

Law Amendments Committee presentation

Bill No. 4, An act to Provide for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Nova Scotia

March 29, 2021 at 10:15 by Telephone.

Good morning. My name is Barrie MacGregor, thank you for allowing me time to make a presentation and I'm speaking in support of Bill No 4, The Biodiversity Act as presented by Minister Porter on March 11, 2021.

I'm 75 years old and have lived in Canaan, Yarmouth County since 1978. I am an active environmentalist.. My wife and I live totally off grid in a small house we built 20 years ago from locally sourced and milled lumber.

Our woodlot holding was at a maximum 200 acres at one time and we operated it part time under the guidelines of a management plan supported by NS Lands and Forests. This involved selective cutting in a mostly hardwood forest. Since the mid 1980's my involvement in that lot has been harvesting firewood for our own use and cutting enough logs to satisfy a small need for lumber. We now own a remaining 50 acres in Canaan on the Tusket River, where we live. I am the current president and a founding member (1986) of TREPA, the Tusket River Environmental Protection Association. I am also an active member of the Healthy Forest Coalition and a board member of Nature Nova Scotia. I'm not a Halifax elitist.

I gather from the media that changes have been made to the bill I have a copy of. I'm not sure what has changed, when it was changed, who changed it on what authority or who was consulted. So I'm speaking in favour of the bill as presented by the minister on March 11, 2021.

For some time I have communicated with the provincial government in regard to forestry practices and the promotion of biodiversity and the care of endangered species. This communication was one way, me to the government. It also appeared that harvesting was going on at a rapid pace on crown land to get as much done before the Lahey report was implemented. When efforts on the part of many failed to get a meeting with government or a moratorium on harvesting until the report was implemented civil action became the only answer. A few people from Extinction Rebellion sat in the minister's office asking for a meeting and were arrested. A logging road blockade in Digby County held up movement of logging trucks from Oct 21 to December 15th when 9 of the Forest Protectors were arrested. My wife Sandra Phinney, was one of the 9 served by the RCMP.

Premier McNeil announced his retirement and Ian Rankin was chosen to be party leader and therefore Premier. His platform is a matter of record and included the passing of the Biodiversity Act and implementation of the Lahey report. My assumption along with that of many others was that these two measures would be taken early in Mr. Rankin's mandate.

But no. A rapidly created organization called Concerned Private Landowners Coalition (CPLC). begins its initiative with a full page ad in the Chronicle Herald misrepresenting the contents of the Biodiversity Act and successfully getting a lot of private land owners unnecessarily upset.

What has occurred over the past two weeks in our little province is truly alarming. Arguing points and perceptions is one thing, but it is quite another to outright lie and mislead so to whip the people into a frenzied weapon that destroys initiatives that are beneficial for the common good,

It appears from the media that some elements have been changed in the Biodiversity Act by removing some of its teeth. The CPLC smells victory in its two week effort and is celebrating with a large ad in the current Chronicle Herald.

The CPLC misrepresentations include:

Fines for violations that are said to be too high. Historically, when fines were low for environmental violations offenders could say they complied with all the rules as they had paid the fine and kept on offending. A fine that “hurts” is required if a judge needs that as a way of dealing with persistent or gross offenders. It’s totally up to the judge to set the amount of a fine.

Entering private land without permission. The act specifies that this can only happen with permission of the landowner and an agreement with the owner.

There has been no consultation: There was advertised consultation opportunities in at least 4 different parts of Nova Scotia.

There are no regulations: It is not abnormal to have the act put in place first and then the regulations created. This was done in the case of governing the mink industry.

My final point is that there are really not two sides to this discussion if we look at the long term. In forestry and biodiversity what other choice have you? The question is - what do we want to pass on to our grand children and great grandchildren? What’s your vision? I firmly believe it is the responsibility of the Nova Scotia government to clarify the long term plan of where we are headed as a province for our forest land. If we do not have a clear common destination we’ll never agree on how to get there.

Thank you for your time.

Barrie MacGregor

March 29, 2012