

## FOCA Fall Seminar 2013

### Post-event Comments

-by Anne McCauley, FOCA Board member (& Muskoka Lakes Association)

Thanks to everyone who attended, and who participated in the 2013 FOCA Fall meeting on Saturday, November 2, 2013 at the International Centre in Toronto. In spite of the rain, over 75 association representatives were in attendance.

FOCA's Executive Director, Terry Rees, provided an overview of FOCA concerns from the past year. His somewhat pessimistic view of government activities related to the cottage environment was enlivened by more positive slides from across cottage country! He reminded everyone of the importance of participating in our communities, including next year's municipal elections (Election Day will be Monday, October 27, 2014). Cottagers can vote in their cottage municipality, and need to exercise their options. FOCA will send information about Municipal Elections in the New Year. In the meantime, members can contact the FOCA office to receive a summary of Terry's presentation.



Guest speaker Bob Sandford's talk about flooding throughout Canada struck a sympathetic note, especially since the MNR on that very Friday issued a flood alert for much of cottage



country for the weekend. Terry's pictures of the spring floods in Ontario helped remind us of the some of the problems we faced earlier in 2013.

Bob put these events into the context of climate change. He stated that continuing with past assumptions about water is "no longer practical or defensible." Personally, I had not considered that the flood plain mapping done in the 1960's to 1980's (to establish the elevation of flood-prone lands) is no longer adequate as

we experience greater rainfall intensity, and as we continue to pave or build over much of the ground, changing the natural infiltration of rainwater into the soil.

Our flood plain mapping urgently needs updating, as do our water management plans. Our infrastructure (dams, bridges, roads) also needs to be re-examined. The reality is that having built a lot of shoreline infrastructure--whether it is a cottage, a dock, a road or a dam—we can't ignore it for the next 50 years and then cry when it fails or is damaged.

Bob also made the point that the flood events are not just regional but rather can have province- or nation-wide impacts, not just from flooding but also because flood waters can transport enormous amounts of pollution.

Being a writer, Bob offered a couple of key phrases. He urged us to work together when "first there is a crisis" and then there is a "deadline" as motivators. "Never waste a good disaster," to initiate working together. Be aware that our politicians and resource managers have an inclination "to provide spin." This may come to us described as a "1-in-100 year storm" rather than a call to action. Bob criticized governments and officials for their tendency to "manage the message rather than manage the mess."



As I thought about the flooding I experienced in Muskoka this spring, I was surprised at how much it resembled the flood event Bob discussed in Canmore, Alberta. My seatmate at the meeting (from the Lake of Bays Association) and I looked at each other and said, "this is exactly what happened in Muskoka: an overnight flood event caused by rapid snow melt and intense prolonged precipitation."

I have commented at length upon Bob's speech as he has inspired me to do something about it, not just accept but recognize the world is changing and that I have the choice to be proactive and prepared.

FOCA is working with Bob Sandford to make his excellent presentation available to our member associations to share with their members. Stay tuned for details!

