



Nova Scotia Environmental Network

Connecting for a Sustainable Future

**Annual meeting between
Nova Scotia Environmental Network (NSEN)
and
Nova Scotia Environment (NSE)**



2 PM January 13, 2021 (online)

Attendees from Nova Scotia Environmental Network and its member organizations:

- Chris White (NSEN Board of Directors)
- Dorene Bernard (Grassroots Grandmothers Circle)
- The Rev. Marian Lucas-Jefferies (Anglican Diocese of NS & PEI)
- The Rev. Tory Byrne (Anglican Diocese of NS & PEI)
- Karen Robinson (Sandy Lake Conservation Association)
- Becky Parker (Nature Nova Scotia)
- Nina Newington (Extinction Rebellion Nova Scotia)
- Byron Rogers (Campaign to Protect Offshore Nova Scotia)
- Brian Cho (Citizens Climate Lobby)
- Karen McKendry (Ecology Action Centre)
- Ivan Drouin (Green Party of Nova Scotia)
- Judy Green (Green Party of Nova Scotia)
- Linda Scherzinger (KAIROS Halifax)
- Doug Rigby (KAIROS Halifax)
- Shoshana Naumann (Living Earth Council)
- Nick Knutson (Société Environnementale Acadienne)
- Richard Beswick (Cumberland Wilderness Society)

Attendees from Nova Scotia Environment:

- The Hon. Gordon Wilson (Minister of Environment)
- Laura Bignell (Executive Assistant to the Minister of Environment)
- Deputy Scott Farmer (Deputy Minister of Environment)
- Andrew Murphy (Executive Director of Sustainability and Applied Science)
- Jason Hollett (Executive Director of Climate Change)
- Lorrie Roberts (Executive Director of Policy)
- Adrian Fuller (Executive Director of Inspection, Compliance and Enforcement)
- John Somers (Executive Project Lead)
- Meghan McMorris (Senior Planning Advisor)

Proceedings:

Brief opening statements by Scott Farmer, Chris White, and Gordon Wilson.

1. Dorene Bernard – Grassroots Grandmothers Circle

- The grassroots in Mi'kma'ki often have no choice but to take a stand to defend our lands, waters, and Treaty Rights when policies and laws fail to do so.
- Litigation and criminalization of protectors cannot be the only defense to protect our environment in Nova Scotia.
- Litigation against the government and proponents should not be the only way to address the environmental impacts of development on Mi'kmaq Treaty Rights and the lack of meaningful consultation.
- Environmental goals must include stewardship of the environment, implementing Netukulimk, addressing climate change, and renewable energy.
- In this time of climate change, pandemic and reconciliation with First Nations in Canada, what changes has your department made in the last year to improve working relationships and consultations with Mi'kmaq communities on environmental assessments?

Minister Wilson

- Change is evident over the last decade
- Need education around people's understanding of what Treaty Rights are and how important they are.
- Tone and understanding in government is important.
- Access to government officials (like today) is important.

Dorene Bernard

- Will the Mi'kmaq law of Netukulimk, guiding our stewardship of the lands and waters, including the integrity of the land and water and resources for all Nova Scotians, be adopted in environmental assessments of fossil fuel and resource industries and their impacts to our environment?

Minister Wilson

- We have more work to do to bring in our regulations under the Sustainable Development Goals Act.
- The usage of "Netukulimk" in the Act was key.
- That is certainly something that needs to be understood and put into part of our regulatory understanding and what we're going to put forward for regulations

2. The Rev. Marian Lucas-Jefferies – Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia and P.E.I.

- We're all commanded to care for the Earth, the air, and the water for all life.
- All of creation, all living things are interdependent – without them, we cannot survive.
- Our relationship that the Earth is not about subduing it or controlling it or owning it, but about working with it, and working together to ensure the well-being of the environment we share
- What message of hope might you share with us here today about the actions this government will undertake to care for creation here in Nova Scotia?

