



Association du lac McGregor McGregor Lake Association

Issues paper in response to the VDM Bodies of Water Consultation

Introduction

The Municipality of Val-des-Monts (VDM) recently launched a consultation effort to seek feedback from residents and non-residents on usage of Val-des-Monts' bodies of water. L'association du lac McGregor Lake Association (The Association) wishes to present this paper to share its position and opinion on this important issue.

Summary

Lac McGregor riparian residents have repeatedly noted damage to docks in the past decade and shoreline damage from waves caused by boat traffic is visible in many areas of the lake. While these concerning issues may have been slowly occurring for several decades, the increase in development on the lake, the resulting increase in boat traffic and the attendant waves created by these boats has raised these property, and environmental issues to the forefront of residents' awareness.

This increased boat traffic, both motorized and non-motorized, also raises serious concerns regarding human safety. While watching for other watercraft or while pulling a skier, boarder or tube boat, drivers run a high risk of not noticing smaller craft or people in the water, whether near a dock, in a channel or in one of the larger bays. Larger waves in channels and narrow, dead-end bays also risk capsizing smaller craft. Residents have observed multiple safety issues some of which have necessitated rescue action by these residents.

"Every time I see a family passing in front of my dock, I worry they will not make it back safely.

I rescued a family canoeing with 2 small kids. The waves were too big and they did not know how to handle the situation. The canoe flipped and the kids were screaming. Luckily, I was close by and helped them. Unfortunately, the scenario plays in my mind every time I see canoes passing in front of my dock.

They had no chance; in such conditions canoes are not safe at all, even with experienced people." Submitted by a lake resident

While riparian residents with boats contribute to these effects, all additional visitor boat traffic amplifies the rate and depth of damage to both property and the riparian zone and has dramatically increased safety concerns.

The Association, as directed by voting members present at the 2022 Annual General Meeting noted that input to the planned VDM consultation should include the following points:

- that, at a minimum, the current prohibition from the boat ramp at Parc Pélissier be maintained for boats with deep wave-producing mechanisms (not just water ballasts) and PWC, and
- that the Association offers to work collaboratively with the municipality to improve boating safety and to reduce damage caused by boating through concerted communication and monitoring initiatives.

While the association and lake residents welcome non lake residents to the lake, we believe an increase in boat traffic on the lake will have a direct impact to personal safety and will increase the damaging environmental impacts by a multiplier factor to an extent the lake environment cannot sustain.

The Association recommends that no further expansion of lake access or development of lac McGregor occur until the Municipality of Val-des-monts (VDM) completes a formal study to establish the actual boat load capacity of the lake. The results would form an empirical and evidence-based method to inform decision making for any future development.

The Association

L'association du lac McGregor Lake Association, founded in 1945 and incorporated under the Federal Non-for-Profit Act, has a mandate *“To promote and encourage interest in the protection of McGregor Lake and its surrounding environment, including the relevant watershed, for the continued benefit of the members and their properties; to collaborate with organizations and government authorities and agencies that share a similar purpose in the betterment of said area; to promote better relations and understanding among the residents and property owners of said area and generally to further the common interests of the members.”*

The Association represents 160 permanent and seasonal residents of the lake through membership, has a direct email outreach to 289 lake residents, and has a reach of over 800 lake and VDM residents through its Facebook Group membership - all of whom have an interest in the continued health and use of the lake.

The Association has had a long collaboration history with VDM on issues that fall within the Association's mandate, such as the boat wash, ramp access controls and communication partners for VDM messaging.

The Association values partnership with the municipality and believes that the municipality shares the vision to preserve and enhance the lake and its environment.

Key Issues

Over the past decade, the Association has received persistent complaints of dock damage, visible shoreline erosion, disruptive noise, threat to bird nesting and concerns for individual safety. Increased boat traffic including an increase in surf boats, larger engine and deeper hull boats and PWC are implicated in the increased rate of the aforementioned property and environmental damage, and safety concerns.

If the boat operator is uninformed about the proper means to operate a watercraft, all motorized boats are capable of creating larger than necessary waves near shore and unacceptable noise. We strongly believe that concerted efforts at education could correct most of these damaging, unsafe and disruptive behaviours as boaters may not be aware of the waves emanating from the lowered back of their boat from either overloading or from operating their boat at an inappropriate speed, or are unaware of the disruptive nature of loud music as it carries over water. In 2019 the Association recommended that the municipality leverage the Nautisme Quebec – “*Suivez la Vague* ¹ ” information campaign to enhance our collective ability to promote proper behaviour on the lake. At the time, the municipality made the decision to distribute locally produced information material. It is our belief that unless a more visible, professionally led information campaign is adopted, we can expect little to no change to how users navigate and behave on the lake.

The congestion of both motorized and non-motorized watercraft in many areas of the lake has led to observable unsafe conditions where non-motorized watercraft and swimmers are threatened by fast-moving boats or swamped by large waves. Residents have reported unease while sitting on their docks as they wonder when, not if, they may need to rush to help someone.

