

Chronicle Herald - EDITORIAL

Your say on land use

Thu, May 22nd, 2008

EVERYONE who cares about the future of Nova Scotia's natural resources – from forests and minerals to biodiversity and provincial parks – should make their voices heard at public meetings being held by Voluntary Planning over the next three weeks.

The hearings, meant to consult the public on a new natural resources strategy that will guide decision-making for many years to come, actually began – with little fanfare – on May 12. Almost half the meetings have already been held, but 15 public sessions still remain, set for communities from Yarmouth to Cheticamp.

According to some observers, participation by the public – unlike that of industry and environmental groups – has been minimal. That's unfortunate. Voluntary Planning's advice, informed by these meetings, will play a key role in shaping government strategy on future use of resources.

Two of the province's biggest resource industries – forestry and mining – are dealing with volatile international markets and dynamic supply and demand trends. Provincial resources strategy obviously affects their businesses directly.

But what happens to the province's forests and mineral deposits is a concern to all Nova Scotians. So these discussions about the future development of provincial lands, and implications for tourism, biodiversity and many other interests, are clearly vital. Those who want their opinions heard should get to a meeting in their area and have their say.

The meetings are all held in the evenings, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. The full schedule is on the Voluntary Planning website:

http://vp.gov.ns.ca/files/u4/NR_Community_Meeting_Schedule.pdf

To make it even easier, we'll list when and where you can air your views.

Public hearings will be held tonight in Debert and New Minas, in Shelburne on Monday, May 26, in Cheticamp and Windsor Tuesday, May 27, in St. Peter's Wednesday, May 28, in Sherbrooke, Sheet Harbour and Weymouth on June 3, in Membertou and Yarmouth on June 4, in Halifax on June 9, in Liverpool and Stellarton on June 11 and the last meeting is in Antigonish on June 12.

Voluntary Planning's public hearings are the first phase of a three-stage process to develop the natural resources strategy. But they're performing the crucial task of giving the public a voice in policy-making, right at the start. Don't stay home and regret it later.