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Glavine: NDP not shielding Chignecto game sanctuary

By DAVID JACKSON Provincial Reporter
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The NDP has changed its tune on protecting the Chignecto game sanctuary, Liberal MLA Leo Glavine charged Wednesday.

Mr. Glavine said granting an exploration agreement to Eastrock Resources Ltd. last week for an area that includes the game sanctuary shows the New Democrats are not committed to protecting the area, as they have indicated in the past several years.

"They've been talking the talk, they're in power, and it's truly time for them to walk the walk on this issue," Mr. Glavine said.

"When I take a look at what I heard at Province House, in the legislature for the past six years, this is not consistent with the viewpoint and the policy that the NDP have voiced over that period of time."

The agreement with Eastrock, a Calgary company, means no one else can look for oil and gas in the designated areas of Cumberland and Colchester counties. But for specific activities on the Crown land, including the sanctuary, the company would need joint approval from the Environment, Energy and Natural Resources departments.

Eastrock conducted some seismic testing in the sanctuary, home to the endangered mainland moose and Blanding's turtle, last fall.

In November, Pictou West MLA Charlie Parker, now the House Speaker, blasted David Morse, then the Conservative natural resources minister, for allowing the testing in an area of moose habitat, saying the minister was "more than willing to destroy it."

In the Nov. 5 news release, Mr. Parker pointed out that a public review of the province's game sanctuaries released in 2005 found most respondents wanted more protection for game sanctuaries.

"Allowing seismic testing in the Chignecto sanctuary does nothing for mainland moose

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habitat protection," he said. "Why won't the minister listen to the results of his own department's consultation?"

Mr. Parker was in Scotland on Wednesday for Nova Scotia Day celebrations and unavailable for comment.

Mr. Glavine said the Liberals support banning industrial activities in game sanctuaries.

Despite the possibility of future activity in the sanctuary, Environment Minister Sterling Belliveau said the NDP position on the sanctuary hasn't changed because Eastrock would still need a permit for seismic testing or drilling.

"What I emphasized earlier is that there's a farther process that has to be evaluated and approved, and the approval goes through the three different departments, so I think we're getting a bit ahead of ourselves here and that decision would be made at the appropriate time," Mr. Belliveau said.

The sanctuary is part of the exploration agreement, although Environment officials are considering it for a higher level of protection that would ban logging and mining. Conservationists have wondered why the door is open to those activities while the review is underway.

Between the new exploration agreement and one from 2006, Eastrock holds the rights to about 258,000 hectares of land. The sanctuary comprises less than 10 per cent of that, about 22,000 hectares.

Eastrock president Michael Volcko could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

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