

St. Mary's council won't take sides on Archibald Lake

SMRA SAYS LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE 'SHIRKING THEIR DUTY'

By Alec Bruce, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

ST. MARY'S – Council for the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's is staying neutral on the wilderness area status of Archibald Lake, a position that has the president of the local river association accusing them of "shirking their duty."

At last week's committee of the whole meeting (July 7), councillors neither supported nor opposed the St. Mary's River Association's (SMRA's) year-long campaign

to seek provincial protection of Archibald Lake, about 10 kilometres northeast of Sherbrooke, from extractive industries like Atlantic Gold, which wants to build a water-intensive mine at nearby Cochrane Hill.

Last month, the SMRA asked council for a letter endorsing its efforts. But, at last week's meeting, Deputy Warden James Fuller said, "As a

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council, we can't have a dog in that fight. That's a federal and provincial permitting issue. It's really not up to us now. We just need to kind of stay neutral in this."

Warden Greg Wier concurred: "So, what you [Fuller] are saying is that we represent all of the people in the municipality, not just 55 per cent or 60 per cent, but everyone. [That's a] very good point."

He added that he was still open to receiving further information and that council should reply to any letters it has received [from the SMRA and residents] on the issue, with appreciation,

the St. Mary's watershed system. With the climate crises all of Canada is facing, not protecting such an integral habitat is akin to shooting oneself in the foot."

He noted that "although protecting Archibald Lake will eliminate the proposed water supply for Atlantic Gold's open pit gold mine, it does not in itself put a stop to the proposed gold mine on Cochrane Hill. It simply says you must look elsewhere for a water supply. This is not an issue of 'yesses' versus 'nos' but is about ensuring the long-term health and economic wellbeing of our municipality."

In January 2020, the

provincial government announced it was considering the 684-hectare site for wilderness protection, but it has not yet made a decision. Atlantic Gold has already delayed its proposed Cochrane Hill mine's opening by several years, citing both the uncertainty surrounding a ready supply of water and other priorities, including its developments near Fifteen Mile Stream and Beaver Dam.

"SMRA takes a strong stance on protected

land in our valley which provides important wildlife corridors, habitat for many species and it helps meet the federal targets of 25 per cent protection of land and water by 2025," Beaver said. "Hopefully, council will heed clear goals residents of the area stated during the extensive St. Mary's planning exercises leading up to the development of our new 10-year Strategic Plan which is a future based on a healthy environment

and sustainable growth." Said Fuller at last week's committee of the whole meeting: "If it's strictly natural preservation, if it's strictly for recreation, if it's strictly for fishing, or hunting or hiking or biking or whatever, they want to do – I'm absolutely in favour of it. But I don't personally think that as a council we can get involved in that. The most we can do is tell them how big their sign can be. That's all the jurisdiction we have."