Minister Wilson

- Nova Scotia has been and will continue to be an environmental leader in Canada and North America.
- The Sustainable Development Goals Act is touted as the most ambitious in Canada.
- I am disappointed that we don't have a full set of regulations for SDGA yet, but I know that we will get them.
- I find hope in such initiatives, in groups like yours, and in my government colleagues

3. Karen Robinson – Sandy Lake Conservation Association

- We are working to expand Sandy Lake - Sackville River Regional park by an additional 1800 acres, but 900 acres are slated for housing development by the city. Current studies find that the area remains an ecologically valuable unit today, including old growth forest, 1 habitats, and at least 15 danger species.
- Q1: Do you know of any provincial properties that could be traded to acquire the remaining 1800 acres from the private landowners?
- Within the watershed, Marsh Lake is an outstandingly-rich 50 acre wetland that's currently owned provincially by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- Q2: Will you support making the 50 acres at Marsh Lake go to H.R.M. Halifax City ownership as part of the Sandy Lake Regional Park? Can you help us do that?
- The Parks and Protected Areas Plan provides more than 100 remaining sites that are awaiting designation.
- Q3: Is Louis Lake in the Sackville River watershed among the next areas that you will bring forward? And when will you bring those areas forward?

Minister Wilson

- I think all three of the questions fall under the purview of what our next premier is going to bring forward.
- I will commit to finding you an answer on questions 1 and 2.

- I'm quite proud of the work that I've done in protected areas. I was given a directive by the premier when I was given this position almost two years ago to put together the submissions for the 13%. There's so many tremendous opportunities that we need to look at and bring in. It gets tougher the closer I get to 13%.
- I do understand the Sackville River quite well. I'm fairly familiar with the other property you're speaking of. But at this point in time, I think we're going to need to wait a little bit to get some of those answers.

4. Becky Parker – Nature Nova Scotia

- About 30 species out of 60 in NS are still waiting for their legally required recovery plans, management plans, etc., including mainland moose.
- It's gotten so bad that in 2019, my organization and two of our member groups took the Nova Scotia government to court around the Endangered Species Act and what wasn't being done.
- In 2020 we won – government was found to be in violation of the Endangered Species Act. That was eight months ago. We've had no updates.
- We recently initiated a petition which 30,000 people signed after not hearing back to multiple letters we sent to the Minister of Lands and Forestry, and there was no response to that petition either.
- So our question for you is, if in six months from now, in a year from now, if 30 species are still awaiting protection in Nova Scotia, what do we try next when so many options have failed us?

Minister Wilson

- I do have an appreciation for issues around species-at-risk.
- I think the legislation is the most important thing that we need to get through the goalposts down the road.
- I think for all three Liberal leadership candidates there is a clear commitment to reintroduce legislation and continue that forward. I think that in itself is significant.

Richard Beswick – Cumberland Wilderness Society

- On the Chignecto Isthmus there have been 3 moose sighted recently by friends of mine where we could go 25 years and not see a moose.
- We're seeing more bobcat, bear, and a lot more eagles in the area. So there's something about what we're doing, I think, that we're doing right.

Minister Wilson

- That's encouraging to hear.

Becky Parker

- We've actually engaged more with Environment over the last year, than we have with Lands and Forestry.
- I'm wondering if you see some sort of ethical issue in having our department in charge of natural resources also manage our species-at-risk.
- If in a year from now this is still a problem, if we suggest that you took over the wildlife division, would that ever be something you would support?

Minister Wilson

- Government is an ever-evolving, ever-changing, dynamic entity.
- I don't think there's any suggestions that ever come to the floor that shouldn't be considered. I'll just leave it at that.

5. Nina Newington – Extinction Rebellion Nova Scotia

- I spent eight weeks camped out in an effort to get the Department of Lands and Forestry to act responsibly on the species-at-risk.
- I'm also really interested in seeing a change in the distribution of responsibility between the Department of Environment and the Department of Lands and Forestry.
- If the Department of Environment is going to focus on natural climate solutions, then you will have to be dealing with forests
- There has to be a shift from viewing the forest primarily as a fiber resource to understanding all of its values for us.
- Is the Department of Environment in favour of amending the Crown Land Act? Specifically, expanding the definition of the role and values of the crown land away from being primarily managed as a timber resource to being managed in relation to its biodiversity values, its carbon, etc.

Minister Wilson

- There are some recommendations in Lahey that certainly show that there is an important role for Department of Environment.
- We have had some conversations on how we can integrate ourselves into the management and providing that oversight that our department plays.
- It's a little early on yet. I know they need to get Lahey through the goalposts.
- Whether we need an actual amendment of the Crown Land Act or not, I'm not sure.

