



# WEST CARLING ASSOCIATION

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\*Georgian Bay Shoreline Concerns\*

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## SUMMER 2013 NEWSLETTER

### PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*by Jeremy Gawen*

At the time of writing, I'm looking outside my window at a very white, snowy looking streetscape. It looks more like January than April and thoughts of idyllic summer days on the Bay seem very far away! I've just been in touch with Sarah at Snug Harbour and she tells me that the ice is still all the way out to Franklin Island!

Just minutes ago, I received some really good news; the long-awaited report from International Joint Commission (IJC) has finally come out and it is, indeed, good news! We have been waiting for the IJC to reach their conclusions on the Study Board's Report since last December and, as the months went by with no response, many of us were concerned that they would follow the recommendations of the Study Board and issue a "do-nothing" report. It seems that they actually listened to the 3500 comments they received and have concluded that some relief from the excessively low water levels in Lakes Michigan/Huron is required. Their key recommendations are then as follows:

- They are opposed to any further study of Multi Lake Regulation: new large scale dams and channel enlargement is simply not warranted. **(We are pleased to see this because, although one group has been advocating this, we have always seen this as a hugely expensive environmental disaster).**
- They recommend further investigation to restore Lake Michigan/Huron water levels by 13 to 25 cm or 5 to 10 inches to offset the effects of the 1960's dredging program and subsequent erosion of the St Clair River. **(We are extremely pleased by this recommendation particularly as they recommend that it be done in such a way as not to exacerbate any future high water levels. This very recommendation was made to the IJC last summer by Bill Bialkowski on behalf of Sierra Club Ontario (SCO). We would have preferred that they recommend compensating for all of the dredging activities going back to 1930 which would require an increase of some 20 inches but this is a very hopeful start).**
- They also endorse implementation of a program of "Adaptive Management" and a comprehensive water quantity monitoring program throughout the Great Lakes.

So, what is the state of the water levels? The good news is that since setting a new all-time low record in January of 43 cm or 17 inches below chart datum (176 metres above sea level), levels have been slowly creeping up. Suddenly in the second week of April the floods in Muskoka caused a sudden 19 cm or 8 inch rise. That still leaves us

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18 cm or 7 inches below chart datum or some **23 cm or 9 inches below this time last year!** Some bad news is that this same wet weather caused the steel retaining wall in the Snug Harbour Marina to collapse. This took out about a dozen slips as well as the whole lower parking lot. Sarah reports that they are trying hard to get back into operation quickly, but the repair is complex and costly. If you keep your boat at Snug, you will have to be patient.

Some other good news is that Carling Township has passed a temporary By-law for docks allowing additional flexibility to access the water. Even better, Council has also arranged for dredging in both Dillon Cove and Snug Harbour. Hopefully our marinas will now get by with enough usable slips. Council has also approved replacing the Snug Harbour public dock and installing new concrete ramps at the boat launches. Yet still as you go by boat you will find rocks where you've never seen them before, so please use extra care, use the buoyed channels whenever you can and, if in doubt, don't go there. The Coastguard in Parry Sound tell me that they are currently reviewing all their buoyed channels and may need to make some changes.


So, what are we doing about low water levels long term? I am on the Board's of both GBA and Sierra Club Ontario's Great Lakes Section (SCO). As you will see in UPDATE, GBA continues to lobby Ottawa to bring about a fix for the low waters, as has SCO. Last November, SCO convened a meeting of interested US organizations in Bay City, Michigan which resulted in a new organization, RESTORE OUR WATERS INTERNATIONAL (ROWI), being incorporated in February. Bill Bialkowski and I are both Board members and, so far, there are 4 significant Michigan shoreline property owners' associations plus SCO as founding members under the Chairmanship of Roger Gauthier, a highly respected former US Army Corps of Engineers noted hydrologist. ROWI has already begun a lobbying campaign in Washington to raise the levels of Lakes Michigan/Huron by reducing the flow down the St Clair River. Now that the IJC has recommended restoring Lake Huron water levels, this task is a lot easier. Now our only point of disagreement is that ROWI is pushing to restore the level by 50 cm or 20 inches, while the IJC is recommends only 13-25 cm or 5-10 inches. Yet no matter what happens, I should say that, in many respects, we are going to have to get used to these low water levels for some years to come (unless there is an unprecedented increase in precipitation around the Lakes). No matter how the St Clair restoration is carried out, it will have to be done slowly to avoid causing unacceptably low water levels in the downstream lakes. It could easily take 10 years before full restoration of Lake Michigan/Huron levels are achieved so we will have to adapt. But we're pretty good at that in Georgian Bay! Have a great summer and don't ding too many propellers!

