



## Public Comment Summary

February 2005

**This document summarizes the public comments received by Nova Scotia Environment and Labour during the consultation on Gully Lake and Eigg Mountain-James River Candidate Wilderness Areas.**

### Overview

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In June 2003 the Nova Scotia Government announced its intention to establish two new Wilderness Areas within the Crown land blocks in the vicinity of Gully Lake and Eigg Mountain-James River.

Environment and Labour provided an opportunity for public comment as part of the designation process for these areas. This comment period ran from June 18 to August 13, 2004.

As part of the designation process, a socioeconomic analysis study of the impact of designating the two areas was prepared for Environment and Labour by the consulting firm of Jacques Whitford Limited.

The department held staffed information displays at malls in Antigonish, New Glasgow, and Truro. During this period, information displays were also rotated through regional public libraries in these communities. The consultation process included an invitation for stakeholder groups to meet directly with Environment and Labour staff to share information or discuss specific concerns.

Information packages were available at all displays, by direct mail, at regional Environment and Labour offices, and on the department's website. These packages contained a summary of the socioeconomic analysis study, background sheets on each candidate Wilderness Area, and a public comment worksheet. The website also included the full socioeconomic analysis study report, all public consultation maps, and natural value assessment reports for each study area.

### Public Consultation Response

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The department received 123 individual written responses via email, fax, and mail.

More than 110 people attended the mall sessions, and many of these people picked up printed materials. Oral comments received at staffed displays were recorded and summarized.

Staff met with regional and provincial stakeholder and interest groups, including municipal organizations, conservation groups, all terrain vehicle and snowmobile clubs, and mineral and forest industry representatives.

### Comment Summary

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#### *Designation*

Nearly all respondents expressed strong support for the designation of crown lands in the vicinity of Gully Lake and Eigg Mountain-James River under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*.

People repeatedly mentioned the protection and maintenance of land and water biodiversity and the maintenance of water quality as motivators for designation. They also highlighted improved opportunities for nature viewing and recreation.

For the Gully Lake area, most respondents felt that the candidate area boundaries were appropriate. Protection of forests from harvesting practices was a common concern.

For the Eigg Mountain-James River area, many people felt that the candidate area was too small. They expressed that a significantly larger boundary is needed to protect key habitats and watersheds.

### ***Biodiversity and Natural Values***

Respondents were strongly in favour of protecting natural habitats and the diversity of plants and animals in both areas. Many felt that northern Nova Scotia's natural areas are disappearing quickly and that protecting what remains on public lands from further development is critical. There was also considerable support in favour of protecting the areas as a means to stop the clearcutting of trees and provide beautiful natural areas for the enjoyment of future generations.

For the Gully Lake area, respondents stated repeatedly that protection of biodiversity and natural features should be the highest management priority. People emphasized the need for protecting this intact natural area to support plant and animal populations. They expressed support for its management with long-term environmental rather than short-term financial goals.

For the Eigg Mountain-James River area, people were especially supportive of protecting the watershed area. They suggested that this, along with wildlife habitat protection, should be the highest management priority. Many people also expressed the desire to protect the area's salmon and trout populations and their habitat, the resident moose population, and the Acadian forest.

### ***Recreational Use and Enjoyment***

Many respondents valued the two candidate areas for a variety of wilderness pursuits including birdwatching, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hunting, and fishing. They were interested in securing opportunities for current and future recreational use. People also highlighted the importance of large natural areas for healthy living, quiet enjoyment of nature, and relaxation.

Off-highway vehicle use (primarily all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles) was raised repeatedly, with a clear divide in public opinion.

Most people felt that vehicle use should be eliminated entirely or strictly regulated in the designated areas. Off-highway vehicle users were united in wanting to maintain vehicle access, although they differed in the level of access they desired. Most vehicle users wanted to keep

currently used trails, or at least major connector routes, open. Others supported a ban on vehicle use in the Wilderness Area as long as government helps to establish satisfactory alternate routes on adjacent lands. Some people were concerned that restricting vehicle access could negatively affect hunters and anglers.

### ***Socioeconomic Effects***

Most respondents felt that long-term social, environmental, educational, tourism, and recreational benefits would offset and outweigh revenue losses to forestry and mining. Some people suggested that economic gain would be realized through increases in property value, eco-tourism ventures, and regional tourism opportunities.

People also emphasized the economic benefits of environmental protection for maintaining clean air and watersheds, carbon storage capacity, and biological diversity and integrity.

Some people expressed concern with potential financial losses to the resource industry. A few respondents were particularly concerned with potential loss of mineral revenues in the Gully Lake area, suggesting that an assessment of mineral potential be completed prior to area designation.

Several people provided feedback on the accuracy of some figures, calculations, and assumptions used in the socioeconomic analysis study report.

### ***Other Topics***

Many people commented that government should designate the two candidate areas as soon as possible. People also urged government to proceed with designating more Wilderness Areas elsewhere in the province.

Some people also commented on the importance of understanding and appreciating the historical and cultural values associated with the candidate areas. Several suggested commemorating "the hermit of Gully Lake" by naming the Wilderness Area after him. Others emphasized the importance of managing the areas in a natural state, and minimizing recreational and tourism development.

## Next Steps

In making decisions about designating the candidate Wilderness Areas, government will consider a range of factors, including public comment and the socioeconomic analysis. The results of the public comment have been used by the consultant to finalize the socioeconomic analysis study report.

The Minister of Environment and Labour will bring forward a recommendation, for approval of the Governor in Council, considering designation of these two areas under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*.

## Information Sharing

We thank all those who provided comment during this public consultation process.

A full set of the submissions received during the comment period, and the final socioeconomic analysis are available for viewing at Environment and Labour offices in Halifax (5151 Terminal Road), Truro (44 Inglis Place), and Antigonish (219 Main Street). The final socioeconomic analysis and other background documents are also available on the Protected Areas website.

Nova Scotia Environment and Labour considers participant identity as personal information, in keeping with the provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The privacy of a participant's identity will be upheld by the department, unless the participant consents to the release, or if the submission has been made public by the participant. Any person or group may give prior consent, in writing, to the release of their submission.

Ideas and suggestions are welcome on any aspect of the Protected Areas Program. For more information please contact us or visit the protected areas website.



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