Nina Newington

- So is there currently any interdepartmental committee or anything that's working jointly already?

Minister Wilson

- There are a number of intergovernmental committees that are constantly meeting on a whole spectrum of synergies between Environment, Lands and Forestry, Transportation, Energy, Business, etc.

6. Byron Rogers – Campaign to Protect Offshore Nova Scotia

- We have focused on the environmental risk from offshore exploratory drilling.
- We are also concerned that the entire process is being viewed a little too much through oil industry priority and oil industry eyes.
- We're wondering whether there's some way to get a more environmental lens on some of this in order to maintain the marine protected areas free from drilling and seismic sounding.
- And also in the long term whether there might be some mechanism to rethink the whole fossil fuel issue considering the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals Act, and public concern about contributing to emissions and climate change.

Minister Wilson

- Marine protected areas are federal but I've been getting educated on it.
- I chaired a committee that questioned CNSOPB on different concerns that we had regarding the offshore.
- I once went to Tasmania to learn about how they are handling conflicts between their marine protected areas, offshore resources, and lobster industry. It was very informative and I would recommend to anybody to look into that.
- Every situation is different, and it's always about trying to find that balance.
- I am extremely encouraged in what we're seeing around initiatives to electrify and move us off fossil fuels, so hopefully fossil fuel issues will be mute down the road.
- Does that mean that we're not going to see any drilling offshore? I don't know.

Byron Rogers

- A couple of years ago there was a headline saying that drilling would be banned in marine protected areas. And then a year after that, there was a headline saying they were being opened up.
- Because of this constant changing status, we really don't know what to expect.

Minister Wilson

- Understood. Good point.

6. Brian Cho – Citizens Climate Lobby

- Our major concern is regarding the federal vs. provincial systems and benchmark criteria that allows provinces to challenge the recent announcement by the federal government to implement the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act.
- Are there any plans for Nova Scotia to adopt this federal policy in lieu of our cap-and-trade program that we have right now?
- Are there any plans in the future to move from a five-year visit from the Climate Accountability Act to a yearly visit to review if we're actually meeting these emission criteria and if we're on track to net-zero emissions?

Minister Wilson

- No. we've worked very hard in NS to establish our position on our cap-and-trade program.
- We're going through with a fine-tooth comb on what the announcement means.
- We all have faith in our climate team led by Jason Hollet and his group
- We have future plans but I don't see us deviating at this point in time.

7. Karen McKendry – Ecology Action Center

- Today I'm going to resurface an outstanding opportunity that I feel still remains shackled within your department, and that's the Environmental Trust Fund.
- The account for the fund remains unused, there is no mechanism to bring in non-government revenues to fuel the fund, and there's no infrastructure to disperse them.
- I'm finding this really debilitating to the environmental movement in Nova Scotia.
- In New Brunswick they have an Environmental Trust Fund that's been active for years. Last year they used \$9 million to fund 266 community-based programs that work to improve the environment.
- The Nova Scotia government doesn't have any devoted funds for environmental education, but it's one of the least expensive forms of behavioral change.
- At the Law Amendments meeting for the SDGA in September 2019, many people spoke and the topic that came up the most was the need for more environmental education.
- There are people on the ground you want to implement it, and that could be greatly facilitated by getting the Environmental Trust Fund up and working.
- This is the fifth year that I have brought this forward in this meeting. And Tamara Lorincz used to bring it up every year before me, so this is probably going back a decade now.
- I've done the research on non-government revenue mechanisms that could be used to fuel the fund, but at each meeting I say this, and then I send the documents, and then nothing happens.
- So can you suggest another way that we could work together on advancing this fund?

Minister Wilson

- The comments at Law Amendments were very interesting.
- One thing that did come up was around education. But another one that surprised me – and I think we should hear it more – is food security.
- Regarding the Environmental Trust Fund, our staff are amazing and sometimes it's not what you get done, it's how you get it done.
- I just ask you to hold tight and maybe give us a call in a week's time.