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# A WINDY DAY ON GEORGIAN BAY

*By Jeremy Gawen, Snug Harbour*

As some of you may be aware, I am a fanatical small boat sailor, originally with a laser, then a windsurfer and currently with a small Hobie Cat – which I love. I really love to go out in high winds which so suit the Cat. But even I had some doubts one extremely windy day last summer – there were even white caps in Snug Harbour! However, discretion not being the better part of valour, out I went anyway. In fact, the north end of Snug Harbour where our cottage is located, is pretty sheltered from the north-westers and it was not until I got close to the lighthouse that I realized just how strong the wind was. I tried beating out past the lighthouse to the open Bay but rapidly realized that both the waves and the wind were way too strong for me so I then spent an amazing half hour just reaching backwards and forwards across the harbour, invariably just on the point of capsizing.

Exhausted, I decided to do one last run across the harbour before returning to the cottage and, of course, this was the time one huge gust hit and over I went! Everyone knows, including me, that the large ball at the top of a Hobie Cat's mast will prevent it from turning completely over. Well, not exactly; before I knew it, I was sitting on the bottom of one of the hulls and the tip of the mast was 20 feet beneath me! Looking up, who should be coming past the lighthouse (likely heading to Gilly's for lunch) but the OPP patrol boat in the nick of time. “Bit windy for that isn't it?” was the first comment but then they set to with much maneuvering and were able to help me right the boat. As I slunk to shore to sort out the tangle of ropes, tiller and rudders, I was passed by a very bedraggled group of about 8 kayakers who were struggling mightily against the wind and the waves and appeared to be heading out of the harbour.

Having sorted myself out and thanked the OPP, I finally headed back up the harbour to the cottage. As I was de-rigging the boat, a voice behind me asked how bad the conditions were out in the Bay. A very pleasant young woman explained that she was leading the group of novice Kayakers that I had seen earlier, on a camping trip to Franklin Island. It had already taken them 2 hours just to get to the north end of the harbour and they were obviously exhausted! My advice was under no circumstances should they venture out – it was just too dangerous. She then pointed at Snug Island and asked if they could camp there for the night. I explained that it was private but that they could camp on our property as long as they were careful about fire.

With great relief, they set up a very neat camp and then hung all their soaking clothes on an improvised washing line – much to the consternation of my wife who had just returned from a visit. They couldn't have been better guests, very quiet and gone long before we got up the next morning leaving a spotless camp site. The funny thing was that we had 3 phone calls from neighbours asking if we knew we had campers on our property! It just shows how good people are about keeping an eye out for each other.

# Little McCoy Island purchased by Georgian Bay Land Trust

*By Bill Bialkowski, Snug Harbour*

Georgian Bay Land Trust (GBLT) has leased Little McCoy Island since 2000 but purchased it in late 2012, with the help of generous donations and the support of the McCoy family who opted for strong environmental stewardship instead of development. Little McCoy is the most northerly of the McCoy group which lies north of the Minks and west of Twin Sisters Island. The larger Big McCoy Island is crown land.

Little McCoy Island is 35 acres in size, and supports a wide variety of fauna including the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, the Eastern Fox Snake, the Blanding Turtle and the Five Line Skink. All four are species at risk. Some of the most notable flora includes an extensive Leatherleaf shrub bog community in a large depression that runs through the centre of the island.

The public is encouraged to visit Little McCoy to picnic, kayak, swim and bird-watch. There are, however, rules. The key rule is 'leave no trace', don't have fires and don't camp overnight. Naturally, we are to treat the flora and fauna with the respect they deserve. Visitors need to factor in two cautions. The area around the McCoy group is completely exposed to wind and wave activity and has many treacherous shoals, so be very careful. Make sure the weather forecast is appropriate. This year, with the super low water levels, the shoals will be even more hazardous. So take a compass and chart, and watch the depth constantly.

