



WRWEO WATCH (Vol. 7, No. 1) January 2010

Newsletter for the Woodens River Watershed
Environmental Organization (WRWEO)



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Hardly news now, but new since our last newsletter: the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area was designated a Candidate Wilderness Area under the 1998 Wilderness Areas Protection Act on October 19th, 2009! There is much to be done over the ensuing year to sort out details of boundaries and access, but this process is one of moving forward towards the formal designation of the area as a Protected Wilderness Area, probably early in 2011. It's not yet time to celebrate, but we can pause to reflect on this wonderful land and that it will be conserved for seven generations and more to come.

Annual General Meeting

Accordingly, the theme for the 2010 Annual General Meeting is: **Our New Candidate Wilderness Area by Land and Water**. The AGM is Wednesday evening, February 17, from 7 pm to 9 pm at the Tantallon Public Library. Registration and renewal of membership (\$10 per person) begins at 6:30 pm. (However the meeting is open to members and non-members alike.) Please mark this date on your calendars.

We expect the formal business to take about 45 minutes. It will include summaries of our activities over the past year related to:

- (i) aquatic habitat & water quality in the Woodens River Watershed
- (ii) The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail
- (iii) protection of the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area.

and there will be an election of a new board of directors.

Then, keynote speakers **David Patriquin** and **Dusan Soudek** will provide a **conceptual and pictorial tour of the Five Bridges Lakes Wilderness Area that the Province has recently designated as a Candidate Protected Area**. David, a retired biology professor from Dalhousie University is Co-chair of WRWEO and also active in the Halifax Field Naturalists and the Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society. He will take us on a tour of the area by land noting, for example, the magnificent rhodora bushlands, broom crowberry (a coastal plain species that is endangered outside of N.S.) and the area's little known stands of old-growth oak and spruce. Dusan, past president of Canoe Kayak Nova Scotia, regularly travels the waterways within the area by kayak and canoe. He will take us with him on a virtual guided tour of the streams, lakes, and rivers.



Varied landscape on the 4th loop of The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail near the southern tip of Upper Five Bridge Lake.

"In every deliberation, we must consider the impact on the seventh generation... even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine." - Great Law of the Iroquois

Change of Treasurer on the Board

Brian Saulnier, who has been Treasurer with WRWEO for nearly three years, recently resigned to pursue other interests. This important job can be and has been extremely demanding and we are all grateful for his conscientious and capable volunteer services as we have endeavoured to make ends meet. With his agreement, the Board appointed Rob McMahon to be Treasurer until the AGM, when a new board will be elected.

Annual Fishing Derby Cancelled

On the first Saturday of June, when the province does not require a fishing license to fish, WRWEO held its Annual Fishing Derby, as it has for more than 10 years, with two differences. The derby was held within the Woodens River Watershed at Cranberry Lake by the entrance to The Bluff Trail. We also made a renewed effort to teach catch and release, fly fishing, and a better awareness of the relation between land and water through the use of a quiz with prizes for answers showing the most environmental awareness. Unfortunately the rainy weather reduced the numbers of participants, but there were other more serious problems, including adults showing a disregard of our efforts to make the fishing derby a valuable a learning experience for younger fishers, reports of fishing over the limit and the night before under the cover of darkness. As volunteers we have neither the resources nor the legal power to regulate the behaviour of others. We have, however, an obligation as an environmentally responsible association not to continue to sponsor events that can be easily abused in this way. The Board has decided with regret not to offer the fishing derby again this June. Since International Trails Day coincides with the event every year, our energies can be focused there.



New Information on The Bluff Trail

New information, including new maps and photos, of The Bluff Trail is provided on our website at wrweo.ca or at blufftrail.ca. If you haven't visited there recently, there is much new to learn. A new map of the trail suitable for downloading is available in which the loops are colour-coded according to the colour of the marks on each loop: yellow for the connector and Pot Lake, blue for Indian Hill, red for The Bluff, and orange for Hay Marsh. No less than 20 drainage areas where the trail crosses and has become extremely wet and muddy have been made easily passable through the use of an ancient technique of building the tread with found stone. Though the construction of this kind of tread is labour intensive, it has significant

advantages over the use of boardwalks: stone tread does not rot and hence is low maintenance, it is less expensive to install, it is in keeping with the feel of a wilderness trail, and it is friendly to the environment, eliminating tree cutting for timber and wood preservatives. When properly constructed, this kind of tread does not impede the drainage of water across the area. There are roughly an equal number of such sites on all the loops. Try them out. Your feedback is always welcome.

