

June 28, 2019

Mayor Andy Mitchell and Council
Township of Selwyn
P.O. Box 270
Bridgenorth, ON
K0L 1H0

Dear Mayor and Council:

RE: Wild Rice Communication Group

We are writing as concerned residents and taxpayers of Selwyn Township regarding the Wild Rice Communication Group (WRCG) established in January, 2019 by Selwyn Township Council.

As the harvesting of wild rice on Pigeon Lake has been a contentious issue in Selwyn over the past few years, it is expected that Council would want to observe the unfolding of federal-First Nations discussions. What is surprising, however, is that Council would set up a body to serve the expressed interests of a particular lobby group, Save Pigeon Lake (SPL), rather than a committee with broad membership to represent the residents or taxpayers of Selwyn Township. It appears that this committee is a political mouthpiece for SPL, as evidenced by three of the four objectives of the WRCG (e.g. “to communicate with Township ratepayers, in collaboration with the Save Pigeon Lake group”; “to provide available updates to the Save Pigeon Lake group with respect to the activities of the Parks Canada Multi-Partner Workshop Organizing Committee”; and “provide available updates to the Save Pigeon Lake group with respect to the progress of the Wild Rice Working Group...”).

The group is comprised of two Council reps (Mayor Andy Mitchell and Councillor Donna Ballantyne) and up to 3 members identified by Save Pigeon Lake. “Additional individuals/and or [sic] organizations may be requested to provide representation to the group subject to a resolution of Council to approve the same and amend the Terms of Reference accordingly.” The membership of WRCG is clearly the preserve of Save Pigeon Lake. In the words of Councillor Donna Ballantyne to SPL President Larry Woods at an All-Candidates meeting (October 10, 2018) before the last Township election, “I am there for you...And we’ll have a good fight”.

The partisan nature of WRCG is further evidenced by the omission in the Terms of Reference that Pigeon Lake area is located in the ancestral territories of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabek and is subject to Treaty 20 and the Williams Treaties. This is surprising, given the move by Selwyn Township to nurture good working relationships with local Michi Saagiig First Nations as indicated by holding the CEDI event in November, 2018 which marked the 200th anniversary of Treaty 20. Surely, a working group balanced in its membership would be in keeping with this era of reconciliation.

Save Pigeon Lake does not represent us. The Ennismore meeting in November, 2018 clearly showed that SPL represents only one perspective among residents and taxpayers. Wild rice is a keystone species, and many people come to the Kawartha Lakes to enjoy its unique ecosystems. There are residents/taxpayers who consider that honouring our treaties and fulfilling our responsibilities as treaty people is central to the goal of reconciliation. The Wild Rice Communication Group was established to give Save Pigeon Lakers, who have attempted in the past to destroy the wild rice beds, a privileged role in communicating with Selwyn taxpayers. To filter the views of Selwyn residents/taxpayers through the voice of Save Pigeon Lakers is to attempt to silence the voices of others. To put Save Pigeon Lakers in charge of communicating with the public is to disenfranchise other residents/taxpayers of Selwyn Township.

We call upon you to expand the membership of the Wild Rice Communications Working Group immediately to ensure that residents/taxpayers of Selwyn Township are represented on the issue of wild rice. We would be pleased to appear on the agenda of a Council meeting if it would be helpful for moving the democratization of the representation further.

Yours sincerely and respectfully,

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c.c. Hon. Maryam Monsef, Member of Parliament