

Mayor calls for residents' questions to be answered after Feds deny review of Erin project

By Rob Paul

Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, made his decision on May 26 to deny a federal review of the wastewater treatment plant project in Erin.

The controversial plant has been a hot topic in recent weeks due to the potential impact it will have on the West Credit River.

The project would provide wastewater servicing to the Village of Erin and Hillsburgh. As proposed, treated effluent would be discharged to the West Credit River at Winston Churchill Boulevard, upstream of the community of Belfountain.

In a statement from the federal government, Wilkinson reached his decision that the designation of the project was unwarranted because the potential adverse effects within federal jurisdiction would be limited through project design and the application of standard mitigation measures; the regulatory processes that currently apply to, or have been undertaken for, the project and any related consultations provide a framework to address the potential adverse aforementioned effects, public concerns raised in relation to those effects, and potential impacts to Aboriginal and Treaty rights; and the project must comply with relevant provisions of the above listed Acts as well as the Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations pursuant to the Fisheries Act, the Species at Risk Act, the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994, Ontario's Endangered Species Act and the Conservation Authorities Act.

Having heard residents' concerns about the potential impact the wastewater plant will have on the West Credit River, Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson is hoping for more transparency as the project moves forward.

"As Mayor, I am looking to get answers to the questions raised by many residents of Caledon and I will continue to look to Credit Valley Conservation Authority and the Province of Ontario to address those concerns," said Thompson.

The Coalition for the West Credit River says they are disappointed that Wilkinson decided not to designate the Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant as a project under the federal Impact Assessment Act. The group has been at the forefront of protesting the advancement of the project.

"The Coalition is not deterred by the Minister's Decision," said Judy Mabee, Chair of the Coalition and President of the Belfountain Community Organization. "We will continue on with our work to protect this highly-valued coldwater brook trout population in the West Credit River. We are more than willing to work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and other federal and provincial regulators, including the Town of Erin and its consultants, to advocate for a wastewater plant that sets a new best-in-class industry standard for the protection of sensitive coldwater receiving streams. We will leave no stone unturned in our effort to protect brook trout and the unique coldwater habitat of the West Credit River."

The Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant, they argue, will pose a significant threat to brook trout with the daily discharge of 7.2 million liters of warm sewage effluent into West Credit River coldwater habitat. The release of this sewage effluent will create an oxygen depleted and toxic plume that will extend several hundred meters downstream into brook trout spawning, rearing and nursery habitat.

The Coalition stated that brook trout are the "canary in the coal mine," and the West Credit River has one of the few remaining self-sustaining native brook trout populations in Southern Ontario. "brook trout are a highly sensitive species requiring cold and pristine waters.

"If you're looking at the river from a brook trout perspective, the water in the West Credit River is very low right now because of a dry spring," said Mabee. "It's not a big river and so when you look at water temperatures warming from the weather and effluent

going into the river that is not regulated for temperature, you have combined aspects of temperature increase which will lead to a change in the pH of the water which will increase toxicity level for ammonia and decrease the amount of available oxygen for fish to breath. With the effluent being emitted at Winston Churchill, at the County border, there will be a flow of effluent running downstream and it will have a substantial impact on the river and its habitats.?

Mabee says the Coalition was surprised by Wilkinson's decision because they believed they had enough proof and reason for a federal review, but the fight isn't over, and they'll continue to make an effort to ensure the West Credit River doesn't suffer.

?We knew this was going to be a big challenge putting it forward to the federal government for review,? Mabee said. ?But we worked very hard on our briefing. Our team went through all the documentation with respect to the environmental study report and within our group we have engineers and biologists and put together the issues list we identified feeling very confident with the information that was going forward. The federal impact assessment was our very best chance of making real change to the project.

«The focus of our group is to ensure the West Credit River brook trout are protected and that there's meaningful consultation with respect to the study and to find a way to discharge the effluent somewhere else or designate a facility that discharges effluent that matches stream temperature and meets the CCME (Canadian Environmental Quality) guidelines. Do I know at this particular point exactly where we are going? My answer is, not right at this moment, our team will be meeting very soon, and we all have been reviewing the documents that were included as part of the Impact Assessment Agency review to see where things lie with the recommendations. Going forward we need to find a way to collaborate somehow with Mayor Alls in Erin.?

The Coalition for the West Credit River represents the following organizations: the Belfountain Community Organization, Izaak Walton Fly Fishing Club, Ontario Rivers Alliance, Ontario Streams, Trout Unlimited Canada - Greg Clark Chapter and the West Credit River Watch.

?The Coalition would like to thank all those people, organizations and municipalities for supporting the Coalition's Designation Request by signing our petitions, writing letters to decision makers, calling the Ministers' offices, their MPs and MPPs to speak up for Brook Trout, Redside Dace, reintroduced Atlantic Salmon, and a healthy West Credit River ecosystem,? said Mabee. ?The Cut the Crap, Keep the Credit petition has garnered over 22,000 signatures?so thank you everyone for your strong support. We are still wading through all the federal Impact Assessment documentation, but stay tuned, because we have more work to do.?