

This essay appeared as an article in the Fall 2024 issue of the Farren Lake Property Owners Association newsletter written by Ruth Buckwell, based on an interview with Brian Stapledon, a founder of the association. Information was also supplied by John Ficner, a cottager at the time, and who attended the first meeting of the Farren Lake Association. Information was also taken from a report to the 4th Annual General Meeting of that association written by Reeve Stewart Munro, the former reeve of South Sherbrooke Township and from a memo from Paul Seidl who has a contact at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

HOW FLPOA BEGAN- THE DAM THING THAT WAS OUR FOUNDATION

Flooding was a big problem to many property owners on Farren Lake in the 1960s and early 1970s. The outlet for the lake was at a cave at the end of the narrow bay at the northeast end of the lake. The outlet was sometimes blocked by rocks and debris and because beavers enjoyed filling it in. When that happened water levels rose so that cottage properties in low lying areas were flooded and often remained very wet until early summer. Property damage is mentioned in the reeve's report, but Brian Stapledon does not think any buildings were impacted.

Nevertheless, the problem that led to action by Don Wilson, a cottager on the south side of the lake, and others was that septic tank beds were sometimes flooded. The mix of septic tank effluent and lake water meant that E. coli bacteria could be present in the water people swam and canoed in to enjoy cottage life. But most importantly the lake was a popular source of water for household use including drinking.

The only remedy at the time was to unblock the outlet so that the water could once again flow freely on its underground path to the Tay River. This unblocking had to be done by hand. There was no easy access to the outlet except on private property. Several cottagers including Eric Mendroch, Brian Stapledon, John Ficner and others performed this unpleasant task when it was required.

Stewart Munro, the former reeve of South Sherbrooke Township, recounts in his report, that Dr. Featherston and Don Wilson called on him in May of 1970, and explained the problem to him. The suggestion was that a new outlet through the hill taking the shortest course was the answer. Munro, knew this was a big project, too big for South Sherbrooke. Other levels of government would have to become involved.

The first step was to find out whose jurisdiction this project would come under. There were four possibilities: the provincial Departments of Lands and Forests and of Mines and Resources, Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA) and Canadian Agricultural and Rural Development Act (ARDA) through which all worked closely

together. The reeve provided the names of officials and federal and provincial politicians to contact. Don Wilson wrote to them all and to other governmental agencies and departments on behalf of an informal group of interested cottagers led by Don Wilson, Gerry Morris, David Thompson and Brian Stapledon.

Don Wilson eventually found out that the Department of Lands and Forests dealt with projects such as this. At first, the Lands and Forests official said that cottage owners were responsible for lake levels from their property line to the middle of the lake. Don informed him that was not the case. He also promised that every property owner would write to the Department to confirm that their deed showed that their property ended at the shoreline. Through Don's efforts and persistence, and the contacts and influence of the reeve, the Department of Lands and Forests agreed in 1970 that a dam was needed and that they would look after lake levels. It was built the next winter.

During the negotiations, the Departmental representative was just glad that they only had to deal with one person on behalf of a group and not individually with each property owner on the lake. The group then met at the Rhodes Real Estate Office of Clarence Murray and decided to call a get-together of cottagers. The Tweedsmuir Hotel in Westport, now The Cove, was selected for the all-cottagers meeting. Notices were posted on each road and people were contacted either in person or by telephone where possible.

There are still people on the lake who remember that meeting in 1970. Gerry Morris chaired it but it was very informal. He asked what the attendees wanted. Water safety and getting the government to look after the dam headed the list. At the meeting it was decided to call the group Farren Lake Association and that meeting is the foundation of our present-day Farren Lake Property Owners Association.

In conclusion, Don Wilson saw a problem. He sought help to solve it from fellow cottagers, outsiders and governments. Farren Lake Association was born because a group of people saw a need for co-ordinated action to solve problems.



The Original Dam