Development Plan Threatening Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness

As we look forward to seeing the Five Bridge Lake Wilderness Area declared a Protected Area, there seems to be some stalling if not backtracking by HRM in regard to the promised Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park. The 2006 Regional Plan laid out plans for a Regional Park at Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes (BMBCL). The park would include a core wilderness area and a peripheral multiple use recreational area. In October of 2007, the province made a commitment to protect a large crown land block within that area and in April of 2009, 1312 ha of crown land, covering most of the area conceived as core wilderness area and some of the area conceived as multiple use recreational area in the Regional Plan, were designated a wilderness area under the Wilderness Protection Act. HRM had agreed to procure privately held lands (by purchase, land swaps or other means) to complete the park including land around the eastern lakes, which comprise the major part of the water surface within the proposed Regional Park.



Susie Lake, in the proposed Regional Park, is surrounded by Birchdale Projects land.

Over the past several months, rumours have circulated about possible development of the private lands. On January 7, 2010, WRWEO Co-chairs Richmond Campbell and David Patriquin wrote a letter to the Mayor and Councilors, cc'd to WRWEO membership, expressing concerns about this situation. On January 8 they attended an information

session hosted by HRM staff to clarify what has been happening. About 75 people attended, including seven of the 23 HRM councilors. The essence of what they were told is contained in a Q&A document which is posted at <http://halifax.ca/regionalplanning/documents/BirchCoveSusieLakeQandA.pdf>

In summary, on July 31, 2009, Birchdale Projects requested HRM to conduct a secondary planning process for the private lands they hold within and adjacent to the proposed park. Staff looked at this request and two others for other areas. As there is no shortage of land in HRM for projected growth to 2026, they recommended that consideration of requests for secondary planning be deferred to the second review of the Regional Plan in 2016.

It is now up to Regional Council to accept this recommendation – or not.

The staff's report and the original requests for secondary planning are available at:
<http://halifax.ca/regionalplanning/documents/BirchCoveSusieLakeQandA.pdf>

Noticeably lacking in the Staff's Report was any mention of procurement of the private lands for the Regional Park. Following the staff's presentation, the floor was opened for questions and an intensive discussion took place over the ensuing 2 hours. Speaker after speaker, including the WRWEO Co-chairs, expressed dismay that HRM has not been moving ahead with its commitment to procure the private lands that lie within the proposed regional park. Three councilors said they agreed and would not support any request for secondary planning involving these lands. That leaves 20 and the Mayor that we are not sure about!

Breakfast Television at the trail head

CTV roving reporter Cyril Lunney took a lesson in snowshoeing from Jim Carwardine at the trailhead for The Bluff Trail and talked to David Patriquin and Jim about the trail and what to bring when hiking on it. The footage was broadcast in four 2-minute clips on Breakfast Television on Jan. 15, 2010. The clips are posted on YouTube and can be accessed via wrweo.ca (or blufftrail.ca). See the post on the home page.



PERSPECTIVES

We invite WRWEO members to share their perspectives on issues that relate to the Woodens River Watershed, The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail and the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area. Below, WRWEO Co-chair David Patriquin expresses the position of the WRWEO Board on the forest biomass issue that has been much in the news recently.

The Biomass Issue: We should pay woodlot owners to store carbon, not to burn it!

