

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairperson and Members of the Committee considering the amendments to the Wilderness Protection Act of 1998 (revised 2005).

My name is Victor David and I represent, approximately, 100 members of two clubs (one as president and one as vice-president) in Guysborough County. These are family-oriented clubs who take full responsibility for their actions.

We, in rural areas, feel that we are at a great disadvantage concerning these protected areas. These areas seem to be designated, by and large, by people who have never been to the actual sites, geographically. We have two towns on the eastern seaboard of the province which are, effectively, "landlocked" by protected areas (Canso and Little Dover). Until the recent opening of the old Queensport-Cole Harbour Barracks road, Port Felix and the Queensport-Half Island Cove areas, were pretty well isolated, as well. These decisions are "life-altering" to us because they prevent us from using lands which were, previously, accessible. In some cases, private land is surrounded by these areas without any regard for these land owners. The government is, effectively, telling land-owners that "you are no longer permitted on your own land!" What would happen if rural community came to town some night and declared "OK, you can't go downtown tonight and enjoy yourselves; it's off-limits?" We all know that that wouldn't float. It seems to be happening to us on an all-too-often basis. Decision-makers talk about our backyards as if they were owned and operated by themselves.

As well, we have a difficult time understanding why people in the city seem so down on ATVers, snowmobilers, off-road bikers, etc. We are the stewards of the land in our area and have been for quite some time. We have trained Trail Wardens who police the trails on a regular basis. We build safe water crossings and keep the trails clean and clear of brush, etc. We do not tolerate people littering or leaving the land other than the way it was found. We are committed to leaving as small a footprint as possible. Please note that, since 1994, we have realized over half a million dollars in volunteer hours and equipment in my club, alone. To insinuate that we "wreak havoc on the land" is to insult us and to indicate that someone didn't do their homework. We have "protected" these "areas" for years and, probably, will for years to come. We all know that in the beginning, when these machines were unregulated, there was much disrespect for the land but we feel that that has changed, drastically, in recent times. We think it's time for government to realize that. For instance, the average age of our membership is 45-50 years of age; mature by any standards. We are, always, going to have law-breakers; that is a very sore spot in our society, unfortunately. But, we don't feel that the wrong-doings of a few should handcuff the general population. As members, we have ex-police personnel, ex-RCMP officers, schoolteachers, medical personnel, councillors, commercial fishermen, mothers, fathers, etc. In other words, a very broad cross-section of the population. We try to educate and tutor. We are all for conservation and protected areas but of what use are these areas if no one can visit them? We are not asking for a system of "arteries." We, only, want a corridor to get through these areas. Or, stop along the way and have a picnic. And, it boggles the mind to see what the logging industry does to the landscape with wood porters and wood processors and the like and all we're asking for is to use a few trails which are, already, in existence and, which will allow us to visit the natural environment.

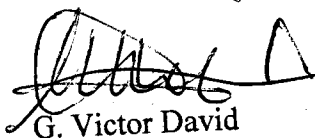
What ever happened to the Planning Committee of 1995? There was supposed to be public input but that has never happened and, still, isn't happening. Why not follow the management plan which was agreed to at that time? Several thousand Nova Scotians had "initial" input and then .....everything slid off of the track. There was a derailment somewhere along the way, for certain. Is this hearing today about input? We think not. We're here today, trying to get someone to realize that these decisions affect us, immensely, in the rural community. We pay taxes just like everyone else but because our population base is not large, it seems that we're never heard. We want to be part of this decision-making process; that is not much to ask. Some people are involved, obviously, why not us? Why not the people who are, directly, affected? In a democratic society, this should be routine.

We are asking the committee to re-evaluate their decision to close the North Ogden Round Lake area to motorized traffic. We are not seeking a new trail; we are asking, only, to use the existing trail which has been there for, at least, 50 years. This designated area has, effectively, cut our Trans Canada Trail in two. To ask us to find an alternate route would be to ask us to build a 50 kilometre trail when it's only 8 kilometres on the existing trail (approx.). We understand that all of the new designated areas will have an access corridor; why not the original 31? Also, there is a trail coming out of Canso on the Nova Scotia Power Corporation right-of-way which has been there for years. This would enable Canso to travel out of the protected area and, as well as, enable Little Dover to secure a route out of the area, too.

As a final note we are, adamantly, opposed to the loss of the Minister's discretion clause. That would put us at an insurmountable disadvantage in future negotiations.

Thank you for your attention to this very real problem.

Respectfully,



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Vice-President, Guysborough Trails Association