Near parc Pélissier, non-motorized boats often monopolize the centre of the bay prompting motorized boats with a choice of travelling close to these canoes and kayaks or close to the shoreline docks and swimmers. Boating safety education could indeed help reduce these hazards, however safety issues will be unnecessarily exacerbated should more access be granted for motorized boats or additional rental non-motorized watercraft. Based on the last 3 years of data collected by VDM, from mid-June to mid-August, between 118 and 321 boats were permitted access per week. While data is only presented on a weekly basis, VDM data and lake residents can attest that the majority of this boat activity occurs on weekends, when the parking lot is full and the road leading to parc Pélissier is lined with parked cars and trailers. While the association appreciates that VDM wishes to maximise income to offset for the costs of the Pélissier ramp development, we firmly believe that the number of weekend use by far exceeds what is a reasonable amount of boat on the lake in addition to the baseline number of boats from lake residents.

In recent years there has been a pronounced increase in the use (trespassing) of the shoreline of privately-owned lands by day boaters.

This increase directly parallels the decision by the municipality to rent canoes and kayaks at Parc Pélissier coupled with the development of riverain properties around the lake where shallower water is more prevalent. This non-authorized use of private land has resulted in destruction of natural shoreline plants and rock barriers whether wilful or inadvertent. Further, property owners report camp-fires, the removal of small trees in the riverain and the introduction of human waste and garbage in these areas. These fire and environmental risks are unacceptable.

¹ <https://www.nautismequebec.com/en/>

Another threat to the health of our lake is the proliferation of Invasive species. At our expense and effort, the Association has identified these Eurasian Milfoil (invasive-species) weed beds, has distributed printed and electronic material regarding Eurasian Milfoil, and has installed signage and buoys in order to discourage boating activity in these areas in order to try to slow or halt the spread of this invasive weed. The Association commends VDM for the installation of a boat-washing station and supports additional stations and a mandatory washing requirement for ramp use at parc Pélissier. As noted in the 2021 VDM water quality report; « *la première recommandation des rapports de suivis sur la qualité de l'eau (dans le cadre du PDE de la municipalité) est de réduire les risques de contamination aux espèces aquatiques envahissantes en lavant les embarcations nautiques.* »

Our lake has likely reached its capacity to accommodate boating and human activity.

These safety, property and environmental concerns are not unique to lac McGregor. In fact, Canadian press is replete with articles expressing similar concerns; concerns sufficiently widespread and serious that the Federal government has recently expressed a need to review these issues: <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/environnement/2022-07-24/protection-des-lacs/ottawa-reflechit-a-l-idee-d-etre-plus-proactif.php>

VDM recently noted in the 2021 *Bilan du Plan directeur de l'eau*: “*Avantageusement dotée d'une nature exceptionnelle, la Municipalité de Val-des-Monts se doit de mettre en oeuvre différents moyens pour préserver ce caractère unique qui nous distingue et pour protéger la richesse des écosystèmes qui nous entourent*” <https://www.val-des-monts.net/municipalite-val-des-monts/plan-directeur-de-leau-val-des-monts/>

The province of Quebec has a Loi sur le développement durable that applies to its administration and ministries. This law has a number of guiding principles, one of which is *Précaution: Lorsqu'il y a un risque de dommage grave ou irréversible, l'absence de certitude scientifique complète ne doit pas servir de prétexte pour remettre à plus tard l'adoption de mesures effectives visant à prévenir une dégradation de l'environnement*; (When there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty must not be used as a reason for postponing the adoption of effective measures to prevent environmental degradation) While municipalities are not subject to this law, VDM could choose to be inspired by this principle and demonstrate leadership.

Conclusion

The Association considers any proposal to increase the number of boats permitted day access to lac McGregor and any increase to the number and variety of rental watercraft at parc Pélissier to be contradictory to the evidence presented and to the stated mandate of VDM to protect the natural environment as noted in the PDE 2021.

Recommendations for immediate implementation

- VDM, working in consultation with the Association, should conduct a Boat Load capacity of the lake in order to obtain a factual empirical and evidence-based assessment of the lake's ability to handle any proposed changes to lake access and activities
- Until VDM and the Association have properly assessed the actual boat load capacity of the lake, that an interim measure be implemented immediately to reduce the high

traffic on weekends. The Association can work rapidly and collaboratively with VDM to establish a reasonable maximum number of boats allowed on the lake each weekend during peak of summer Mid May to End August. Such measures could include adoption of a maximum number of boats with motors over 50HP, or a maximum aggregate horsepower load that will be permitted access at parc Pélissier on the 3 summer holiday weekends (St. Jean Baptiste, July 1 and August 1).

