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Murky Waters

CONTENTIOUS MINK FARM DEVELOPMENT GIVEN GREEN LIGHT

By STEVEN WENDLAND

YARMOUTH COUNTY, NS—A proposed mink ranch development on Sloans Lake appears to be moving forward, much to the consternation of area residents who had been under the impression that the development application had been rejected under a municipal land-use bylaw.

“The health of the Wentworth-Carleton watershed is already seriously strained by high-density fur farming at its headwaters,” says Debbie Hall, an area resident. “It’s very depressing. Sloans Lake is one of the last clean lakes in the watershed.”

On October 28, 2009, following years of worsening lake conditions and the continuing proliferation of blue-

green algae blooms, the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth (MODY) voted to amend a municipal land-use bylaw, increasing, from 328 to 500 feet, the required minimum setback distance from lakes and rivers for buildings, manure storage facilities, and burial sites for the disposal of dead animals used in conjunction with fur ranches and hog and fowl farms.

An application submitted by R&N Farms Limited for a mink ranch development on Sloans Lake, roughly 20 kilometres north of Yarmouth, was initially denied because the development proposal did not meet the new setback criteria. But R&N revised its application to meet the demands of the revised bylaw and has since been granted 14 building permits for the same location.

“It looks like we won the battle but lost the war,” rues Hall. “The community had hoped that the bylaw amendment would curtail the development altogether.”

The blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, that is thriving in many Yarmouth and Digby County lakes is a toxin-generating microscopic plant that flourishes in water

containing high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen. The algae’s prevalence has raised concerns about health and safety, reduced property values, damage to local ecologies and the proper regulation of industry.

The 2010 NSE report, entitled A Water Quality Survey of Ten Lakes in the Carleton River Watershed Area [of] Yarmouth and Digby Counties, lists mink farms, a mink food processing plant and an aquaculture operation as “three large nutrient sources which could potentially be stimulating algal production in [the headwater] lakes.”

“It’s clear to the people who live in this area and are directly affected by the water pollution that the problem is getting worse as the mink farming industry expands,” says Debbie Boudreau of the Tri-County Watershed Protection Association, a nascent Yarmouth-based community group devoted to bringing relief to the affected lakes. “Our environment is suffering under the weight of 1.8 million mink; what will happen as the industry continues to expand?”

NEWS in BRIEF

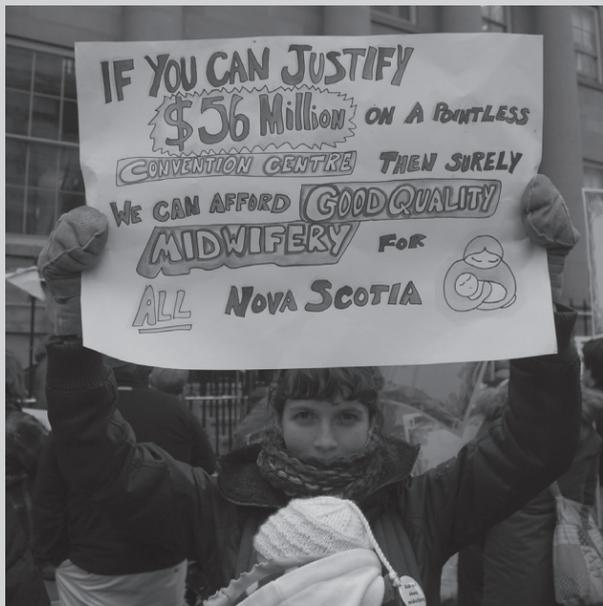
JANUARY 2011

HRM city council was hit with a \$21-million bill - \$11-million over budget - for construction of an underpass linking Bayers Lake’s Big Box stores to Clayton Park. Environmental approvals were ignored, and a council meeting in June which intended to discuss the cost of the project was cancelled due to Queen Elizabeth II’s visit. Multinational engineering firm SNC Lavalin could be heard laughing all the way to the ATM at the Bayers Lake Wal-Mart.

The NDP government and the province’s school boards continued to talk tough, with the government claiming the province’s 9 boards carried a \$45-million surplus last, year, and the Halifax Regional School Board (the largest in the province) countering that much of its own surplus consisted of funds raised by students for school trips. The Strait Regional School Board announced the proposed cuts to the provincial education budget would mean cutting 249 jobs in the Strait Region. The Nova Scotia Teachers’ Union asked for clarification on the proposed 22% cuts.

Fred George, former CEO of Halifax-based Gammon Gold, was listed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives as the 6th-highest-earning CEO in Canada, making in one day what the average Canadian worker makes in an entire year. CEOs raked in these disproportionate salaries even during the recent recession, the CCPA noted.

