

Presentation on Bill#4, March 29, 2021, 14:00

First I would like to say that I am a landowner in rural Nova Scotia but I do not feel threatened by Bill 4 and I am in no way represented by the “Concerned Private Landowner Coalition”, a coalition in name only. On the contrary I support the bill in its original form.

I am privileged to have a small brook running on my property and into a salt water bay. When we started to live there in 1984 we discovered that there was a run of smelts in that brook. Every spring for a week to 10 days they gathered at the mouth of the stream by the thousands and circled, waiting for the high tide to climb the small waterfall. Sometimes they were joined by gaspereaux. We did not have to go check if they had arrived because we were told by the cries of the blue herons and gulls that gathered to feed on the fish caught between the rocks when the tide went down. The run was an amazing phenomenon to watch, and because very few smelts, if any, made it up the fall, my children and I would scoop some with buckets and quickly release them above the fall. We probably did not make much difference, as I learned later that smelts can successfully reproduce by spawning on the shore at the mouth of the freshwater brook. But my children learned to respect life of all animals and marvel at the workings of nature.

Then, one spring, a man in a small boat came and put a net across most of the inlet. He came again the next spring, and there has not been a single smelt trying to go up the little brook since, nor a gaspereau. We do not see herons strutting on the shore for most of the summer anymore. The man did not come back either, but that is not surprising, he killed the goose that laid the golden eggs.

This is biodiversity loss. It is difficult to express in words the deep sense of loss, of sadness, of frustration and sometimes anger that this smelt run is no more. I will not be able to share the awe with my grandchildren. When I tell this story to them, it will be a story in the past, like so many stories Grandma tells. But it will not be a story of their present and future. This is why we need the biodiversity act, with emphasis on awareness, education and enforcement.

You may think that this is only a small fish run, in a small brook, of a small population of smelts. But I am only one of the many Nova Scotian from all over the province who can tell similar stories about many different species of flora and fauna. Sometimes the cause is evident, as in the case of a forest clear-cut, sometimes not so evident because habitat fragmentation and loss is such an insidious phenomenon. But biodiversity loss happens every day in Nova Scotia and more and more species become endangered. Practically no land owner has enough land to preserve biodiversity on his or her own, we must collaborate and work as a team, and this is why we need the biodiversity act; it should transcend property boundaries and work at the landscape scale.

It is very disappointing that Bill 4 has been modified already even before today's public consultation. It is even more concerning that the changes were made to appease people that reacted to a completely false and alarmist representation of Bill 4, mounted by a special interest group, Forest Nova Scotia, hiding behind an assumed name and purporting to represent small private land owners.

In shaping Bill 4 I urge you not to forget the very many Nova Scotians that need and want the biodiversity bill, such as

- the families that do not walk their favourite trail because it now crosses a clear-cut,
- the fishermen that do not go fishing because there are no salmon and too few trouts swimming in our streams,
- the wild berry and mushroom pickers who do not pick anymore because of herbicide spraying,
- the farmer that is concerned for his crop because pollinator insects become fewer every year.

Please do not water down the biodiversity bill, most importantly for our children and grandchildren. They are so worried for the natural environment of their future that they feel compelled to have demonstrations even before they are out of school and to do a hunger strike to save the moose.

I thank you for your time and attention.

Patricia Egli, MES, Ph.D.