



April 10, 2019

Mr. Matt Holmes, Manager of Planning Services
Town of Bracebridge
1000 Taylor Court
Bracebridge, Ontario
P1H 1R6

Re: Comments on March 29, 2019 Letter from Dougan and Associates to South Bracebridge Environmental Protection Group; Our File 3517

Dear Mr. Holmes:

We are in receipt of a critique of our Environmental Impact Study (EIS), prepared by Dougan and Associates, who were hired by the South Bracebridge Environmental Protection Group. That critique includes the following statement in support of the EIS.

“Overall, our conclusion is that the EIS provides a reasonable overview of the ecological characteristics of the area, identifies some but not all key species and habitat types that are present and require protection, identifies some impacts associated with the proposed development plan, and presents a strategy to address potential impacts through buffers and mitigation approaches that will be identified at a future date, presumably during detail design of the school precincts and road network.”

That statement essentially confirms that the methodologies and work completed as part of the EIS are appropriate, that recommendations of the report to mitigate environmental impacts are sound, and that there are opportunities to ensure any additional matters are addressed through the Site Plan process. However, the letter then goes on to raise three principle concerns with the EIS, and suggests these raise concerns with respect to environmental policy conformity. These are numbered as bullets 1 to 3 in the main body of the Dougan and Associates letter. Michalski Nielsen Associates Limited disagrees in all cases with the concerns raised by Dougan and Associates, as explained further below.

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1. Concern with respect to field investigations being insufficient and/or too old:

- while it is true that the EIS took advantage of information that has been collected over the past two decades, all relevant field work was either refreshed or completed anew in late 2017 and throughout 2018;
- there were a minimum of 12 site inspections by ecologists over the 2017 – 2018 period, to confirm earlier work and complete a variety of new surveys, including to delineate wetlands and other vegetation communities, determine vegetation composition, assess aquatic habitat conditions, document amphibian breeding, document breeding bird activity, evaluate bat maternity roosting habitat, assess deer wintering activity, survey for Whip-poor-will and survey for general wildlife use;
- it is very important to note that there was pre-consultation within MNRF, the District of Muskoka and the Town of Bracebridge at the onset of this project. Species at Risk issues were confirmed with MNRF. The level of additional field work was discussed with the District and Town. Field efforts met or exceeded all information requirements of all three of these approval authorities;
- as decisions were made with respect to site opportunities and constraints, field efforts were able to be more heavily focused on the development precincts that were being identified;
- considerable attention has been paid throughout such surveys to potential Significant Wildlife Habitat, which has been thoroughly addressed in the EIS, particularly as it relates to the identified development precincts;
- natural environment conditions within this property have been very thoroughly examined and it remains our strong position that there are no gaps in the baseline information which create any uncertainty respecting our conclusions on the environmental sensitivities of this site. Resultant conclusions on the appropriateness of proposed development are therefore sound.

2. Wetland Status:

- the critique states that “The consultant indicates throughout the EIS that the wetlands on the site are not Provincially Significant.” This is an incorrect and misleading statement;
- the EIS speaks to the matter of Provincial Significance on only a single occasion, in the discussion of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) policies (page 53 of the EIS), in which it states, “There are no Provincially Significant wetlands within the property.” This is a simple statement of fact;

- I note that the subsequent sentence of the EIS reads “That said, there are various other wetlands within this property which require protection, with one of these, Henry Marsh, being a feature of local/regional importance.” There is absolutely no attempt in the EIS to downplay the importance of wetlands;
- the constraints analysis section of the EIS identifies wetlands as the primary constraint on this property, and prioritizes the protection of such wetlands, including with robust buffers and with large landscape blocks to remain undisturbed and dedicated to ensuring connectivity between the different wetlands, as well as between wetlands and woodlands;
- if one examines the locations of development precincts in relation to these wetlands, it is quite easy to see that an average of 100 m or more of undisturbed natural landscape will be maintained around the wetlands on this property on the whole (without consideration of the District’s Bracebridge West Bypass route);
- there are no triggers under the *Planning Act*, PPS or District and Town official plans for completing a wetland evaluation as part of an EIS. In fact, doing so as part of such an exercise is not feasible as most wetlands or wetland complexes overlap property boundaries; wetland evaluations must be undertaken at the watershed level;
- the Province is responsible for confirming the significance of wetlands and is almost always the agency responsible for completing or commissioning the completion of wetland evaluations. The Province has been part of the consultation process for this project, has reviewed information on the proposed development, and have not indicated that it wishes for wetlands to be further reviewed;
- regardless, the status of wetlands on this property (i.e., whether Provincially Significant or not) would not dictate any needs for changes in buffer dimensions, alterations to development precincts, or any other changes in project design.

3. Evaluation of Significant Wildlife Habitat:

- the evaluation of Significant Wildlife Habitat has been able to be more targeted to the identified development precincts, and is very thorough. It properly considered all relevant categories of potential Significant Wildlife Habitat;
- it is important to understand that the PPS makes clear that decisions on what constitutes such habitat is left to the discretion of individual municipalities. Further, the policy direction of the PPS is permissive: development is allowed both within and adjacent to

Significant Wildlife Habitat providing that “there will be no negative impacts on the natural features or ecological functions.”;

- the example raised by Dougan and Associates with respect to woodland amphibian breeding habitat is a case in point. While technical guidance documents to the PPS do note that amphibians using such features as vernal pools will disperse into woodlands up to 230 m away, the policy direction of the PPS simply requires consideration of whether there are concerns that amphibian breeding, and subsequent dispersal to woodland habitats, will be compromised at a broader landscape level (which extend beyond the limits of individual land parcels). As has been documented in the EIS, there are absolutely no concerns that these functions will be lost within either the subject property or the broader environs, fully meeting the test of the PPS. This is also true for all other candidate Significant Wildlife Habitat within or adjacent to the identified development precincts.


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In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to respond to the Dougan and Associates’ critique. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or comments.

Yours truly,

MICHALSKI NIELSEN ASSOCIATES LIMITED

Per:



Gord Nielsen, M.Sc.
Ecologist
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Enc.