

Potential Lewis Lake Nature Reserve

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From the Chronicle Herald:

A large part of crown land near Lewis Lake in Upper Sackville is slated to become a nature reserve as part of the Nova Scotia government's plan to protect 12 per cent of all land in the province.

Walter Regan, president of the Sackville Rivers Association said he is happy to see a part of the Sackville River Watershed protected, but would like to see more.

“Since 1990 the province of Nova Scotia has been trying to work towards this 12 per cent figure,” Regan said from the organization's office at the Sackville Heights Community Centre. “It's not based on any real science, it's just a figure. At the time, this goal was really significant, because back then, the only thing that was protected were a few federal parks.”

The government focused on crown-owned land and ecologically significant properties when determining the best properties to protect. If all of the areas slated for protection get the ‘go ahead,’ the province will be looking at 13.7 per cent protection, not 12.

Regan said this is a good ‘first step,’ but would like to see the province continue protecting more land.

“The government of Canada in 2011 signed the Tokyo Accord that they would save 17 per cent of Canada, so I think Nova Scotia should follow that example and try to go for that figure next,” he said. “13.7 per cent is a good first step, but it needs to be higher.”

“One of the last crown-owned properties on the Sackville River Watershed is what we know as the Lewis Lake block,” he said pointing to a large map of proposed protected areas. “Here’s the last chance to save and protect the last large section of crown-owned land on this watershed.”

The area covers about 600 acres and is flanked by two other large crown properties, both of which Regan thinks should become part of the reserve.

“The whole thing is crown owned,” he said while showing the Lewis Lake block. “They want this as a nature reserve, and these two areas to stay as crown.”

“The thing I like about it is here’s our last chance to save a very ecologically important area for the Sackville River, it has ground water recharge, and we have no large parks on the watershed,” he said. “This would keep a 600-acre area just for wilderness, no hunting, no ATVs.”

Regan said that approximately 65,000 people live on the Sackville River Watershed area and that one of the biggest threats to the habitat is more ‘leap-frog’ residential development, what he describes as developers building out further into the wilderness.

“As a nature reserve, we would chase the chainsaws,” he said. “Nobody is going to be able to go in there and put down a massive subdivision.”

Regan said wetlands in the area are in particular need of protection because they help to prevent flooding, something the Sackville and Bedford communities deal with on a regular basis.

“These wetlands are also contiguous to the Pockwock water reservoir, and many of us rely on that,” he said.

The presence of wild Atlantic salmon in the Sackville River is a major indicator of the watershed’s overall health, and although they are there, the population has declined from decades ago.

Regan said the biggest human pressures on the area are developers, forestry and the mining industry.

Regan strolls through the proposed protected area around Lewis Lake. The area currently has a Girl Guides Camp, which will stay if the area becomes a nature reserve.

Across the lake, homes can be seen on Sackville Drive. Regan said if this area isn’t protected, it could end up like another Springfield Lake with homes all around it.

“All I’m asking, with the Lewis Lake block, is to protect a small portion of a 150 square kilometre watershed,” he said. “I need the water slow and I need it cold.”

Although the Proposed Sackville River Nature Reserve doesn’t directly touch the river itself, Regan says the protection of the land will help with water recharge.

A public consultation process will be conducted before the proposed areas are officially protected.

Colin Chisholm
Herald Community Writer

colin.andrew.chisholm@gmail.com