REPORT TO OTTY LAKE PROPERTY OWNERS, FEBRUARY 1974.

After the Ontario Ministry of the Environment completed its original water quality and sewage disposal surveys on Otty Lake in 1971, your Committee began a water quality monitoring programme to ensure that the pollution abatement measures established by Ontario were effective. Unfortunately, by the end of 1972 water pollution levels were still rising.

We assumed that Ontario would share our concern and the Hon. James Auld, The Minister of the Environment, was asked to assist. He indicated that some action would be taken but nothing happened. We then approached the Hon. Bert Lawrence, the senior Ontario Cabinet Minister responsible for environmental matters. He expressed concern and said that he would personally look into the problem.

With this assurance a meeting was arranged with the Municipalities of North Burgess and North Elmsley to discuss the situation and to arrange for remedial action. It was held in Perth during January 1973 and Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Douglas Wiseman the provincial member for Lanark, and representatives from adjacent municipalities were invited to attend.

Mr. Wiseman's reaction was negative. He said that he opposed what we were doing and would not attend. Mr. Lawrence was asked to speak to the delegates during the luncheon, but as he was unable to attend he sent a telegram to support our objectives.

The evidence presented by environmental experts at the meeting supported our contention that Otty Lake was seriously over-populated and that immediate controls were needed. The representatives of the municipalities were asked to introduce temporary building restrictions until more satisfactory pollution control measures were introduced.

The proposals for more effective pollution control and better environmental management were submitted to Mr. Lawrence. The work was to be financed on a fifty-fifty by Ontario and your Committee, and Mr Lawrence asked us to submit our proposals in writing. We did, and on April 25, 1973 he wrote back to say that we would hear from him in a short time. This is the last communication we have had with Mr. Lawrence.

We also sent follow-ups to the Reeves of North Burgess and North Elmsley. We did not receive acknowledgements from North Burgess and an unsatisfactory reply was received from North Elmsley long after the time for effective action had passed.

In June 1973 Mr. Wiseman convened a meeting in Carleton Place to discuss the procedures for land severances and land sub-divisions in Lanark County. Your Chairman and Mr. Donald Hill, the Vice-Chairman for Environmental Management, attended. The approach seemed to be designed to explain how people interested in dividing and selling land should proceed. We were worried as a number of these people owned large parcels of land on recreational lakes in Lanark and we knew that many of the lakes had been classified as over-populated by the Government itself. When we asked about the problems of environmental control the answers were defensive and impractical. Mr. Wiseman seemed to have little understanding or concern.

At the beginning of the 1973 season we had decided to broaden our water quality testing system and this work was undertaken by Dr. Fred Green and a number of our younger members. By the end of June we knew that the water was continuing to deteriorate but we were puzzled by a report that had been published by Ontario.

In February 1973, just after the meeting with the municipalities, the Ministry of the Environment issued a report on Otty Lake water quality levels based upon the 1971 survey. Although it was two years late it suggested that the water quality in 1971 had been good. We were surprised by the wide difference between this material and the results we were obtaining, and we thought that the Lake was deteriorating at an extremely rapid rate. Three months later Dr. Green discovered an unpublished report on the water quality levels taken by Ontario during the 1971 survey which revealed that the water quality along the shoreline, where our children swim and where we obtain our water, was much poorer than the published report had indicated. We were concerned because these results were more closely related to our material, and in one area on the northern shore the pollution counts were extremely high.

At the Annual Meeting in July, the situation was thoroughly discussed and your Executive was authorized to take legal action, if possible, to stop further building if it was unable to control the situation through normal channels.

For the rest of the summer the water quality continued to deteriorate and cottage building went ahead without any restrictions by North Burgess or North Elmsley. Except for a few dedicated intermediate officials Ontario seemed to be unconcerned and disinclined to act. We decided to wait until the water testing for the season was complete before making the next moves. And then an event occurred that put the problem into sharp focus.

At about midnight, on the Friday before the Labour Day weekend, a technician from the Medical Health Unit in Brockville arrived at a cottage on the northern shore close to the point where the high pollution counts had been obtained by Ontario two years before. He said that he had come to take water samples and, because of the late hour, he explained that this was necessary because a young boy, who had been a guest at the cottage a short time earlier, was in a Smiths Falls hospital with an illness that might be typhoid fever.

The next day was hot and muggy and hundreds of children were swimming. The cottager was extremely concerned and informed your Committee. Our Medical Adviser contacted the hospital and discovered that the symptoms did indicate the possibility of typhoid, and that the incubation period coincided with the time the boy had been at the Lake.