The Georgian Bay Land Trust's mission is to preserve and promote appreciation of the archipelago and mainland along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay and the North Channel. Stewardship is GBLT's core activity. GBLT commits to the stewardship of these properties in perpetuity. To learn more about Little McCoy, and GBLT's 33 other properties, visit [www.gblt.org](http://www.gblt.org). GBLT is always looking for volunteer stewards to help maintain an on-site presence – something to consider.

## A view from Carling Council – Spring 2013

*By Michael Gordon, Long Bay*

Since my last report in January, Council has focused on:

- **Finalizing the update of our Municipal Buildings.** The new 4-bay steel frame building is coming along well as you can see from Hwy 559. The final budget ended up at \$900,000 and will provide appropriate space to safely store and maintain our public works vehicles. We have discussed the future fate of the old PW/admin building and have asked our Fire Chief to determine if it is of any use to the Fire Department. If not, we can demolish the building as part of the new Public Works building construction tender.
- **Upgrading our road infrastructure** – As part of our effort to hard-surface

all of our township roads, the surface treatment of Sand Bay Road will take place this spring, in addition to Wawanaisa Rd. The major road project for this year was planned to be Blind Bay Rd and Pengally Bay/Linda Ave and we applied to the provincial Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative Capital Program for funding to support those projects. As this application was not successful, we have decided to defer this work until next year and apply again to obtain funding from the province.

- **Taking action to address low water levels** – Council continues to work with the township of the Archipelago and other municipalities around the Bay to communicate our deep concern about our water levels to the IJC, Federal and Provincial governments. This effort focuses both on a long-term solution to the problem and the need for funding to support short-term adaptation. Council has passed a temporary use By-law for docks that will provide additional flexibility to enable property owners to access the water. The Township is dredging Dillon Cove and Snug Harbour, replacing the Snug Harbour docks and installing new concrete ramps at all our boat launches. Finally, Township administration will support waterfront property owners by assisting with blasting/dredging applications where required.
- **Clarifying our Official Plan and Zoning By-law regarding Boathouses and Boatports** – in March, Council passed Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments to prohibit the construction of any new boathouses or boatports in Carling township.
- **Exploring a septic re-inspection program** – in November, the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority presented to Council some options for a septic system re-inspection program. At this time, Council has decided to focus our initial efforts on education and you will be receiving information with a newsletter from the Township this spring.
- **Determining the future of our Lighthouses** – Council is proceeding to develop a business plan for the Snug Harbour Lighthouse. We still have many questions concerning the process, costs, and obligations but we will continue to engage on this issue.

I am always happy to speak with anyone about anything relating to Carling Council. You can reach me at [mgordon003@sympatico.ca](mailto:mgordon003@sympatico.ca)



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# Carling Farmers' Market

*By Jane Whitwell*

A group of Carling Township residents met in the spring of 1979 to discuss the possibility of having a weekly farmers' market. John & Irene Kozbey (Deep Bay) took the initiative to organize it and spoke with other locals who also had surplus vegetables. Irene Hailstone then approached both Carling Township Council and the Recreation Committee, and in less time than it takes to catch a bass, she had favourable support. The Recreation Centre on Highway 559, the former public school, was selected as the location.

In June of that same year the inaugural Carling Farmers' Market was held and the first vendors included many prominent families in the area—Lori Konoval and Vivien Konoval, Walter and Mary Trakalo, Irene Hailstone, Pat Haines, Ruth Fry, Elinor Christie, John and Isabel Kozbey with Dick Marshall joining them later in that season. The 1979 Executive Committee included Lori Konoval and Keith Ramsay.

From the beginning The Market offered delectable homemade bread, baking, pottery, vegetables, pickles, preserves, crafts, artwork, books, sewing, maple syrup, etc. Now decades later, The Market still offers homemade bread, baking, vegetables, pickles, preserves, crafts, knitting/crocheting, books, plus jewellery, garage/attic surplus items, sometimes a boat, artwork, woodwork, furniture, signs, puzzles, etc. The Market is still a gathering place for the community—a genial mix of residents, cottagers and campers. There is nothing better than to come out early Saturday morning for a fresh brewed cup of coffee accompanied by a fresh butter tart, mingle with your Carling neighbours and chat with the vendors! What bliss!

