

# St. Mary's council defers decision on Archibald Lake

By Alec Bruce, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

SHERBROOKE – Council for the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's will take 60 days before deciding whether to endorse Archibald Lake as a provincially protected wilderness area, temporarily derailing the St. Mary's River Association's (SMRA's) hopes for a united front in its

well-publicized campaign for the designation.

The move came at council's committee of the whole meeting earlier this month, in response

to a letter from SMRA President Scott Beaver asking for council support in advance of a June

*Continued on 12*

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*Continued from 1*

22 meeting with Premier Iain Rankin on the issue. "I think, at this particular time, it might be imprudent for us to jump into an approval

without knowing some of the additional ramifications of having it be protected, as opposed to not protected," Deputy Warden James Fuller told fellow councillors at the

June 16 session. "I think this requires a whole lot more study than just the few days that we've had the letter. I just don't think that we have enough time to study this thoroughly."

Warden Greg Wier agreed, adding: "I'd like to be sure what I'm writing a letter about and I'm sure that council feels that way."

Said Fuller: "I'm not

saying it's bad (Archibald Lake designation). I'm just saying that if two years down the road, it interferes with another project that might be coming up, we should know this ahead of time."

In January 2020, the provincial government announced it was considering the 684-hectare site at Archibald Lake north of Sherbrooke for wilderness status. The

designation would upend plans by Atlantic Gold to build an open-pit mine at nearby Cochrane Hill because it would eliminate a ready supply of fresh water for resource extraction.

Atlantic Gold has already delayed the proposed mine's opening by several years, citing other priorities, including its developments near Fifteen Mile Stream and

Beaver Dam. Last month, the province said it had still not reached a decision about the lake site's designation.

During the video meeting with SMRA officials last week, Rankin again declined to commit to the project. "The premier [was] non-committal about Archibald Lake and [said] that his department is looking at that right now," Beaver

said in an interview. "He didn't have a whole lot of information to give us on it."

Regarding council's decision to support pending further study, he said: "I find it discouraging, at this point, that they have not already looked into it ... Although, it may be fair to give them a little bit more time. It is a new council."