The Department of Natural Resources announced funding for a bio-massive biomass-burning project by Northern Pulp in Trenton, despite no apparent evidence that the province’s forests can sustainably provide 1.5 million tonnes of biomass each year. “Several times we’ve asked the Department ...for their report on how they arrived at the 1.5 million tonnes of wood available for biomass harvesting per year,” said Jamie Simpson of the Ecology Action Centre. “We can only assume... that there is no report that provides comprehensive justification for the claimed biomass supply.”



Two hundred people, many holding babies or pushing strollers, rallied in downtown Halifax to demand better access to midwifery services. Currently, only four midwives are legally employed in the entire province of Nova Scotia. | Photo by Angela Day

Central Nova MP and Minister of Defense Peter MacKay signed a Canada-Israel Principal Memorandum of Understanding (PMOU) on defence cooperation. MacKay was hosted by the Israeli Minister of Defence, Ehud Barak, and met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, leaders of the Israeli opposition and Palestinian authorities.

A handful of people rallied at Grand Parade Square in solidarity with the Egyptian people’s uprising against US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak.

Stepping Stone, an advocacy group for sex-trade workers, drew the attention of bus-goers and news-readers with an ad campaign promoting the message that “sex workers are people too.” “We really wanted folks to see sex workers for what they are, and that is people,” said Stepping Stone director Rene Ross.



On Martin Luther King Jr Day, the Halifax Peace Coalition also celebrated the 50th anniversary of Dwight Eisenhower’s farewell address, in which he warned “against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military industrial complex.” The coalition picketed outside the Canadian Forces Stadacona Base, protesting Canada’s decision to buy 65 F-35 fighter jets. The jets will cost at least \$16 billion, and the deal—the largest military procurement in Canadian history—with weapons giant Lockheed Martin guarantees no jobs in Canada. Lockheed Martin has an office on the base. | Photo by Moira Peters

The Yarmouth diocese agreed to pay \$1.5 million to six people who, while they were between three and 16 years old, suffered sex abuse by religious leaders in the Catholic Church in Nova Scotia in the 1950s and ‘60s. Recipients of the settlement money, disappointed by the amount, say there are hundreds of other victims. Local dioceses struggle to raise the money, selling “non-core” church properties - sports fields, houses and rural community buildings - to pay settlements. The Vatican, which actively covered up reports of sex abuse, will not contribute to settlements.

—Compiled by Moira Peters and Ben Sichel

Temperatures Plunge, Debts Rise, Students Fight Back

STUDENTS "BEAT BACK THE DEXTER ATTACK"

By HILLARY BAIN LINDSAY

Defying a snowstorm and freezing temperatures, students in Halifax were out in force today, turning out the largest protest the city has seen in years.

"Tuition fees are too damn high," said Kings University student Gabe Hoogers, Nova Scotia director of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). "We should not be saddled with mortgage-size debt as we start our independent lives. The average student debt after graduating from an undergraduate program [in

Nova Scotia] is \$31,000."

"Everyone here knows at least one person who didn't attend university because they could not afford tuition," said Elise Graham, chairperson of the CFS-Nova Scotia. "We are marching for them today."

Participants at the march expressed disdain for the NDP government who announced this week it will cut university funding by four per cent in the next budget.

"Darrell Dexter has a short term memory," said Graham, who is a student at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. "It wasn't too long ago his party claimed to be proponents of affordable education. They've since proven that students cannot expect any government to have our backs."

"We need to beat back the Dexter attack, we need to beat, beat back the Dexter attack!" yelled nearly 1,000 people as they marched down Spring Garden Road – Halifax's downtown shopping district – towards Province House.

"Today we march in solidarity with current, past, future and potential students here and around the world," said Graham. "And tomorrow, we will continue to work together to build a system of education for all students. A system that doesn't include debt. That isn't restricted to high family income. A system that isn't racist or classist. A system that is based on the needs of staff, faculty and students."

"So – So – So – Solidarity!" chanted the crowd.



One group of protesters constructed a mock guillotine that they used in a satirical skit, chopping off the heads of three dummies representing the leaders of each political party. The sign on the guillotine read: These Are The Cuts We'd Like To See. "We agree that times are tough and cuts need to be made," said Dave Bush, a participant in the skit. "So we came in with our alternative budget proposal: we should cut out the political class entirely. They're corrupt and they all do the same thing."

| Photo by Tom MacDonald



Despite being initially blocked from the downtown, students took Spring Garden Road then Barrington, and marched to Province House. | Photo by Tom MacDonald



Tuition will rise for international students as well; A diversity of perspectives came to protest.

| Photos by Moira Peters

The hundreds of students gathered at Victoria Park expressed frustration and anger at rising tuition.

| Photo by Hillary Lindsay



At Pointe-de-l'Église, more than 100 Université Sainte-Anne students gathered to protest tuition hikes on the February 2, 2011, Nova Scotia Student Day of Action. Two hundred fifty Acadia University students in Wolfville joined the province-wide day of action. | Photo by Christopher McDaniel



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