

REPORT FROM THE OTTAWA MEETING OF ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

by Rosemary Curley, Waterside

Environmental groups from across Canada met in closed sessions in Ottawa April 29 - May 3, and then spent two more days discussing their opinions with Environment Canada in public consultation hearings. The conference, officially entitled the Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGO's) Meeting, was instructive, interesting and a bit mind-boggling. Both Roy Johnstone of H.O.P.E. and myself were in attendance to represent P.E.I. The meetings were funded for the most part by Environment Canada and the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council.

The meeting began with two guest speakers. Author Richard Grossman elaborated on his recent release "Fear at Work" which emphasizes that regulations aimed at pollution control create new jobs more often than they cause job loss. Yet employers often use job lay-off as blackmail to influence regulation-making bodies. Environment Canada's Tom DeFayer speculated on future economic development and environmental effects.

The next few days were spent in concurrent workshop sessions where directions in forestry; agriculture; energy, including nuclear energy; economic development; aboriginal rights; and acid rain were discussed. Resolutions in subsequent general sessions included requests for the following:

1. settlement of aboriginal people's land claims
2. more research into biological control in agriculture
3. more field trials in various forest management methods.

Learning sessions on the Environmental Assessment Review Process, lobbying, and fundraising were also provided. I attended the session on fundraising to obtain some ideas for the Island Nature Trust, which needs funding badly.

On May 2, representatives from each region met with Environment Minister John Roberts. Eight Atlantic delegates discussed forest research, promotion of Department goals, acid rain, forest spray programs, and the National Park system in a 45 minute session with the Minister. We all felt this was very worthwhile.

Over 200 people, 50% industry personnel, attended the Environment Canada public hearings. Topics of greatest environmental importance were listed in ten concurrent workshop sessions, and reported in general sessions. Among those listed were: forest management, toxic waste disposal, acid rain, safe use of pesticides, nuclear waste disposal and Northern development. Surprisingly, ten of ten groups reported that "the polluter should pay for clean-up". Even though industry personnel were well represented, they assumed an observer role in most workshops and thus the conclusion represented the environmentalist view.

Another surprise was that "loss of agricultural land" was near the top of the list of environmental problems. Farmers have been concerned about this for some time, but environmentalists are beginning to realize that the disappearance of our best land means that marginal soils now harbouring wildlife are being developed to replace the loss. As well, development of land on steep slopes leads to serious erosion and stream siltation, and in the long run, capacity to produce food is impaired. This was one issue on which industry and public groups fully agreed.

It is difficult to summarize a week-long full schedule in one page, and I hope to report more fully at our October meeting. One major disappointment was that both the Canadian Wildlife and Nature Federations did not send delegates from their Ottawa offices. These groups contain the majority of Canadian environmentalists. However, a lasting impression was that today's environmental groups are relying on logic rather than emotion to achieve their goals, and therefore