

April 19, 2022

Director's Office,  
Crown Forests and Lands Policy Branch  
Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry  
70 Foster Drive, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 6V5

Dear Director Henry,

**Re: Floating accommodations on waterways over Ontario's public lands**

In response to the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (MNDMNR) [request](#) for public input into floating accommodations on waterways over Ontario's public lands, the Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) offers the following feedback.

The MLA represents over 11,500 people who are lakefront property owners and users in the District of Muskoka.

The Muskoka Lakes Association is a volunteer membership-based organization advocating for responsible stewardship and enjoyment of the unique environment of the Muskoka Lakes.

Our activities range from water quality testing to advocating for responsible government, fair taxation and responsible land use policies. The MLA is Canada's oldest lake association and has been active in the region since 1894.

The MLA is deeply concerned about the prospect of floating accommodations on Muskoka's lakes and rivers, and their impact on the environment, character, tranquility and overall enjoyment of our waterfront area. We agree with all of the concerns listed in ERO 019-5119, and highlight the following concerns:

- **Sewage and wastewater management**: The MLA is very concerned about the risk that sewage and wastewater generated by floating accommodations (including gray water from sinks, showers and laundry) will end up in the lakes/rivers, threatening the health of the water for wildlife, swimming, drinking and recreation. Waterfront properties in Muskoka are subject to strict and enforceable rules regarding the location and condition of septic systems. Our community supports these strict standards which are crucial in order to protect water quality. The MLA believes it will be impossible to enforce rules about the disposal of sewage or wastewater from floating accommodations, especially since any wastewater that is illegally dumped into the water will quickly disperse.
- **Municipal By-laws**: A myriad of municipal by-laws apply to tax paying waterfront land owners in order to protect the waterfront's natural character, privacy, and the safe and

peaceful enjoyment of the area – including regulations on building density and setbacks, noise, and night light. Even if comparable strict rules were created for floating accommodations, the MLA believes that it will be virtually impossible to enforce them on owners and users of floating accommodations.

- Mainland Parking: The MLA notes that mainland parking for water access properties is a large and complex issue on Muskoka’s lakes. There is a serious shortage of parking available for water access lots, to the extent that Township of Muskoka Lakes is considering requiring deeded access to mainland parking or a long-term rental agreement with a marina for a new water access lot. Introducing floating accommodations would exacerbate this significant challenge.
- Environmental and Recreational Carrying Capacity Thresholds: There is no enforceable permit system in place reflecting a full understanding of environmental thresholds to sustain even day-access boaters, much less floating accommodations. Smaller lakes and some bays are already over capacity for safe and enjoyable recreational use of the water area, which is leading to restrictions and/or prohibitions on new development or new lot creation.

As a result of these concerns, the MLA supports the recommendation of the Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML) that **floating accommodations should be prohibited**, as explained in Staff’s [report](#) approved by TML’s Planning Committee on March 17th, 2022 and forwarded to the MNMNR shortly thereafter.

Should, however, the Province proceed to permit such uses, the MLA agrees with TML’s recommendation that floating accommodations that are anchored, moored or left at rest for a designated period of time, and that are predominantly designed for accommodation, be considered a building and subject to municipal building and zoning requirements. We recommend this include a permit system delineating precisely where floating accommodations may be anchored and how they can be used, similar to the model of national and provincial parks that limit the location of campsites and number of visitors.

Finally, the MLA provides the following answers to the questions raised in the ERO:

1. Should the types of watercraft that are allowed as “camping units” be clarified?  
**Yes.** The regulatory definition of ‘camping units’ should be revised to limit the types of watercraft equipped for overnight accommodation that are allowed for camping on water over public lands. Watercraft designed primarily for accommodation, not travel, should not constitute a camping unit.
2. Should the meaning of “camping purposes” be clarified?  
**Yes.** The regulations should define ‘camping purposes’ to mean recreational use during a short visit, rather than seasonal or prolonged accommodation.
3. Should changes be made to the camping rules set out in Ontario Regulation 161/17 as they relate to camping on waterways over public lands?

**Yes.** The camping rules set out in Ontario Regulation 161/17 as they relate to camping on waterways over public lands should be revised to prohibit floating accommodations. However, if the Province proceeds to permit such uses, the regulation should:

- reduce the number of days a person can camp on water at one location
- establish the minimum distance watercraft must move if a person camping wishes to stay longer
- establish the minimum distance from the mainland that camping is permitted
- require a permit be obtained in order to camp, similar to a camping permit in public parks
- require compliance with municipal by-laws
- only allow camping at locations designated by the local municipality.

4. Should more restrictive municipal bylaws apply where they exist / are created?

**Yes.** Municipalities should be permitted to enact bylaws regarding camping on water within their jurisdiction to suit their local needs. Municipal bylaws should be permitted to be more restrictive than the provincial regulation.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback. We encourage you to continue to seek public input as this review progresses.

Sincerely,



Deborah Martin-Downs  
President

cc: Honourable Norm Miller, MPP Parry Sound-Muskoka  
Minister Rickford, Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources & Forestry  
David Pink, Director of Development Service and Environmental Sustainability, Township of Muskoka  
Lakes  
Samantha Hastings, Commissioner, Community and Planning Services, District of Muskoka  
Planning Committee, Township of Muskoka Lakes