



HEART OF THE BAY

St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association

March 27, 2014

Dear Minister Churchill,

This letter is to provide you with the response from the Board of the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association (SMBSA) to your letter sent on February 26th, which outlined actions to be taken by the DNR subsequent to our meeting on February 11th, 2015. First, it is important to express our appreciation for taking the time to meet with us and to hear our concerns. We are also encouraged by your decision to delay the harvesting of Areas 221, 222, 223 and 537. We hope that future decisions on these lots will be made within the framework of the stakeholder engagement process, and will involve a serious evaluation of the impact of any logging on water quality in Kieley Lake and the Ingramport River, as the major risk to these water bodies would be through the logging of the areas that have been given delayed allocation status. We also appreciated the increase in the elevation of the clearcut scheduled for Area 219 to move the harvest farther away from the west side of the Ingramport estuary to reduce the visual impact.

However, the SMBSA remains deeply concerned about the fact that clearcuts will proceed on Areas 219 and 220 this spring prior to the establishment of a stakeholder engagement process. We have not yet received the pre-treatment assessment on these areas that we requested on February 11th. Your letter of February 26th stated that pre-treatment assessments will be available on the DNR website by the end of 2015, and this will be a major step toward achieving your Department's goal of transparency. However, this action will be too late in providing the information we need at this point in time to understand what continues to be a truly baffling decision from our perspective.

Your letter indicated that the most compelling argument we made on February 11th was related to the value of tourism activity in our area. Mr. Minister, both sides of the #103 Highway between Exits 5 and 6 are already riddled with clearcuts that mar the visual panorama of the gateway to the South Shore. Equally important for tourism is the #3 Highway and your decision to proceed with harvesting will not only impact views from the east side of the estuary, but will also scar the borders of the new Ingramport interchange and degrade any views of Kieley lake that will be visible from the new roadway.

Department representatives present at our meeting on February 11th stated that the visual impact of clearcutting is negligible after three years. We find that claim to be contrary to our experience, and we will make efforts to monitor the lands around us to document the impact of this controversial forestry practice over the years to come.

Equally important are the environmental concerns that are specific to the river valley and ocean estuary that will be directly impacted by the clearcutting. We request assurance from your Department that our fears regarding erosion, siltation, and water quality are unfounded. If the pre-treatment assessment does not provide scientific evidence to allay our concerns, we request that studies be undertaken over the upcoming years to monitor water quality in all aspects, including the well water of local residents.

SMBSA Board members who have recently hiked into the areas of Areas 219 and 220 were perplexed by the apparent lack of economic value of the trees that are slated for harvesting. The trees appear to have limited value due to their small size, and types, which raises questions on the motivation for the clearcutting. It is speculated by some in our community that the harvesting is being pursued to clear the way for residential development. A statement from you to quell this rumour would be appreciated, and would be distributed by SMBSA.

Considering the multiple negative impacts and degree of continuing citizen concern we remain vehemently opposed to the planned clearcutting in the Ingramport River area. We still find it hard to believe that there are no other crown lands which would be far better choices for harvesting to support the immediate needs of the forestry industry.

We have been accused in the public media of being opposed to necessary economic activity in our back yards. Mr. Minister, we want to assure you that SMBSA is completely committed to the harvesting of our forest resources in appropriate areas and using sustainable practices. This is why our organization put countless volunteer hours into submitting a proposal for a community forest for St. Margaret's Bay. We also feel that we speak with legitimate authority about the decisions that directly affect us precisely because the impact is in our own back yards.

The process that has resulted in the decision to proceed with clearcutting on Areas 219 and 220 has fallen far short of the principles and aspirations of "The Path We Share" and we wholeheartedly support the intention of the DNR to establish a proactive stakeholder engagement process. Patricia MacNeil has sent the Draft Stakeholder Engagement Framework to us for review and both Geoff Le Boutillier and Helga Guderley have submitted extensive comments which we support. We feel that an engagement process that truly achieves a balance of interests can only be achieved through an empowerment process that delegates final decision-making to stakeholders, and we remain hopeful that the framework for engagement will be exercised at this level for major decisions.

We look forward to ongoing dialogue with DNR and participation in the stakeholder engagement process. Your letter of February 26th stated that the management plan for the St. Margaret's Bay area of the western crown lands has been drafted, and will be released in the coming months. SMBSA recommends that the management plan for the Rossignol, St. Margaret's Bay, North Mountain District be released in a draft form, prior to being finalized, in order to utilize the engagement process that is currently being designed.

Thank you again for your consideration of our input and concerns.

Sincerely,

*Cathy Crouse*, Chair

On behalf of the Board of the SMBSA

Cc. Denise Peterson-Rafuse, MLA for Chester - St. Margaret's

Matt Whitman, Halifax Councillor for District 13

Frank Dunn, Deputy Minister of DNR

Patricia MacNeil, Executive Director, Policy, Planning and Support Services, DNR