Your Committee held emergency meetings and was preparing to advise all cottagers about the dangers when another medical report was received which indicated that the illness had not been definitely diagnosed as typhoid. It was decided to withold an announcement to avoid panic during the holiday weekend. On Tuesday we asked the Medical Officer of Health in Brockville, Dr. Vera Soudek, for advice. She phoned the Chairman to confirm the fact that we might have a case of typhoid and she agreed that the minimum precaution would be to post the Lake and warn people not to drink the water. Warning posters were placed on the main access roads.

We understand that the child's mother and sister entered hospital with similar symptoms but the illnesses were finally diagnosed as some form of para-typhoid. This was a great relief, but an ominous warning of things to come if we fail to stop rising pollution levels.

A further delay could not be tolerated. Mr. Hill arranged to have Dr. J.C. Van Loon examine the general condition of the Lake. He is a professor at the University of Toronto and an expert on these matters. He confirmed and supported our evidence. Affidavits were also obtained from long-time residents with professional backgrounds which supported the rate of water deterioration in recent years.

We then decided that we would try once more to have controls invoked through regular channels, and we arranged another meeting with the municipalities of North Burgess and North Elmsley. We presented the evidence in documentary form, and requested that holding by-laws to prevent further building be introduced. Our position was once again supported by the experts in attendance and many private citizens urged the municipalities to take action. In the following days the news media came out strongly in our support.

A month or so later replies were received from the municipalities and they were entirely unsatisfactory. It seems that our elected representatives in Ontario are willing to act and to work with us as long as we are planning, but for reasons only they can explain, they are not prepared to take proper remedial action. Under the circumstances the matter has been referred to our lawyers and a decision is pending.

The destruction of the Lake environment divides into two general categories. The first is the contamination of the water by human waste. This makes it unfit to drink due to the presence of dangerous bacteria, and contaminated water can spread disease and eventually be closed for swimming. In Ontario health officers are instructed to stop swimming when general coliform counts reach 1000 and when faecal coliform counts reach 100, provided that these levels represent the general water condition. Ontario also warns that the presence of these coliforms make the water dangerous for drinking unless it is boiled or chlorinated. I am enclosing a pamphlet put out by the Ontario Health Ministry which gives detailed information.

I am also attaching the coliform counts taken at representative locations on the Lake last summer. We are beyond the safe drinking levels and in some places we are approaching a "No Swimming" situation. I have not given the exact location of the testing points as this information can be misleading. Stations 1 to 16 are in the western part of the Lake, and 17 to 32 are in the eastern section. But it is well to remember that unsatisfactory counts in any part of the Lake affect us all.

Pollution abatement is extremely important and though Ontario has assured us that an effective programme has been undertaken to renovate faulty sewage disposal systems, we have decided to establish a follow-up programme of our own this summer to make sure that no stone is left unturned. However a word of caution is needed. It has been suggested that the renovation of sewage disposal systems alone will clean up pollution on the Lake. This is incorrect. Ontario conducted scientific studies in the Muskoka Lakes for several years and have reported that septic tanks, even under the best conditions in soil similar to ours, are far from efficient. The details appear in a report published by the Ministry of the Environment in May 1973 and entitled, "Muskoka Lakes Water Quality Evaluation".

The second form of deterioration is the aging process and is called eutrophication. All lakes, even without man's helping hand, grow old and eventually die. Environmentalists use unfamiliar language to describe the process but it is really quite simple. Aquatic plants and lake side foliage die and decay on the bottom. In time muck forms and produces more growth. This procedure is repeated and accelerated. Over a period of many thousands of years the lakes fill in and become swamps. This is a natural evolutionary process, but the problem today is that human waste, particularly nutrients from detergents and related materials, has greatly accelerated eutrophication, and the aging process that Mother Nature might have taken thousands of years to accomplish, is now happening in a comparatively short time. Dr. Van Loon told us that our Lake has reached an accelerating phase of eutrophication and that this is evident from the muck on the bottom, the lack of oxygen, and the algae growth.

This is not a happy report but it does represent our present situation.

In the meantime the Committee will vigorously carry out its continuing responsibilities. Dr. and Mrs. G.L. Liberty have taken over water testing. Mr. David Code will follow-up pollution abatement. Mrs. Jane Robertson will handle membership and an officer will be appointed to supervise the regatta and other recreational activities in the near future. The work of the Area Counsellors will be coordinated by Mr. Bill Roy, and Dr. Green will become a Special Adviser on water quality and pollution abatement.

