWR and the CEWF exist to represent the interests of their respective groups in the region. The CEWF is directly linked to the TSW as the organization exists to ensure that the interests of riparian residents are represented in water management. BDWR is not linked as directly to the TSW, but the group is actively working to repair the consequences of its construction. The existence of these two organizations is emblematic of the current state and history of the TSW. They are both part of a long history of resistance against colonial infrastructure. BDWR and the CEWF exist as part of a larger story of grassroots movements that formed to combat the large overarching organizations that consolidated power.[242] The CEWF is a continuation of the riparian individuals who pushed back against the raising and lowering of water levels without consultation. The Drowned Lands Association, as well as the numerous private individuals who sued the government for compensation, are its cultural and ideological progenitors. Meanwhile, BDWR is a continuation of a long history of Anishinaabeg adaption to and resistance against the TSW and its settler colonial context, which attempted to assimilate and destroy their way of life. Anishinaabeg communities legally fought TSW management by filing for claims when their manoomin stands were drowned. Anishinaabeg community members around the TSW also moved manoomin

[241] Paula Anderson and James Whetung, "Black Duck Wild Rice: A Case Study," Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2018): 5-20.
[242] See Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire* for concepts of the power, rivers, and infrastructure.

seeds to other areas when they realised these stands were at risk to ensure the plant's survival.[243] BDWR is a continuation of these efforts.

BDWR and the CEWF demonstrate that the TSW continues to create tension in the region. Both organizations were born out of unresolved conflicts. The CEWF was formed because even after almost 100 years, TSW management had yet to determine a water management strategy that adequately considered riparian communities. BDWR was similarly formed because the TSW's construction continued to be detrimental to manoomin stands and without intervention, the stands would continue to disappear. Additionally, cottagers still clash with Whetung, albeit less frequently than before.[244] Despite the ongoing conflicts, many visitors to the TSW are unaware of these underlying tensions, or the continued slow violence against the Anishinaabeg riparian communities perpetuated by the TSW. The tranquil image presented to visitors obscures this reality.

Current Issues with Commemoration

The recreational nature of the TSW today shrouds the challenging elements of its past and present. Understanding the damage that this waterway once inflicted and continues to inflict while paddling through its waters or enjoying a sunset is not easy. This is the nature of slow violence; it is inherently difficult to perceive by those not directly affected.[245] But the invisible nature of slow violence is not the only reason for the

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[243] Petr Cizek, "Guardians of Manomin: Aboriginal Self-Management of Wild Rice Harvesting," *Alternatives* 19 (May-June 1993): 31.
[244] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, afterword to *Cottagers and Indians*, by Drew Hayden Taylor, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2019), 65-66.
[245] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

general public's unawareness of the TSW's negative aspects. It is also a result of the commemoration efforts done for the TSW, which have hardly improved since 1929.

While Parks Canada tweaked their wording, the current commemoration of the TSW remains a natural evolution of the centuries-old narrative used to justify its construction. The main issue is that the word "improvement" still features front and centre, as the first line reads, "In 1833 the legislature of Upper Canada authorized improvements to the waterways of the Newcastle District, the first of which was a wooden lock here at Bobcaygeon."[246] In public declarations of the TSW's value as a heritage site, Parks Canada doubles down on this narrative. Their explanation emphasizes several times the value of the infrastructure itself. They praise the completeness and sheer size of the TSW as well as the monumental value of some of its most well-known features, such as the Peterborough Lift Lock.

Parks Canada's commemoration demonstrates how deeply embedded ideologies of high modernity and settler colonialism are with the TSW. The emphasis on its completeness is an ideological through point to the days when the TSW was first built. The same ideology that measured the resources surrounding the TSW as feet of timber to be sold, or hydropower to be generated, appears in attitudes towards the TSW today. Behind the scenes, this ideology is pervasive as well. In the 2002 Management Plan for the TSW, Parks Canada refers to its construction as having "re-engineered the natural, cultural and economic landscape of the region".[247] These are not simply words on a

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[246] Parks Canada, *Trent – Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada* (Bobcaygeon, ON, 2008), https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=560&i=53286

[247] Parks Canada, *Trent – Severn Waterway and Peterborough Lift Lock National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan* (2022), 5.

