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LOCAL NEWS

Last updated at 10:29 PM on 16/08/09

Open discussion needs to be open

BY DARRELL COLE
The Amherst Daily News

AMHERST - Cumberland Wilderness wants an open discussion on the future of the Chignecto Game Sanctuary, one that involves all the stakeholders including those on both sides of the debate. Responding to comments by Cumberland South MLA Murray Scott earlier this week about a plan brought forward earlier this year by the Natural Resources Department, group spokesperson Harry Thurston said that proposal was neither open nor transparent.

"The problem with the DNR plan was that it was neither transparent nor fully consultative," Thurston said. "In fact it was developed without any input from the local or provincial environmental community, Cumberland Wilderness being one of the principle stakeholders."

The proposal also left out government experts responsible for designing protected areas and as a result the department's proposal "not only failed the test of transparency, it lacked scientific credibility." In his request for an update, Scott said the government needs to engage the public in a transparent and fair consultation process, saying that a DNR proposal to protect 20,000 acres of the 55,000-acre reserve was developed through a stakeholder consultation.

He said it's important that the sanctuary remain accessible for use by area residents, such as allowing off-highway vehicles on designated trails and to allow for continued use of private land. Thurston said his group is in complete agreement that designated trails be preserved and is in favour of separating private lands from the boundaries of the protected area.

"We have stated clearly and repeatedly that we support the connection of all communities surrounding the sanctuary with a designated trail system," he said, adding his group has met and will continue to meet with government officials, off-highway vehicle organizations and hunting and fishing groups about the merits of added protection for the sanctuary.

Environment Department spokesperson Bruce Nunn said government is continuing to review the sanctuary's status along with other protected spaces in Nova Scotia with the aim of protecting 12 per cent of the province's land mass by 2015.



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“These lands could possibly contribute to that,” Nunn said. “We are evaluating Crown lands as part of a broader planning process to meet that goal. We are aware that there has been a lot of discussion in the communities about establishing a new wilderness area and how that can affect how the existing area is used. Any discussion on a wilderness area will have to consider all those affected groups.” Nunn said there would be public consultations if the province opted to move towards designating the sanctuary as a wilderness area.

dcole@amherstdaily.com



17/08/09

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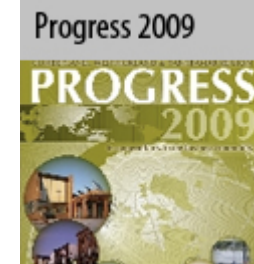
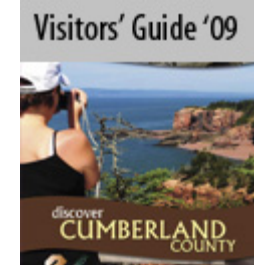



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