The 2013 season opener for the Carling Market will be Saturday May 18th, a combination of a community yard/garage/plant sale with our regular vendors. The summer season officially begins on Saturday June 22nd and runs through to Saturday August 31st. The Annual Thanksgiving “Savour the Flavour of Carling” charity breakfast and silent auction will be Saturday October 12th, the charity to be named later. Begun in 2010 the Thanksgiving Charity Market has raised nearly \$5,000 for the West Parry Sound Health Centre Foundation and Parry Sound Adopt-A-Home/Habitat for Humanity Muskoka. Throughout the summer months we are anticipating hosting special events such as we had this past year when Santa came to visit and Carling Fire & Rescue held interactive demonstrations. Plans are underway to have a “dogfest” in August and possibly a few more theme days (i.e. summer reads, ratepayer associations, participation, Carling history, etc.)

Everyone and anyone are invited to participate, be it as a vendor, customer or browser! The table space can be rented on a daily basis or for the season, bring your own chair/table/tent or use from the Community Centre. The Market is open from 8:30 am to noon, rain or shine. In inclement weather The Market moves indoors utilizing the Centre's wonderful interior space featuring a display of many historical photos of Carling Township's ancestors.

The Carling Farmers' Market is steeped in tradition and community spirit—why

not join us? For further information please contact: Wanda Davis 705-342-1830, wanda1\_davis@hotmail.com or Jane Whitwell 905-887-9303, jane.lee.whitwell@sympatico.ca or check the Carling Township website (www.carlingtownship.ca)

## Knowing When to Go

By Tom Betts, Snug Harbour

Our family is a nine-hour drive from the splendor of Georgian Bay, yet our thoughts are seldom far from the cottage. From the spring to the fall, days at the cottage are interspersed with days at our Pennsylvania home, and any separation is relatively brief.

Winter, though, is a different story. Depending on conditions, we may go as much as six months without setting foot on the Canadian Shield. So, late each winter it is with plenty of excitement that we look toward our early May Open-Up weekend, and we hold dear several reminders that it is time for us to head north.

Even before the ice begins to leave the lakes in Pennsylvania, migrating ducks arrive. There are many species, but we take special note of the attractive buffleheads – the males with bright white patches on their heads, and the females, drab by Nature's design, with a tiny buff cheek patch. They dip and dive in the tame waters near our home, but they've got points far to the north on their mind (they can nest as far north as Hudson Bay), and so do we.

Sometime early in March we hear the first white-throated sparrow in our back yard, working his way up from the south and checking our feeders for seed. He's fueling up for a trip to some quiet, pine-sheltered cove along Franklin Island, and when I hear his legendary "Old-Sam-Peabody-peabody-peabody-peabody," I can't help but think of that cove. We know he won't stay in our backyard for long – he's got places to go, and so do we.

Peepers and other frogs begin their chorus from the swamps as soon as any hint of spring is in the air, and when there is moisture enough. In an advancing wave, from Florida to Hudson Bay, the music of the tiny frogs (they're a mere 3 cm in length!) announces the spring season. When we hear ours in Pennsylvania, we know that their cousins are beginning to stir far to the north, and we start our packing.



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As winter gives way in Pennsylvania, a symphony of bird calls returns. Red-winged blackbirds appear, sometimes while snow is still on the ground. And robins and cardinals sing their cheery songs before the sun is up.

But it is another bird that serves as our cottage reminder – the red-eyed vireo. This small olive-green migrant from South America makes a home every year along the path that leads from our dock to our cottage, and every day in the summer he sings non-stop from the treetops. His slurred, broken melodies go up and down the musical scale as we come and go from our fishing trips. When we hear the first vireos in the tall oaks of Pennsylvania, we know it is the beginning of a storm of neotropical migrants. Some will stay and nest in our state, but others are charting their trip across the border, and so must we.