plaque or a handful of people trying to glorify the TSW, but rather a deep issue with the way in which we as Canadians understand and present environmental infrastructure.[248]

As this thesis has shown, alongside the work of scholars such as Madeline Whetung, Gidigaa Migizi, Mae Whetung-Derrick, and Ben Kapron, the TSW was deeply flawed and damaging to the environment and culture of the region. It operated in tandem with settler colonialism by precipitating slow violence against Anishinaabeg communities. The raised waters flooded important cultural sites and permanently destroyed Anishinaabeg land. It also drastically changed the shorelines and upended a delicate balance and part of the ecosystem, in an area that was incredibly important to Anishinaabeg ways of life. On top of this, the environmental damage inflicted was enormous. Numerous species were killed off and others were enormously depleted. As native species died, synonymous with settler colonialism, the TSW allowed the entrance of invasive species, such as carp, which furthered the damage already done. Amidst this massive change, Anishinaabeg communities fought the Canadian Government's efforts to assimilate them. The New England Company may have left in 1901, but the TSW attempted to continue its work.

While communities showed incredible resolve in adaption and cultural survival, the situation today should not be interpreted as a glowing success of the TSW. Unfortunately, this is the narrative that has been set out by Parks Canada. It does not need

[248] For more discussion on concepts of infrastructure and modernity see Tina Loo, "High Modernism, Conflict, and the Nature of Change in Canada: A Look at *Seeing Like a State*," *Canadian Historical Review* 97 (March 2016): 34-58.

to be this way. Although current commemoration has fallen short, heritage plaques and public history are a potential solution to educate the public.[249]

New commemoration efforts must be cautious. It is not enough to apologize for the past damages as this would only reinforce the notion that the TSW today is static and the violence it once inflicted is now gone.[250] In addition, apologies have served as tools to whitewash the continued building of environmental infrastructure.[251] Instead, there must be a combined understanding of the TSW's past and present with consultation and control given to Anishinaabeg communities. Canadians must learn to be skeptical of the settler colonial narratives that enable massive environmental infrastructure projects.

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[249] Sarah W. Krotz explores this concept regarding place names around the TSW in her article "The Affective Geography of Wild Rice: A Literary Study."
[250] Brittany Luby, *Dammed: The Politics of Loss and Survival in Anishinaabe Territory* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020), 171-72.
[251] Anna Willow, "Destruction and Disjuncture: Ironies of Apology, Exhibition, and Ethnography along British Columbia's Dammed Peace River," *Ethnohistory* 67 (January 2020): 49-74.

