



Report #11 from the Steering Committee

September 24, 2009

CHEBUCTO WILDERNESS COALITION

Meeting of the CWC Steering Committee with Minister Sterling Belliveau, Department of Environment and Minister John Mac Donell, Department of Natural Resources

On September 10, 2009, Minister Sterling Belliveau, Department of Environment, met with five members of the CWC Steering Committee, including Tom Musial, chair of CWC, Beth McGee, chair of FBWHT, Richmond Campbell and David Patriquin, co-chairs of WRWEO, and Geoff LeBoutillier of SMBSA. The meeting turned out to be much larger than anticipated. Minister Belliveau invited his Deputy Minister, Nancy Van Stone, his Executive Assistant, Joanne Cooke, the Acting Director for Protected Areas Branch, Peter Labor, and senior staff members Oliver Maass, and Leif Helmer. The minister also invited the Honourable John MacDonell, Minister for Natural Resources, the minister's Executive Assistant, Laurence Nason, and Acting Coordinator from the DNR Planning Secretariat, Hugh Gillis—a total of 14 participants.

After introductions, Minister Belliveau began the meeting by saying that he had viewed by air the Five Bridges Lake Wilderness Area in order to become better acquainted with the land for which CWC is seeking protection and welcomed hearing our presentation. Tom thanked the Minister for this opportunity and first discussed the very positive implications for tourism. He then reviewed the main points in our previous report, with David Patriquin elaborating the four ecological reasons for protection. Finally, Tom read from a recent letter of endorsement written to the Minister from Graham Smith, a Director of the Nova Scotia chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and Director of the Sage Environmental Program, a private foundation dedicated to conservation in Nova Scotia:

The Crown land in the Five Bridge Lakes area is essential to connectivity for both animal and human traffic. This land mass as a protected area would provide connectivity to the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes lands to the north, Long Lake Provincial Park to the east, and Terrence Bay Wilderness Area to the south. It would also link all of these areas to the HRM Western Common if HRM were to designate the western portion of the Common as a wilderness or semi-wilderness area. The Five Bridge Lakes tract is the core that brings all of the surrounding areas together, which otherwise would be like island sanctuaries.

The value of a unified land mass and network of watersheds that have intrinsic ecological value in their natural state is inestimable. The area is home to both endangered species and species at risk, including the Mainland Moose. It is home to numerous watersheds whose health is essential to the quality of human life as HRM's urban core expands. In a unified land mass, significant environmental research can take place that would not be possible in a fragmented area. The area has exceptional potential for soft ("leave no trace") recreational activities for a wide variety of outdoor enthusiasts. If protected, its periphery would support the tourism industry as ecotourism becomes more popular. All of these benefits are available on the doorstep of Atlantic Canada's largest urban core. We can preserve them if we act now. If we do nothing, we may lose the opportunity forever. Rarely is it possible for government to do so much for the public good at so little cost.

For these reasons, I ask your administration to act promptly to name the Five Bridge Lakes tract of Crown land as a candidate for protection under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act.

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Both ministers sincerely thanked the CWC and the community groups that it represented for their sustained, dedicated work over the past nine years for public stewardship of public lands. They further emphasized that the various groups have “done their homework well” in presenting a case for protection. Minister Belliveau re-affirmed Premier Dexter’s commitment to protect at least 12% of the province’s land mass. Minister MacDonell spoke articulately and with passion about how lucky we all were that the wilderness was so close to Halifax. Both ministers acknowledged the four ecological reasons for protecting the Five Bridge Lakes lands and both ministers agreed that the land’s proximity to the Metro-Halifax urban core gave it a special, distinctive character.

In his concluding words at the meeting, Minister Belliveau asked the CWC to be patient with its request to have the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area lands protected. He explained that government has procedures that must be followed, and government still needs a little more time to complete these procedures. We must, therefore, wait for the completion of these procedures. The Steering Committee, however, heard nothing at the meeting to suggest either reservations or pending impediments, from either the ministers or their senior staff, to the Province taking the next step, namely, official designation of FBLWA as a candidate area for protection under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act.