

## FRENCH RIVER SOURCE WATER PROTECTION COMMITTEE

A meeting of the French River Source Water Protection Committee was held at the Tatamagouche Branch Library on May 14, 2024, at 2:00pm.

- Present:** Councillor Michael Gregory, Chair  
Mayor Christine Blair  
Deputy Mayor Geoff Stewart  
Mark LeFresne, Village Commission Rep  
Alex Feix, North Shore River Restoration Rep  
Greg Watson, Citizen Rep, Watershed  
Dan Troke, CAO  
Michelle Boudreau, Director of Public Works  
Paul Smith, Director of Community Development  
Greg Cummings, Watershed Planner, NSECC
- Absent/Regrets:** Kim Baldwin, Citizen Rep, Watershed  
Michael Allen, Watershed Planner, NSECC
- Introductions:** Introductions were completed by members and the meeting called to order at 2:05pm.
- Approval of Agenda:** An agenda was prepared and circulated for the Committee's review and approval. Mayor Blair requested that Wind Turbines be added to the agenda.
- Moved by Alex Feix and seconded by Mark LeFresne
- "That the agenda be approved as amended." Motion carried.
- Approval of Minutes:** Minutes from the meeting held on May 11, 2023 were circulated for the Committee's review and approval.
- Moved by Mayor Blair and seconded by Greg Watson
- "That the Minutes from the meeting of May 11, 2023 be approved as presented." Motion carried.
- Business Arising:** Michelle Boudreau has reached out to Forestry Nova Scotia and will discuss public education tools with them in the coming weeks.
- Feedback, General Watershed Observations:** Existing Watershed signs need to be updated this year.
- Greg Watson noted that sedimentation in the watershed continues to be an issue. He also noted that Johnson Brook appears to be in better shape than Byers Brook; possibly due to Johnson Lake being spring fed with a reliable feed of water.
- The North Shore River Restoration Association has started its field season and will need more information about field conditions before they finalize their plans. Aerial survey of the watershed will be very

helpful with this. Any windstorms since Fiona have continued to result in blow-down. Natural cycles seem to be earlier this year and water levels are lower than usual for May. Their work in the French River will include continued maintenance of existing structures and they will also be taking on projects on the Wallace River. Undersized culverts in the watershed are creating erosion.

**County Wide Planning:**

Paul Smith provided a progress report on the development of a County Wide Plan including the review and updates of all planning documents, policies and the Land Use By-law. The updated plan will address all watershed areas in the County including French River, Debert and St Andrews River. Paul provided an overview of the existing regulations for the French River Watershed Protected Area and requested feedback on these existing watershed protections, for inclusion in the County wide planning process. He noted that once the plan is in place, any rezonings within the watershed area would require Council approval, which will provide a layer of protection within the watershed area.

Greg Watson inquired if the County was setting aside funds to purchase watershed lands, or if there are federal programs to support land purchase. Given the large size of the watershed, the purchase of lands was not being considered by the County, and typically federal funding programs do not allow for land purchase. It was suggested that a partnership with the Nature Conservancy could be beneficial. Staff to explore.

Alex Feix suggested an information mailout to property owners in the watershed could be a good way to distribute information on best management practices, sedimentation, and the existing regulations.

The existing \$2B federal tree planting program could be a good resource for habitat restoration. Alex asked for clarification on whether blueberries are considered row cropping. Staff to review.

Mark LeFresne inquired about existing construction setbacks from watercourses, and if the current measurement was 5m. Paul noted that the County wide plan would pull construction back from watercourses and lakes, but measurement has yet to be confirmed. It was noted that the County permitting system should somehow be able to flag permits that are in the watershed, to ensure setbacks are met and that applicants are aware.

**Forestry Management Plan:**

Paul Smith provided an update on the County's Forestry Management Plan. It was initiated after the County was approached by a sustainable forestry company last year to carry out some work in Debert via a provincial funding program. This triggered a bigger question about how we are managing all County owned/forested lands. Council directed staff to issue a request for proposals for a forestry management plan for 4,000 acres of county owned property and Forest Resource Consultants (FRC) were the successful bidder.

They visited each parcel, assessed conditions, categorized the areas into eco districts and recommended treatment options and annual plantings for each parcel.

Once the program is rolled out, we will better be able to see if any of the recommended practices could be applied in the French River watershed area. Paul noted some blow down salvage may be occurring this year in Debert, which could help reduce fuel sources for forest fires. Greg Watson noted that salvage must use a balanced approach, and that leaving some debris is important especially in terms of soil cover. Greg Watson and Alex Feix requested copies of the forest management plan. Paul to coordinate.

**Aerial Inspection:**

A charter flight from Debert with 2 passengers would be \$270/hour. Alex Feix was the only Committee member interested in participating. Michelle to offer the other seat to Staff and reach out to the Debert Flight Centre to coordinate.

**Information, Dalhousie, Cyanobacteria:**

Michelle provided information on a study being conducted by Dalhousie. They are working over 5 years to identify specific cyanobacteria which grow in mats on river bottoms and produce an anotoxin. At this point the risk appears to be mainly to animals who directly ingest the mats. Dalhousie researchers Lindsay and Rob will be in the watershed over the summer collecting data. They have also deployed some passive collection equipment in the rivers and brooks, which should be left alone if found.

The research is taking place in a number of areas across the province. Last year's results showed 2 areas in the watershed where the cyanobacteria was located. The first is in the Byer's Pond outlet and the second is the outlet to our backwash tank at the water treatment plant site. These areas will be further studied this year and an update will be provided in the Fall at the next source water protection meeting. Rob and Lindsay will also visit our water plant and assist water utility staff in identifying the cyanobacteria in the field. Photos were circulated to the committee members showing the cyanobacteria mats, and possible warning signage.

**Source Water Protection, Sampling and Inspection:**

Spring and Fall inspection results from 2023 were circulated to committee members for information. The inspections are carried out by water utility staff. Main items requiring attention are the aging watershed signs, and missing guardrails in a number of water crossing locations. The question was asked about aerial spraying within the protected watershed area, and if it was permitted. The question of direct injection inoculation of trees was also brought up. Staff to review.

**Hemlock Woolly Adelgid:**

Maps showing existing hemlock stands within the watershed area were circulated. There is minimum presence of hemlock.

**Wind Turbines, Watershed Area**

Mayor Blair updated the committee on her recent meeting with Everwind. While the company had originally planned to install 3 to 5 turbines within the watershed area, they have agreed to move them out at the Municipality's request.

**Next Meeting:**

The next meeting will be scheduled in September 2024. Committee members will be notified when a convenient date is arranged.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting adjourned at 3:30pm.

Michelle Boudreau,  
Recording Secretary