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APPENDICES

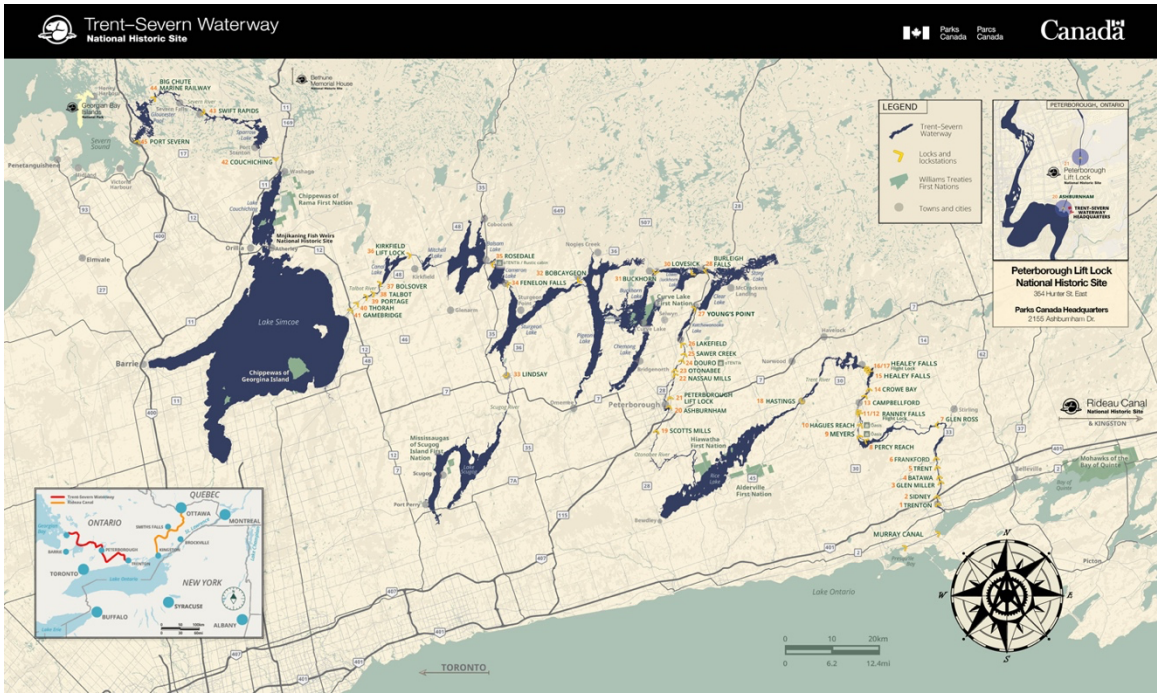

Figure 1. Map of the Trent-Severn Waterway by Parks Canada. *Visitor Map*, 2025. https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/on/trentsevern/visit/cartes-maps.

Figure 2. Pamphlet by the Kawartha Lakes Association. *KAWARTHA LAKES: Health, Rest Joy*, 1901. Pammett Collection, Box 56, Peterborough Museum and Archives.

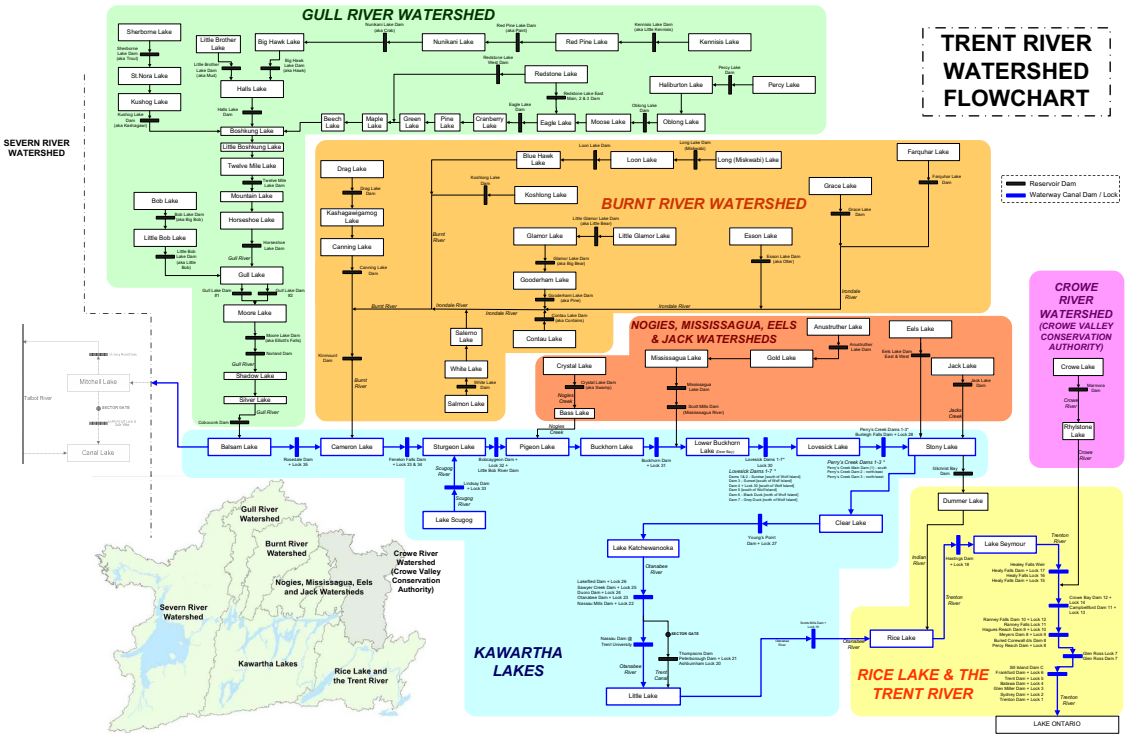

FIGURE A2 - Trent River Watershed Flow Chart

Figure 3. Map of water flow by the Coalition for Equitable Water Flow. *Trent River Watershed Flow Chart*, 2025. https://www.cewf.ca/map-how-the-water-flows