

HEART OF  THE BAY

St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association

Honourable Stephen McNeil
Premier of Nova Scotia

Subject: St. Margaret's District Park

Dear Premier McNeil,

The St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association appeals to you to act with haste to cancel the clear cutting of harvest blocks 724, 722, 727, 729, 730, 714 and 715 recently allocated by the Department of Natural Resources in the St. Margaret's District and to consider an alternate future for these lands.

To summarize recent developments in this area, in late January, 2016, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) posted harvest allocations of 385 hectares (600 football fields) in this heavily used recreational area, which contains the Old Annapolis Road hiking trail, a world class fish ladder recently built by Nova Scotia Power, several stands of valuable red spruce, an active Scout Camp and 3 nature reserves. The public had 3 weeks to respond and respond we did. Faced with public outrage, on March 16th, DNR "deferred" the harvest on 30% of these areas, but clear cuts will proceed on the remaining blocks, including those listed above. While deferring harvest on 30% of this area seems good, presumably this means DNR will consider them for harvest once public attention abates.

Premier McNeil, we strongly believe that this area provides the perfect location for a "front country" park, having close access to a major highway (103) and 30 minutes from downtown Halifax. Revealingly, the public of all ages have used the lands near and around Sandy Lake for ages as if it were a public park area. We are presently defining such a park that would allow us to enshrine current usage patterns, in conjunction with other community groups that share our values of preserving the heritage and quality of life in the St. Margaret's Bay area. Local residents have made extensive use of these lands for generations. These lands are a perfect tourist destination given their location and accessibility. The area has multiple attractive features, with archaeological, historical, ecological and recreational attributes.

"To preserve and enhance the bay's natural environment, its heritage and its quality of life based on the community values of the people who live in the St. Margaret's Bay area."

Core Values – Community Involvement, Responsibility, Transparency

The impressive fish ladder would be of considerable interest to visitors. These attractive features would be lost if the blocks listed above were clear cut. While in the rest of Nova Scotia, 30% of crown land is protected or in parks, in the former Mersey lands in the St. Margaret's district there are no parks and less than 10% of the land is protected. Ray Ivany's seminal report, Our New Economy, identified tourism as a major growth area. Very few tourists would want to visit clear cuts.

The Stewardship Association's mission statement is "To preserve and enhance the Bay's natural environment, its heritage and its quality of life based on the community values of the people who live in the St. Margaret's Bay area". The St. Margaret's Bay community has worked hard to try to provide input into the management of these lands. A few years ago, efforts by the people of St. Margaret's Bay to establish a Community Forest on these lands received extensive backing from Halifax's mayor and councillors, from 60 prominent NGO's and community organisations, and from hundreds of residents; however, DNR flatly rejected this proposed community forest. Our further efforts to participate with other stakeholders in the management of this forest were marginalized. As we see it, the problem is that DNR manages these public lands as if they only represent sources of fibre and forest biomass, even though the classification of these lands indicates that they have multiple values. DNR is clearly unable or unwilling to collaborate with communities despite the precise commitment in their own 10-year guiding policy plan – The Natural Resources Strategy. Rather, they seem to see one group of stakeholders – the forestry/biomass industry – as the only stakeholder to consider.

Given this impasse, the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association is appealing directly to you, Premier McNeil, to cancel the clear cuts of harvest blocks 724, 722, 727, 729, 730, 714 and 715 foreseen by DNR. The SMBSA requests a meeting with you, before the opening of the provincial legislature, to allow us to present our proposal of a park that will allow the multiple values of these lands to be enjoyed by future generations.

Sincerely,

Eileen M. Cody and Kellie Allen, co-chairs
St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association

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