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of Nova Scotia
Municipalities

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December 16, 2014

The Honourable Randy Delorey
Minister, Department of Environment

Minister Delorey:

I am writing as a follow-up to a resolution on protected areas passed at the 2014 Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM) Fall Conference. The resolution is attached for your review.

The UNSM supports the creation of Wilderness Areas throughout the province including the protection of sensitive areas and species at risk. At the same time the UNSM would like to see the Province develop methods of improved access so residents can gain a better appreciation of these areas. We would also like to see improved communication with municipalities and enhanced enforcement. To this end, the UNSM is requesting that the Province review its Wilderness Areas Protection Act to consider the following:

1. The Ability to Construct New Trails

The UNSM would like to see the ability for new trails to be constructed. While the act states that "The minister may, in a Wilderness Area designate, develop, and manage a trail or route", it is not clear if a new trail can be constructed in a designated wilderness area for motorized or non-motorized use. Could an organized OHV or trail group be granted special permission through an agreement to create a new trail or would it only apply to maintaining existing trails within the designated area?

2. The Ability to Operate a Bicycle and to Tent/Camp

The current act states that no person shall use or operate a bicycle and shall not camp or tent. While UNSM recognizes the importance of maintaining the pristine nature of wilderness areas, there needs to be a balance in terms of using the land so residents can appreciate it. The use of mountain bikes and camping/tenting in a number of designated areas should be permitted, as these represent low impact activities. This would allow Nova Scotians and tourists to gain a better appreciation of our wilderness areas.

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3. Exclude Well Used Public Roads from Designated Areas

Certain designations have taken away the use of public roads within wilderness areas. Once designated, those public roads that have been traditionally used by hunters, hikers and motorized vehicles will no longer be accessible. The UNSM would like to see better communication with impacted communities with respect to identifying and maintaining access to these public roads, even if such roads do not serve as regional connector routes.

4. More Enforcement

In reaching its goal of 13 per cent, the Department of Environment has created many more wilderness protected areas with fewer staff to manage them. If the Province is serious about managing and enforcing our wilderness areas and having them contribute to local and regional economies – then it must put significant staffing in place to support and guide these endeavors.

5. Direct Consultation with Municipalities

The Province should develop a formal process to directly consult with municipalities that are located within the geographical area of proposed wilderness designations. Municipalities are not a stakeholder group but a true order of government and deserve to be treated as such. This process would also extend to any issues that arise within existing designated areas.

While the above recommendations impact all municipalities that house wilderness areas, it is important to point out that one of our member units, the Municipality of the County of Victoria, will have 40 per cent of its landmass protected once the latest wilderness designations are legislated. When you look at the fact that approximately 13 per cent of the Province is protected as a whole, Victoria County is over-represented. This will limit the municipality's ability to generate economic development activity with respect to utilizing its natural resources. The Province should consider these impacts before legislating all of the designated wilderness areas for Victoria County.

I look forward to your response of the above issues identified.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Hunter', written in a cursive style.

Warden Keith Hunter
UNSM President

cc: UNSM Board of Directors
The Honourable Mark Furey, Municipal Affairs Minister
The Honourable Zach Churchill, Minister of Natural Resources

Resolution 15A - Wilderness Protected Areas - Passed at 2014 UNSM Fall Conference - Submitted by 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.