



October 24, 2008

CHEBUCTO WILDERNESS COALITION

A landscape photograph showing a calm body of water, likely a lake or river, surrounded by a dense forest of evergreen and deciduous trees under a blue sky with light clouds. The image is positioned at the top of the page, behind the main text area.

Report from the Steering Committee

CWC Meets with the Minister of Natural Resources

Representatives of the Chebucto Wilderness Coalition (CWC) met with the Honourable Davbid Morse, Minister of Natural Resources on Tuesday, October 21, 2008. The Minister was accompanied by senior staff members Brian Gilbert, Patricia McNeil, and Hugh Gillis. Mike Marriott, Beth McGee, and Tom Musial represented CWC. Kermit Degooyer and Martin Willison joined the EWC delegation to express the support of the Ecology Action Centre and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

The meeting was relaxed and friendly. The delegation told the Minister that it did not come to make a presentation but to become better acquainted and to ask and answer questions. Although the meeting was scheduled for an hour, it lasted almost an hour and a half. We asked the minister to guide the discussion. Everyone spoke in smoothly flowing conversation.

For the first half hour of the meeting, the Minister directed his questions to Mike Marriott regarding his surprise at the support of ATVANS and the Safety-Minded ATV group. Mike's responses were eloquent (plain talk and unvarnished facts). OHV riders were as concerned as anyone about preserving the natural environment and his organizations were committed to safe and responsible use of off-road vehicles. The OHV organizations have a history of maintaining established trails, and as long as they can continue to use two well-established, hard-packed trails: the Old Coach Road and the Joshua Slocum Fire Road. These roads can be exempted under provisions of the Wilderness Areas Protection Act.

The constructive dialogue between the Minister and Mike sent the tone and direction of the rest of the meeting. Subsequent discussion returned regularly to the way in which the CWC initiative represented a groundswell of community-based cooperation and coordination that had already addressed most of the issues that WAPA protection would



likely raise. The CWC approach was one that could serve as a model for other communities.

The Minister asked many questions about how community communication and coordination took place. His questions gave Beth an opportunity to talk about “town hall” meetings, workshops, and bi-monthly COCO meetings that shared information, addressed issues, coordinated activities, resolved differences, and linked representatives of diverse communities around and throughout the 103-333 highway loop.

The minister acknowledged the endorsement of the two local MLA’s, Bill Estabrooks and Judy Streach,, and confirmed his receipt of correspondence confirming the Endorsement of the Western Region and full HRM Council.

Kermit and Martin made informed statements about the ecological values of the land and emphasized the social values arising from a pristine wilderness located so close to the region’s major Metropolitan area.

Brian confirmed that there were no significant interests in lumber or mineral extraction in the area and at times seemed to be saying that it would be good for government to respond positively to the CWC’s “bottom up” initiative, for the community seems to have correctly identified the most appropriate use of this parcel of land.

By the time everyone left the room, all participants judged the meeting to be a success. The Minister said that he was pleased that we could cover such a broad range of significant points without a formal agenda and in a way that enabled everyone to speak. “That, for me,” he concluded, “is the sign of a successful meeting.”

The delegation did not get a direct answer from the Minister concerning his willingness to support our initiative (Tom asked him directly), but he directed his staff to gather and report to the CWC his department’s assessment of the lands in question. We can expect a formal reply in the weeks ahead.

Following the meeting, he emphasized to Tom how much he admired the way that the Coalition was going about its work.