It has become necessary to raise the annual fee to $5.00 due to our expanding activities, and as these fees are now due for 1974 you should submit them to the Secretary Mrs. John Burns, 764 Lonsdale Road, Manor Park, Ottawa, Ontario. Many people wait until the summer to send in their dues, but in view of the special circumstances this year it will be helpful if you will send them in now.

If it becomes necessary to take the matter of proper environmental management to the courts, the costs will not be met through general revenues, and it may be necessary to impose a temporary surcharge to meet these expenses. As the amount cannot be decided until the legal approach has been settled a number of members have already pledged funds to support these costs. We will be grateful for similar commitments and members wishing to do so should advise the Secretary.

We are not going to lose the battle to save beautiful Otty Lake. With your support we will see this matter through to a successful conclusion, no matter what difficulties may arise, or what areas of action may be needed. If for some reason we are unable to obtain redress through the courts, then the only alternative will be non-party political action, and we will not hesitate to take it.

John Kimble Abbott,
Chairman,
Otty Lake Pollution Control Committee.

OTTY LAKE POLLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE

1973 Bacteriological Water Quality Test Program - TOTAL/FAECAL COLIFORM COUNTS

Station	May	June		July			August		September
	21	3	17	2	15	29	12	26	9
1	0/0	18/18	10/0	15/0	2/2	25/2	55/22	5/0	20/0
2	0/0	0/0	40/4	0/0	5/0	10/2	30/8	0/0	0/0
3	4/4	0/0	10/0	20/4	0/0	55/6	35/2	0/0	0/0
4	0/0	8/0	16/16	20/16	0/0	0/0	15/4	0/0	15/2
5	0/0	0/0	0/0	5/0	0/0	15/0	0/0	5/2	20/0
6	0/0	0/0	10/0	35/4	10/10	10/2	20/0	5/0	5/0
7	0/0	0/0	8/8	0/0	10/2	6/6	5/2	0/0	5/0
8	0/0	0/0	0/0	5/0	0/0	10/2	20/0	30/0	15/2
9	0/0	0/0	5/0	5/2	2/2	15/0	20/0	5/2	10/2
10	0/0	0/0	10/2	0/0	10/0	2/2	10/2	0/0	5/4
11	0/0	0/0	25/2	0/0	0/0	5/5	10/0	0/0	15/0
12	10/6	0/0	15/0	15/4	20/2	20/12	55/18	10/0	5/0
13	0/0	0/0	0/0	20/2	25/0	15/4	45/0	5/0	10/0
14	0/0	0/0	2/2	5/0	10/0	20/0	0/0	0/0	5/0
15	0/0	0/0	0/0	105/4	22/22	100/6	10/0	15/2	5/0
16	2/2	2/2	30/2	10/2	0/0	100/4	5/0	20/0	5/0

Station	May	June		July		August		September	
	27	10	24	8	22	6	19	3	16
16		10/4	34/6		15/0			20/0	20/0
17	6/2	35/2	28/6	4/0	45/4	75/24	10/4	5/0	45/0
18	20/16	25/0	60/30	130/16	0/0	900/200	10/2	50/16	15/4
19	2/0	40/2	80+/22	145/2	45/2	115/14	105/28	15/4	20/0
20	28/28	25/0	60/18	100/24	90/0	140/36	65/18	70/2	15/0
21	20/10	20/0	80+/8	120/16	10/0	40/20	80/40	210/18	35/6
22	8/6	80/10	10/2	20/6	100/100	55/28	200/84	10/0	25/2
23	12/0	125/0	20/2	30/4	10/0	140/2	150/16	25/6	5/0
24	6/2	30/14	24/6	20/4	20/0	5/0	10/6	10/2	10/4
25	14/8	25/0	50/8	35/12	65/4	85/12	10/0	10/0	0/0
26	20/14	15/2	16/4	30/10	100/14	50/4	110/6	140/0	20/2
27	40/6	75/0	8/2	85/6	85/0	25/0	20/6	15/6	100/0
28	50/6	30/10	2/0	15/2	15/2	15/8	60/10	15/2	20/4
29	4/4	80/20	38/2	40/4	180/4	10/8	0/0	20/10	0/0
30	10/0	100/0	56/6	90/24	70/4	30/10	20/20	60/6	5/0
31	4/0	55/6	16/0	50/2	75/0	85/30	10/6	40/0	10/2
32	40/40	0/0	36/20	5/0	0/0	120/6	30/10	5/0	10/0