

Bill # 50

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4

To the

Law Amendment Committee  
NS Legislature

**Bill 50 – Wilderness Areas Protection Act revisions**

Dear Sir / Madam,

Halifax, 3 November 2009

I would like to voice my serious concerns against some of the proposed changes to the Wilderness Areas Protection Act, specifically Clause 2 which permits a seal hunt authorized by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (Canada) on Hay Island in Scatarie Island Wilderness Area. The proposed changes include the addition of two subsections in Section 24 of Chapter 27:

*(3) The Minister may issue a licence permitting the holder of the licence to carry out a seal hunt authorized by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (Canada) on Hay Island in Scatarie Island Wilderness Area.*

*(4) A licence issued pursuant to subsection (3) must only permit such activities as are required to conduct the hunt, and may contain such terms and conditions as the Minister considers necessary to minimize adverse environmental impacts and protect the wilderness area.*

As a scientist and a resident of Nova Scotia, I am strongly convinced that a seal hunt for commercial purposes on Hay Island in the Scatarie Island Wilderness Area is fundamentally against the basic purpose of the Wilderness Areas Protection Act and against the people of Nova Scotia.

The purpose of the Wilderness Areas Protection Act (Chapter 27, Section 2) and its primary (a-c) and secondary (d-f) objectives include:

*(a) maintain and restore the integrity of natural processes and biodiversity,*

*(b) protect representative examples of natural landscapes and ecosystems,*

*(c) protect outstanding, unique, rare and vulnerable natural features and phenomena,*

*(d) provide reference points for determining the effects of human activity on the natural environment*

*(e) protect and provide opportunities for scientific research, environmental education and wilderness recreation,*

*(f) promote public consultation and community stewardship in the establishment and management of wilderness areas,*

*while providing opportunities for public access for sport fishing and traditional patterns of hunting and trapping.*

Opening a Wilderness Area to a commercial seal hunt will be in conflict with all of these objectives, especially (1) the maintenance and protection of biological diversity and natural ecosystem, (2) the provision of reference points for the effects of human activities, (3) opportunities for environmental education and wilderness recreation, as well as the (4) public consultation and community stewardship in the management of wilderness areas.

The people of Nova Scotia have fought long and hard for the establishment of protected areas such as Wilderness Areas in order to protect the biological diversity and natural ecosystems and landscapes in their home Province. It is not appropriate to open such areas to any commercial industry or harvesting purpose. This will undermine the value and basic principle of the Wilderness Areas Protection Act and the general nature conservation. It will also undermine the public trust in the management of protected areas by the government.

Scientists around the world have worked hard to establish meaningful measures for the protection of biological diversity and natural ecosystems. Protected areas are a key component of these measures on land and in the sea and should be respected and unambiguously protected as such. Opening a Wilderness Area or otherwise protected area to a commercial industry will reduce its protective value for biodiversity and natural ecosystems but also undermine the value of nature conservation in the eyes of the public, government, and industry.

In the Wilderness Areas Protection Act, the only permitted activities (Section 24) include public engagement in:

- (a) *sport fishing*; and
- (b) *traditional patterns of hunting and trapping*.

It is also stated that the Minister may make an order *temporarily restricting or prohibiting* the sport fishing, hunting or trapping. Opening the Protected Wilderness Area to a commercial seal hunt is absolutely against these basic permitted activities.

*Wilderness recreation* in the Act is defined as non-motorized, outdoor recreational activities that have minimal environmental impact, including nature-based tourism. A commercial seal hunt is certainly not among these.

In the Wilderness Areas Protection Act the listed prohibitions (Section 17) clearly indicate the prohibition of commercial or industrial activities including mineral or petroleum development, quarrying or mining, resource development including a hydro-electric or water-resource development, forestry or aquaculture activities, and agricultural activities, among others. It is also prohibited to:

- (d) *create, construct, maintain or operate a trail, road, railway, aircraft landing strip or helicopter pad;*
- (e) *use or operate a vehicle or bicycle;*
- (h) *remove, destroy, or damage any natural object, flora or fauna, whether living or dead;*
- (i) *remove, destroy or damage any object of scientific, historical, archaeological, cultural or palaeontological interest;*

A commercial seal hunt would be against the principal prohibition of commercial activities in a Wilderness Area. Also, it will need to maintain and operate a trail or road and use and operate a vehicle, which is prohibited by the Act. Finally, it will remove and destroy natural fauna which is prohibited by the Act.

The Scatarie Island Wilderness Area includes both land and land covered by water (Schedule A #21). Although marine resources are generally managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, seals that breed, nurse, rest, sleep or otherwise occur in a Wilderness Area should be protected from commercial exploitation in that area. Wilderness Areas are a refuge for wild animals and should not exclude animals that live both on land and in the sea.

I hope that you will consider the points outlined above and maintain the protection and not allow the commercial exploitation of wildlife in the Wilderness Areas Protection Act.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heike Lotze', written in a cursive style.

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Canada Research Chair in Marine Renewable Resources