Clearcutting and watershed integrity can be uncomfortable partners. There has been at least one bad experience associated with clearcutting on the Woodens Watershed: in 2004, a flash storm after a poorly executed clearcut washed silt into Brines Little Lake and from there into the Woodens River, turning it chocolate brown for five days. New pressures to clearcut for a minimum of financial return (and hence minimum incentive to do it with care) could develop if the province allows large scale clearcutting for biomass energy. In December, 2009, WRWEO Co-chair Richmond Campbell and I wrote a letter to Premier Dexter on behalf of the WRWEO Board, cc'd to WRWEO members, expressing concerns about the environmental impacts, sustainability and CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions that would be associated with large scale forest biomass projects. The topic was much in the press during the fall, concurrent with the Renewable Energy Consultation process at Dalhousie University.

(See: http://eco-efficiency.management.dal.ca/Events/Special_Events/.) The Renewable Energy Strategy coming out of that process recommends that large-scale forest biomass energy could provide up to 70 megawatts by 2015 and a further 70 MW by 2020. The authors suggest that it could be done in an ecologically compatible fashion by setting appropriate regulations, e.g., that management be certified.

Much of the discussion about sustainability of forest biomass has focused on whole tree versus stem-only harvesting. A clear-cut near Caribou Mines provides a particularly upsetting example of what can result from a whole tree clearcut, apparently SFI



Area by Brines Little Lake that was clearcut in 2004. (Photo in spring of 2009)

(Sustainable Forestry Initiative) certified. (See photos and story at

<http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/story/2241>).

Regardless of whether a clearcut for biomass involves stem-only or whole tree harvesting and regardless of the provisions to ensure it is conducted according to the highest possible standards, however, there is an important reason that it shouldn't be part of our green energy strategy: it would entail CO₂ emissions at least equivalent to those associated with coal.

The common assumption has been that forest biomass is "carbon neutral", i.e. that because the forest regrows, it takes up the carbon dioxide that was released when the biomass was burned. True, but if a 40 year old forest is burned, it takes 40 years to take it up again and there are additional CO₂ emissions associated with enhanced breakdown of soil organic matter following a clearcut, loss of forest productivity, energy used in processing, and the lower efficiency of biomass to generate

electricity compared to petroleum products. Further, if the forest were not cut, it would go on sequestering carbon dioxide (taking it out of the atmosphere). So a clearcut for biomass takes a site that helps to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and turns it into a source of more carbon dioxide! (Cutting for timber is a different matter because much of the carbon continues to be stored in wood products. It should be noted as well that there are biomass schemes that are carbon neutral or even help to sequester CO₂ - generally these involve fast growing trees or perennial crops grown on fertilized land. Also, use of thinnings or selectively harvested trees for firewood are probably carbon neutral practices.)

We may wonder why this issue has not been raised within the context of the Kyoto Protocol. A recent paper in the prestigious journal Science* has pointed out that there is a critical accounting error in the Kyoto Protocol that allows biomass energy to be treated as carbon neutral, regardless of the source. The error is very large for forest biomass and, the authors say, is leading to inappropriate pressures on the world's forests, most of which will go on accumulating CO₂ if not harvested. Let's hope Nova Scotia's energy

wizards take notice and that our green energy strategy will NOT include large scale clearcuts for biomass energy!

In fact, sparing forests from clearcutting and allowing them to accumulate more carbon, as well as afforestation (establishing forests on non-forest land), are considered critical to global efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions. Really, we should be looking at schemes such as carbon offsets that pay woodlot owners for storing carbon, not for burning it (by selling to biomass energy producers). That does not have to exclude harvesting: for example, selective harvesting of a forest managed to promote natural age structure and species diversity would be a win-win for all, including the wildlife.

* "Fixing a Critical Climate Accounting Error", by T. D. Searchinger et al., *Science*, Vol. 326. no. 5952, pp. 527 - 528 (23 October 2009).



Mixed forest on the north side of Lower Trout Pond in the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area.

To Contact WRWEO: Our e-mail address is wrweo@yahoo.ca. You can also write or call directly to Richmond Campbell (Co-chair: 876-7847 at home or 489-0457 for his cell), or any of the other board members listed on the website; write to WRWEO, Unit 14, Box 300, 3650 Hammonds Plains Road, Upper Tantallon, Nova Scotia B3Z 4R3.

Photographs in this issue of WRWEO WATCH were taken by David Patriquin