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Lake Simcoe cleanup committee formed
By Bill Rea

The federal government promised \$12 million to protect and restore the Lake Simcoe environment in its budget in March.

York - Simcoe MP Peter Van Loan was accompanied by Environment Minister John Baird on the shores of the lake Friday as they announced the next step.

They announced the creation of a committee to Protect and Preserve the Environment of Lake Simcoe (to be known as PROPEL), which will provide advice to the minister on how the money should be used.

In addition to the broader environmental concerns, Baird stressed the importance of Lake Simcoe, calling it "a valuable part of our natural heritage."

"This is an important lake and it's a huge watershed," he observed.

"Our government believes that clean, safe and secure water is something all Canadians should have the right to enjoy," he added. "That is why I am pleased to announce the creation of the PROPEL committee. The valuable work of this committee will compliment the Government's work to ensure the clean up and protection of Lake Simcoe continues to move forward."

He added there has not been enough done over the last 100 years to show respect for the environment. "This is a gigantic step forward," he said, stating there's still a lot more to do.

Van Loan commented this is an important step for him on a personal level, since he spent much of his youth around the lake.

"Lake Simcoe is one of Canada's and Ontario's premier natural resources," he declared.

He says it plays a big role both in the local environment, but the economy as well.

"After years of hard work, action is being taken by Canada's new government to protect and clean up Lake Simcoe's environment," he remarked. "This is important, not just to the thousands of visitors Lake Simcoe welcomes each year, but also to the communities

that live on its shores. Lake Simcoe provides clean and safe drinking water for tens of thousands of families around the lake."

Lake Simcoe is one of Ontario's major recreational areas, according to Environment Canada. It's known for its fisheries and landscapes, and generates about \$200 million annually through tourism and recreation. PROPEL is to be chaired by Innisfil resident Richard Simpson, and its membership will include Ladies of the Lake cofounder Annabel Slaughter, Robert Matthews, Pefferlaw resident Paul Harpley, Innisfil resident Jessica Richmond, Susan Self of Uxbridge, Barrie resident George Taylor, and Orillia residents Neil Roe, Robert Bowles and David Edwards.

"I would like to thank the federal government for taking action to protect and clean up Lake Simcoe. For too long the concerns of Lake Simcoe's residents have been ignored by various levels of government. Thanks to the work of local Member of Parliament Peter Van Loan and local community organizations, our concerns are being ignored no longer," Simpson commented. "As chairman of the PROPEL committee, I look forward to working with the Minister of the Environment to immediately begin the work of protecting and cleaning up the lake."

Van Loan also pointed out this \$12 million is part of a country-wide allocation of some \$93 million.

"It speaks to a national water strategy," he observed, noting the program reflects the philosophy that people in Ottawa don't always make the best decisions, compared to those close to the scene.

There are plenty of people nearby who can offer valuable advice. Van Loan said the hope is the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority will provide expertise to help, as he observed the authority has already done great work identifying technical priorities.

"Now's the time for action," he declared. "That's why we're stepping forward."

He added the government hopes the province will kick in some money too, but the federal contribution is not conditional on involvement from Queen's Park. "I really would like it if the province could step forward," he said.