We don't need a reminder that it is time to go north, that the cottage awaits us. But we enjoy the seasonal hints that Nature offers. And we enjoy the reuniting – during our Open-Up, buffleheads will be zooming across the water at lightning speed, most likely on their way further north to nest. A white-throated sparrow will bring quiet cheer to a misty morning. Peepers and other frogs will sing from the wet areas (though I fear the impact of water levels on these critters), and, if it is warm, our resident vireo may already be sentinel along our cottage path, waiting for us.

Spring has come to cottage country, and so must we!

## Common Loon Tunes

*by Alex Davidson, Snug Island*

It was another lovely Florida sunset over the Gulf of Mexico and my wife Audrey and I were fully engaged in the popular ritual of monitoring the sun's progress to the horizon while sipping our favorite wine. We were suddenly startled by the haunting call of a loon drifting across the Gulf waters. The sound was out of context; not resonating across Georgian Bay on a cool summer evening in July, but across a salty sea 2000 kilometres to the south in early March.

Unfortunately this experience had a sad ending as days later we found a dead loon washed up on the shore. Cause of death was unknown but we suspect that the earlier outbreak of 'red tide' may have been responsible. This is an explosive algae bloom which can be toxic to both aquatic birds and fish.

At any rate, I was motivated to do a little research on this well-loved bird that adds so much to our summer holiday experience and graces the back of our 'Loonie'



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dollar coin. Although loons leave their breeding areas across the northern lakes of the United States and Canada in late October to early November, it seems that little is known about how they get to their wintering areas. Common loons overwinter along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts and have been estimated to travel as much as 2200 km to reach their destinations. These heavy birds can travel no further than a few hundred kilometers per day and hence must overnight on rivers, lakes and reservoirs on their trips to and fro. These staging waters must be ice free and offer sufficient food. Their winter range covers almost the entire North American coastline, from the Aleutian Islands to central Mexico on the Pacific, and from Newfoundland to as far south as central Florida on the Atlantic.

There are a number of North American loon species, but we are most familiar with the Common Loon. This iconic bird nests on clear lakes with rocky shorelines, numerous islands, and floating bogs in boreal landscapes as far north as the Arctic. They are large birds, ranging from 28 to 36 inches (70 cm to 90 cm) with a wingspan of 52 to 58 inches (130 to 145 cm). Loons have nearly solid bones and powerful muscles, making them better equipped to dive underwater than to fly. In fact their legs are set far back on their torsos, the better to propel them underwater after prey. As a result they are decidedly awkward walking on land. Their weight of between 6 to 14 pounds requires a long water takeoff runway, preferably with a decent head wind for lift.

Biologists believe that loons return for breeding season each year to the same general area where they were born. Both male and female work to build the nest, which is located on sheltered shoreline with an unobstructed view and close to food-rich open water. The shoreline at the nest site must be deep enough to allow an underwater approach and egress to avoid revealing the nest location to predators. Successful nests are often reused in subsequent years. Two spotted eggs are laid and incubated by both parents over some four weeks. The young are downy, sighted and relatively mobile at hatching, but cannot feed themselves. Within a day they accompany their parent on to open water for feeding. They may return to the nest for brooding, but on good days they climb from the water on to the backs of their parents and nestle into the feathers for warmth and protection. They may be fed by one parent while riding on the back of the other. Small fish are the primary diet, although vegetation and invertebrates are eaten opportunistically.

Juvenile loons are on their own after about 12 weeks. The parents head off on migration in the fall, leaving juveniles to gather in flocks on northern lakes and make their own journey south a few weeks later. Once the juveniles reach coastal ocean waters, they stay at sea for the next two years. During their third year, the young loons return north for their first breeding season. It takes four years for a young loon to reach breeding maturity. The bird is relatively long lived with 15 or more years not being unusual.

Although the common loon is not threatened, as cottagers we can do our small part to assist in their healthy survival. If you are aware of the location of nesting loons, stay well clear of it, both by boat or on foot. Boat wash or close human presence can cause parents to desert the nest. An alarming number of loons have

died from lead poisoning caused by ingesting lead fishing sinkers or from entanglement in abandoned fishing lines.

I'm certain that all of us will do what we can to ensure the long term presence of this most cherished summer resident of our beautiful Georgian Bay waters.



