

My name is Catherine Kersten from **Recreation Facilities Association of Nova Scotia**, and this is Rhonda Lemire from **Recreation Nova Scotia**. Good evening ~~to everyone~~ and ~~honoured guests~~.

we were Minister Diab. + Honourable MLAs.
We would like to speak to Bill No 108: the 2015 Financial Measures Act.

The following information was sent to all Members of Legislative Assembly on April 29, 2015

On behalf of **Recreation Nova Scotia, The Recreation Facilities Association of Nova Scotia and Hike Nova Scotia**, we would like to address the recent cuts to the **Recreation Facility Development Program Grants (RFD)** which are awarded from the Active Living Branch of the Department of Health and Wellness. These three organizations represent thousands of members in the recreation and facility sectors; students, individuals, corporations and academics. This RFD Program assists community groups, municipalities and other not-for-profit organizations to develop facilities in order to increase public participation in sport and physical recreation. This Program has been in existence since 1973 and has been the backbone for provincial support for many community facilities. Almost every facility has accessed this funding at one time or another over the years.

The impact these grants have on individuals and communities, is great. From the **individual** perspective, recreation holds the potential to assist people to cope with the mental, social, and physical challenges associated with such life events as unemployment, illness, ethnic/racial discrimination, obesity, and addiction to name but a few. Recreation services and facilities have been proven to help address crime and addictive behaviour such as drinking, drugs, and gambling by providing individuals with more meaningful and satisfying alternatives which benefits not only the individual but the communities in which they reside.

From the **community** perspective, recreation services and facilities can help build strong, cohesive, sustainable communities where people want to live. In addition to the obvious benefits such as reduced addictive behaviour and crime, decreased social isolation, and increased physical activity, recreation services can provide many other positive attributes. Some examples include: through engagement in outdoor pursuits, an environmental ethic develops; the provision of local jobs; community events such as festivals increase interaction between diverse groups; and communities with multiple quality recreation offerings can enhance tourism, encourage youth to stay in the community, and attract retirees.

Last year, the RFD program **invested \$2,994,000** (although most years it has been \$1,944,000) **in 64 organizations and/or communities** for the public good. Many recipients showed commitment to the Thrive Strategy and the soon to be released Nova Scotia Trails Strategy and Provincial Recreation Shared Strategy. In light of the OneNS Report (Ivany report) – a large portion of this funding supports rural communities and their facilities; providing infrastructure support, employment opportunities, and enhanced rural economic development

What is interesting to note about these grants is that for every dollar invested by the province, the recipient sources a minimum of \$2 additional dollars to support the project. This shows commitment and diversity of funding, but also tells us that the \$2.9 million amount noted above, actually results in at least a \$8.98 million difference. These grants have been a firm foundation block which our community recreation facilities (including but not limited to: beaches, sports fields, ice rinks, pools, curling clubs, trails, playgrounds, parks and community use of schools) rely on each year to continue to operate. Many communities have long-term facility and recreation plans based on current RFD funding

The impacts are huge and varied with one example being In the **South Shore**, Community Trail Groups work collaboratively in seeking RFD funds. They recognize that each group will not receive funding on a yearly basis, so they strategically apply so that trail associations will benefit on a rotating basis. There are no other grants available to address maintenance, and without maintenance, there would be no trails which are accessed by so many community members and tourists.

The current fair process and budgets managed by the Active Living Branch have proven to be successful and strategically identifies the greatest need, resulting in the greatest impact. The RFD budget may not seem significant in the overall provincial budget, however they are extremely important to the health and wellness to communities across Nova Scotia. Facility infrastructure improvements are necessary for our recreation sector to thrive. We respectfully ask that the RFD remain intact at current financial levels, at the very least.