

City of Whitehorse,
Mayor and City Council

June 28, 2014

RE: SCHWATKA LAKE

Dear respected sirs and madams;

I currently own and fly SCOUT floatplane **CGGQH** based from Schwatka Lake. I have recently listed it for sale, and, as soon as it is sold it is my intention, and commitment, to never operate a float plane from here again. I attribute this decision directly to the growing involvement of City of Whitehorse in float plane operations. I do NOT mean for that to be dramatic, or any sort of threat, it is simply a fact. I hold City Council in the highest regard, but I would like to take the opportunity to explain why I have come to this decision;

I first owned a floatplane on Schwatka Lake in **1993**. In the more than 20 years since then I have both moored a float plane here, and worked as a commercial float pilot off and on, for several of the float plane companies that used to be based here. I think I have learned some things, seen some things, understand much of what happens here, and I feel qualified to comment on what is going on.

Firstly, it seems to me that most of the float plane companies that have been based here, no longer exist, and from my experience I think that is a result of the thin profit margins in the industry.

I have never worked for Alpine Aviation, I do not speak for them now in any capacity, but I admire them because they have survived. I believe they currently occupy an ideal location that is out of the way, low impact, and operationally is ideal because it is sheltered and centered on the lake. This means reduced taxi times, and less wear from wind and wave action. I don't see that they represent anything detrimental where they are, or doing what they do.

From that perspective, not all of the proposed dock locations are usable. Some are too exposed to prevailing winds and waves, some too shallow to safely be used, and some too isolated to be secure. Floatplanes can be readily subjected to vandalism when left in remote locations, as was demonstrated to the anguish of Mr Wilkenson several years ago when his aircraft had the engine ripped out of it by vandals while parked securely on the South-East side of the lake.

Over the 20 years I have been involved on the lake the number of float planes and docks has fluctuated widely. Never was there any shortage of spaces until the City assumed authority and restricted new docks. Prior to that docks were sold, borrowed or exchanged efficiently.

Never has there been an accident or any environmental impact as a result of float plane operation. That is surely significant. I recall years ago being shown a copy of a letter from the City of Whitehorse to all floatplane owners requiring them to relocate to the lake. There was never an issue of land tenure or licencing. This has never caused a problem or been an issue to anyone involved in flying floatplanes, again, until an arbitrary shortage imposed by the City. There are many examples available all across Canada of the direct results and unintended consequences of arbitrary restrictions on public property (just ask a fisherman on any coast.)

I think again of all the flying companies I have seen come to the Lake, invest heavily, struggle mightily, and fail eventually. Tagish Air, Ranger Air, Yukon Wings, all come to mind. Again, I speak for no one other than myself. But, limited clientele, growing overhead, and thin margins killed these guys, and their costs to operate off the Lake were 1/10 of what you are proposing to implement (my estimate based on experience).

I have to admire people like Blacksheep and Tintina that continue to struggle in an industry that so many others had to abandon. I believe Blacksheep's current location is one of the few conditions that keeps them viable, speaking again, only for myself. It would seem to afford them ideal access for both clients and maintenance. They are one of the few long-time survivors, their views may differ from my own, but I guarantee whatever their views are, they are valid and deserved beyond any other "interest" I can conceive of.

I won't raise the issue of the City's legal authority to implement this, I believe changes are nearly inevitable in any event. But logically, any management regime, following a public consultation (manipulated information campaign) based on faulty assumptions can never achieve a valid conclusion, legally based or not. Especially when it is undertaken by bureaucrat elements and focused on solving problems that are in fact, only created by the same bureaucratic authorities.

Here are my predictions;

I predict this dock shortage situation is a tiny model reminiscent of the affordable housing shortage the City has encountered. Very soon after the management regime proposed is implemented, there will be no shortage of docks, but we all know that there will be no large increase in the number of planes operating off the lake either.

I believe that Council could not possibly override the bureaucratic momentum to create a regulatory system, to re-evaluate need, and act solely on the basis of actual facts. An expensive and lengthy planning process has begun. Input sought. Opinions received. Recommendations drafted. A new licencing regime is proposed, and it promises to generate revenue, and "the rest.. is silence.."

I predict the furry of vocal self interest by your bureaucrats, and also by "interests" like boaters, hikers, birdwatchers, developers, and those left desperate by the City-Created

dock shortage, will compete to the detriment of each other, until at last we have all been divided, and ultimately, conquered.

I predict (if I were to continue flying floatplanes) it will cost me several thousand dollars to remain on the lake, I will be regulated by bylaws and subject to new legal obligations, I will have yet another insurance company involved protecting me (or the City), and suffer a precedent of complaints and petty bickering that will be facilitated for ever.

I predict decreased viability of the commercial aviation companies that remain, from regulation, increased overhead, lost clientele, and lower revenues. There will be associated loss in spin-off companies, like tourism, fuel companies, maintenance companies, outfitters, guides, rental and outdoor companies, etc. etc..

I predict private aircraft operators will operate here, for a year or two, but ultimately will forgo their interests and assets and leave too. (Oh, but tl'm describing myself now, and I expect no one to worry about my personal loss but me.).

I have had my say, I appreciate your ear. Until this aircraft is sold I sincerely offer a ride to any of the Council, or staff, with a desire to see this beautiful city from the air, and have the courage to do it with me.

Sincerely

J George Balmer
334-3555