Karen McKendry

- I can definitely appreciate that your amazing staff is overloaded, which would be a great reason to work in partnership with groups about how to advance this.
- We need that leg up and we need that partnership, especially if we want to advance new ideas like nature-based climate solutions.
- There's potential to unleash there, and people are getting frustrated that the province isn't interested in that partnership on the environmental education front.

Minister Wilson

- You've been heard. The wheels of government aren't the quickest in the world.

Karen McKendry

- Yes, let's chat in a week or so.

8. Ivan Drouin – Green Party of Nova Scotia

- I found the Sustainable Development Goals Act pretty progressive, and I was struck by the fact that climate change is recognized as a global emergency.
- It is an emergency, just like we're in an emergency right now with the pandemic.
- We talk about the pandemic every day in the news, and climate change right now is not up front.
- How is it possible for the department to try to bring that up as a real emergency with in cabinet meetings or committee meetings?

Minister Wilson

- Just because it's not being talked about in the media doesn't mean it's not being talked about.
- Government is dealing with the global pandemic and health crisis, but that's not all we're working on.
- There are still frequent conversations right across government in regards to SDGA, our cap-and-trade programs, our green funds, our sustainable community challenge funds, protected areas, etc.

- Before the pandemic, environment was the #1 issue in the world, while healthcare was #2, and the economy was #3. Now obviously health care is #1, but that will change when people refocus back.
- We've gotten the message as legislators. We've started some balls rolling that are important balls to keep rolling.
- Where I get concerned is when you lose a year in educating our children and educating our youth. We're even set back because we can't fruitfully do some consultations.
- I want to assure you that it is still paramount and it is focused on, and in some cases it gives us a better chance to reflect.

Ivan Drouin

- I'd like to see us over party lines as a team. When it's an emergency, it's right now and it's everybody together because we need to be a team.
- So on the environmental issues you could ask us how we can help you to bring all those concerns around the environment to the table and to public discussion.

9. Chris White – Nova Scotia Environmental Network

- One thing we had talked about when we were strategizing for this meeting was the silos of government departments.
- Issues like climate change and forestry are very holistic.
- We were wondering if you could tell us a bit about how governments can close those gaps or work across different departments on these sorts of issues.
- And beyond that, how you might include some of the voices you've heard here today in a more formal and frequent capacity.
- There are only 17 of us here from NSEN, but respectively we have our own memberships, newsletters, and social media followings, so you're really talking to thousands of people right now.

Minister Wilson

- I started working in government in 1978 and I've seen some tremendous movement on the silo issue.
- I don't think people realize the integrated conversations that go on.
- For example, bringing forward a piece of protected land to cabinet would involve a technical committee featuring Environment, Lands and Forestry, and Energy.
- Intergovernmental work gets even broader when you're thinking of trying to green some of our infrastructure and energy efficiencies.
- On the political side of it, we all take that responsibility as Ministers too

- I thought the Department of Energy would be one of my biggest challenges but they have been one of my biggest allies. I work very closely with these ministers.
- I could go on and on about all the different things that are going on within government to try and integrate and coordinate initiatives and make each other understand.
- Regarding your voices, one important forum is the roundtable for the Sustainable Development Goals Act. We're working to get our representatives filled for that.
- The roundtable is a very broad group that will have direct access to the premier and all the pertinent ministers every year for a sit down. It's a tremendous opportunity.
- If there are unanswered questions that you have, please put them in writing and I'll give you my guarantee that we will get back to you on it.
- There are not as many silos as it might seem from the outside, but it's difficult to be involved in the inner workings of government
- If you need, we could compile a list of all of these different intergovernmental groups that we have, at least under our understanding.

Chris White

- Yes, we'd appreciate that.

(Meeting close)

Items for NSE to follow-up on:

for Karen Robinson (Sandy Lake Conservation Association):

- Provide answers on the potential to trade provincial properties to private landowners in exchange for the remaining 1800 acres for Sandy Lake Regional Park.
- Provide answers on the potential to acquire 50 acres at Marsh Lake for Halifax City ownership as part of the Sandy Lake Regional Park.

for Karen McKendry (Ecology Action Centre):

- Discuss activating the Environmental Trust Fund or exploring alternatives for funding environmental education programs in Nova Scotia.

for Chris White (Nova Scotia Environmental Network):

- Compile a list of intergovernmental working groups.