

Resolution 15A

WILDERNESS PROTECTED AREAS (PASSED)

⇒ County of Victoria

WHEREAS the previous designation of Wilderness Protected Areas has had economic impacts on rural communities; and

WHEREAS there are a number of issues with the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act* that infringe on rights that Nova Scotians' consider important;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that representatives from the UNSM and the Nova Scotia Government undertake discussions on the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*, regarding ways to minimize economic impacts on rural communities and resolve issues arising from the 1998 designations and the language of the *Act*.

Response from:
Department of Environment

RESPONSE:

The department appreciates the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities' (UNSM) resolution suggesting improvements to public access and enjoyment of wilderness areas.

At this time, the department's emphasis is on completing the designation of new protected areas by the end of 2015, as outlined in the 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan. As we complete that work, we will be shifting our focus more towards enhancing the management of individual sites, and addressing issues and opportunities. This effort will include completing a review of protection legislation and policies, in order to identify any potential changes that would enhance our ability to effectively manage provincial protected areas. This resolution will be incorporated into such a review.

The Ability to Construct New Trails

New trail construction in wilderness areas is treated differently for motorized and non- motorized uses. New non-motorized trails, such as hiking trails, can be developed by Nova Scotia Environment (NSE) or through a trail planning process with interested partners such as community trail groups or municipalities. This approach has been used successfully to create some truly outstanding wilderness hiking opportunities in wilderness areas across Nova Scotia.

The Ability to Operate a Bicycle and Tent/Camp

Bicycle use can be permitted in wilderness areas on designated trails. As we shift more towards site management, we will be looking at areas appropriate for bicycle use.

Tenting, camping and many other outdoor activities are permitted within wilderness areas year-round at no cost. Information on camping and outdoor recreation in wilderness area is available in our Keep it Wild brochure, which can be found online at <http://www.novascotia.ca/nse/protectedareas/pubs.asp>.

Exclude Well-used Public Roads from Designated Areas

In Nova Scotia, many areas listed as "public roads" are no longer present on the ground, or may be little more than an overgrown cart track. Of course, in other cases, these roads are highly valued for connecting regional communities and accessing recreational opportunities. Through the multi-year planning process for new wilderness areas, staff have completed extensive field work, and met with local and provincial groups to determine the condition and use of an array of access roads and trails. Well-used public roads are typically left out of protected areas to allow continued vehicle use. In some situations, we also implement management agreements to allow OHV use on certain routes. Vehicle access management in wilderness areas can be complex and controversial, so the draft has worked hard to strike the right balance between access and protection. As we work to manage these new wilderness areas, we will certainly be seeking opportunities to communicate openly with local communities and others impacted by vehicle access decisions, while building opportunities to enhance area protection, enjoyment and stewardship.

More Enforcement

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides enforcement resources for protected areas. Within the context of fiscal and other limitations, we are working closely with DNR to ensure that we are providing the best possible enforcement presence in our wilderness areas. This includes focusing on areas of highest risk and taking steps to build an atmosphere of public stewardship that supports compliance. It also requires that we consider the best location of enforcement resources as these lands transition from general Crown land management to management as protected areas.

Direct Consultation with Municipalities

Over the past number of years staff have presented to various municipal councils, held special information sessions for municipalities across the province, and met with municipal representatives individually. We will continue to be present, and look forward to continuing to work with both the UNSM and individual municipalities. Any advice that you can provide on improving this approach is certainly welcome.