

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Chester Clipper (Chester, NS) | | | | Order/Commande 117697 |
| Date 20.11.2007 | Circ. 5200 | Page 1 | 1 / 4 | |

Urban wilderness unique

By Karen Janigan

The designation of 1,350 hectares (3,350 acres) of wilderness as a protected area just inside the western fringes of Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) means the province is listening to the people, says an ecologist.

Chris Miller of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - one of many groups that pushed for the protection of the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area said the move by the Department of Environment "is really an important decision for the people of HRM and the province."

The wilderness area is roughly between Highway 103 and the Bicentennial Highway, and

the Kingswood subdivision to the north, adjacent to the Bayers Lake Business Park.

The designation protects 80 per cent of the Crown land available for wilderness area; another 20 per cent is north of the planned Highway 113 to replace Hammonds Plains Road.

There had been worries that Blue Mountain - the highest point in the Chebucto Peninsula, would be levelled to provide fill for the highway.

"The province removed that possibility with this designation," said Miller. "Urban sprawl won't consume this area. The citizens made it loud and clear that they wanted it protected and that's what the province has done.

Continued on page 2



New wilderness area unique

Continued from page 1

"This area is the size of 20 Point Pleasant Parks and provides incredible back-country features that will be even more important in time as the city continues to grow."

Miller said HRM and the province should not underestimate the draw such a wilderness area has on young people who enjoy the outdoors and value the experience.

"The access to wilderness areas is a big part of the reason I live here," said Miller. "A lot of my friends appreciate the access to wilderness that a lot of other cities lost long ago."

Popular with hikers and canoeists in HRM, St. Margaret's Bay, and farther down the South Shore, Miller said the wilderness area is also within the territory the municipality has earmarked for a regional park.

"I'm very pleased with the province's collaborative approach and support for HRM's regional plan," said Mayor Peter Kelly, at the announcement Oct. 30. "This will help us move forward with HRM's plans for a regional park in the area."

So while access is limited now, HRM will work on acquiring lands around it and developing access. The region is not far from the BLT trail and there is access to the lakes from Bayers Lake.

"One of the interesting features of the area is that the lakes are connected," Miller said. "You can canoe through nine different lakes in a loop and arrive back at the spot you left."

The wilderness area designation will protect numerous interconnected, undeveloped lakes and wetlands; rugged woodlands with old red oak and red spruce stands; and a rare arctic-alpine plant called Mountain Sandwort. Miller said among wildlife in the area, is a sub-population of the endangered mainland moose.

Miller said another value of the wilderness is to provide a venue for exceptional outdoor education for young people and foster appreciation for wilderness that is often difficult to do in urban areas.



| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Chester Clipper (Chester, NS) | | | | Order/Commande 117697 |
| Date 20.11.2007 | Circ. 5200 | Page 1 | 3 / 4 | |

Graham Steele, the NDP's environment critic, said the northern boundary was "gerrymandered" to get the highway past the new Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area.

"The highway being punched through this wilderness area has long been the issue," Steele said in a statement. "What the (environment) minister has done ... is conveniently ignored the area north of the proposed highway by omitting it from designation."

Steele called on Environment Minister Mark Parent to carry out a full Class 2 environmental assessment of the proposed Highway 113 and the 1,350 hectares of Crown land between Highway 103 and the Bicentennial Highway left out of the protection area.

But Parent said the value of the protected land was already highlighted in an earlier environmental assessment into the proposed highway and that protecting 80 per cent of the Crown land preserves significant environmental and recreational features.

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Chester Clipper (Chester, NS) | | | | Order/Commande 117697 |
| Date 20.11.2007 | Circ. 5200 | Page 1 | 4 / 4 | |



Irwin Barrett photo

URBAN WILDERNESS. The Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area provides a back-country experience in an urban setting. No where else in Canada can residents leave the centre of a city and be canoeing through intact wilderness within a half-hour. The province has just protected this area, that falls within HRM's plans for a regional park.