- Implement the following near-term changes in order to immediately address safety and environmental issues:
 - Implement life-saving training and safe boating-education training for boat ramp employees and mandate delivery of boat-safety education instruction for all persons renting VDM canoes and kayaks at parc Pélissier.
 - Deploy the VDM water rescue boat at the parc Pélissier ramp on all high traffic weekends to promote safe boating education and practices, and to be readily available for rescues. If additional staff are required, the fees generated by ramp access and rentals should be increased.
 - Mandate, through regulation, boat-washing for all boats requesting access via the municipal ramp including proof (a receipt) from a recognized boat-washing machine issued within 3 hours of access. Training of ramp staff on an appropriate inspection process should be implemented.
- Partner with the Association in the development and distribution of boat safety documentation through multiple venues including online and printed material:
 - VDM to subscribe to the SUIVEZ LA VAGUE promotional campaign from Nautisme Quebec as a tangible means to enhance safe boating on the lake and leverage the Association to extend the reach of the campaign beyond the Pélissier ramp and formal VDM generated communications channels.
 - NOTE: On boating safety, in 2021 the Association published revised boat safety guidelines on the website <https://lacmcgregorlake.ca/useful-information/>
 - The Association has had some success with the cooperative development and implementation of surf boat guidelines. However, many canoers hang out in the middle of the largest part of the lake where Surf Boaters have agreed to practice the sport. We request that starting immediately, Pélissier staff be required to inform users to avoid this zone as Surf Boaters now need to drive closer to shore which essentially makes the collaborative agreement void.

Additional Recommendations

Boating safety and environmental protection can be further enhanced through the addition of further limitations to the municipal regulations regarding the ramp at parc Pélissier:

- Maintain current prohibitions on boats with ballast capacity and PWC,
- Prohibit boats with cabins and over 23' in length
- Deny access for non-resident boats with motor size greater than 50cv (An exception could be provided on a single day basis to large-engine Bass-fishing boats participating in municipal-sponsored tournaments.)

The Plan directeur de l'eau (PDE) also noted that there were (at the time of writing) 20 private boat launches on McGregor. Work with private ramp owners to control both size and number of boats that enter the lake via private and shared access ramps (Camping lac

McGregor, MCL, Camp St. Joseph) AND via all easements/right of way access authorized by VDM development on lac McGregor.

Engage residents to encourage active reporting to VDM of unsafe boating events. The municipality should implement a reporting number/website such that boats (as identified by boat number) receiving repeated warnings (whether riparian resident or day visitor VDM resident) would be prohibited from any VDM ramp use for an entire season. Boats registered to non-VDM residents should be permanently denied access to any VDM public access ramp.

Work with MRC and other agencies to substantially increase enforcement of safe boating for all boats active on the lakes, with particular emphasis on weekends and holidays.

Comments specific to VDM consultation survey

- right-of-way water easements for non-riverain developments around the lake: Any such water access permission will unnecessarily expand the number of boats and human activity and is also not in line with the mandate of the Plan d'eau. Should the municipality continue with such permissions in conflict with its own stated environmental protection mandates, then it is recommended that any such easements be for swimming non-motorized watercraft access only.
- access to Crown land: To our knowledge there is only one island on lac McGregor that is owned by the provincial government. The rest of the land and riverain properties are privately owned. The waters around this one island contain some of the largest beds of invasive Eurasian Milfoil and activity in these areas is actively discouraged. Therefore, any proposed increased access to crown land on lac McGregor is opposed. It would remain incumbent upon the municipality to work within the mandate of its own Plan d'eau should it pursue access to lakes and crown land elsewhere in the region.
- watercraft rentals: Currently, it is often dangerous when motorized boats are launched at Pélissier in addition to the multitude of non-motorized rentals. Any expansion in the number and type of such rentals is not recommended for both safety reasons and to not further expand the negligent use of private lands.
- services near ramps: Lacking any clear rationale other than VDM accruing permit fees, such a suggestion would further destroy property near the ramp that is currently in its natural state and increase the likelihood of waste being introduced into the lake and its environment. Such businesses would increase noise and traffic disruption to residents living in close proximity to a ramp. Any increase to the parking area or removal of existing trees should be prohibited.
- boat ramp: Multiple issues are addressed below
 - Dates; the listed dates are acceptable, however there should be consideration given to rapidly alter these dates or decline motorized access on a temporary basis when water levels remain high (notably, spring) as waves from boat traffic in high water increases risk to the shoreline environment. Note that even small fishing boats, often operated close to shore or operated at inappropriate speeds, cause damaging waves.
 - Cost; non-resident rates should be increased as resident taxes should not subsidize non-resident usage in any way.

- winter activities; this proposal would increase environmental damage to the ramp area and the lake, and could be expected to increase private property damage and further violate the right to enjoy one's personal property without noise and interruption.
- signage; current signage is limited and is considered to lack sufficient information on the environment and safe boating. The Association has recently requested space to install a sign board that could include information on loon protection, milfoil, and boating safety. We would be pleased to work with the municipality to ensure our materials are not conflict with those published by VDM.

1 Aug 2022