**Beaver Dam Debris at Dillon Bridge, Earl Milligan**

## **SHEBESHEKONG RIVER IS SUFFERING A TRIPLE PUNCH**

*By Earl and Margaret Milligan, Shebeshekong River*

Wet lands are destroyed, the river filling-in with beaver dam debris and Georgian Bay water levels are down by several feet due to dredging in the St Clair River. The water level is dropping while the river bottom is coming up and destroying fish spawning beds.

My name is Earl Milligan and I was born and raised on the once beautiful Shebeshekong River. Back in 1933 my family first lived on the Little Shebeshekong River across from what is now Camp Wawanaisa. When I was six, we moved to the property just west and south of the Dillon Bridge. With my five sisters and four brothers I spent my early teen years roaming the river and surrounding waterways in a row boat. With my younger brother, Elmer, we rowed to and tented on most of the Islands in the area, which were then mainly uninhabited. We were the only family on the river except for the Christenson's (our Aunt, Uncle and cousins) who lived north of the Dillon Bridge.

Then the river was pristine and beautiful. I left to spend 37 years in law enforcement and returned in 1975 to purchase a small piece of the original homestead on the river and built a home where my wife and I retired in 1997.

I was shocked how the river had deteriorated in such a short time. The wetland at the mouth of the river was comparable to Wye Marsh, but was destroyed by channels dredged through the shore road allowance. Not only was this a prime wetland, but also in the late 1800's, the site of the LaRonde family historic trading post (see: <http://www.cottagecountrynow.ca/opinion/columns/article/937489>). The dredged material raised the shore road allowance which was then used to grow vegetables. I complained of course, but nothing happened.

Now for the major problem – the beaver. In most years, beaver built one dam under the Dillon Bridge and a second one at the water fall near our home, plus others upstream. When the water backs up from the Dillon Bridge and threatens the Dillon Road, the Township uses a back hoe to punch a hole in the dam and the debris then floats down the river to spread itself over the bottom all the way down to the river mouth. A few days later the beaver start to build a new dam, only to be defeated by the Township again. The debris from each dam can fill three large truck loads, so since 1975 well over 200 truckloads of beaver dam debris have filled-in the river bottom and that just from the Dillon Bridge dam, let alone the smaller dam near our home and the others further north.

So what's the big deal – hasn't this been going for hundreds of years? “WRONG”. Since mankind first set foot on this continent, beaver pelts have been a fur of choice. As a boy, my family saw more trappers, both white and native, than we did beaver. My cousin, Verna Christenson, now Verna Burden, told us how excited she was to see her first beaver in the river when she was a small girl. It wasn't uncommon for native trappers to stop by our home for soup, sandwich and tea. As the trappers moved out, the beaver moved in and this now has serious consequences for the river and all who enjoy it.

If the water level ever returns to normal, heavy rain and snow melt will cause erosion as the water rides higher up the river banks due to the buildup on the bottom. It is evident that the river is now wider and shallower, as valuable fish spawning beds have been covered over year after year.

Looking at it from the beaver's point of view, they would benefit only if allowed to complete their dam under the Dillon Bridge. There would be a large lake to the north of the Dillon Bridge. Here they would thrive with their lodges, abundant food supply etc. But that is not allowed to happen. Surely there must be some compromise, as we humans have rights too. What is the point of allowing the beaver population to waste their energy and talent to no avail, ever?

I am against harming the bearer, and all other wildlife for that matter, and have suggested a few things that could be done that might convince the beaver that dam building, at least under the Dillon Bridge, is not solving the objectives they are trying to accomplish. Winter arrives and they don't have the flooded area in which to build their lodges etc.

I have submitted reports to MP's, MPP's, Carling Township, the MNR, Fisheries and Oceans, but no one has shown any interest. So the problem goes on. In my humble opinion, no action is not an option, as left unchecked; our river will be nothing more than an extension of the wetlands that exist at the mouth.

At this point, the bottom needs to be cleared of several feet of beaver dam debris. Also, heads should be put together to come up with a plan to deal with our ambitious beaver neighbours. Surely, nothing is impossible - the impossible just take a bit longer.

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