

Barren lost to sell-out science and politics

BY CHRIS MILLER

A story is unravelling in the rolling hills of the Cape Breton Highlands that can rival even the most poorly written Hollywood script. It is a tale of RCMP investigations, suspected cabinet leaks and back-room politics, as well as allegations of sell-out science and insider trading.

Similar to seal hunting on the East Coast and clear-cutting of old-growth forests on the West Coast, environmentalists once again find themselves squared off against developers in an epic battle to conserve what remains of Canada's biodiversity.

A tiny piece of rugged wilderness in Nova Scotia, known as the Jim Campbell's Barren, is causing all the controversy.

Conservationists argue that the 1,709 hectare site is a unique ecological treasure that contains an unusual combination of habitats. It protects the headwaters of three major watersheds, provides a critical forested corridor for the endangered Canada lynx, and is home to numerous rare plants, one of which contains a known cancer-fighting chemical called taxol.

On this basis, the Jim Campbell's Barren was chosen for protection in 1995 as an integral component of Nova Scotia's Systems Plan of parks and protected areas — a plan that recently won the province a national award for conservation by the Canadian Council of Ecological Areas (CCEA).

The Systems Plan established 31 protected areas in Nova Scotia, one of which was the Jim Campbell Barren, and raised the total area of land protected in the province from two to eight per cent. This initiative won Nova Scotia an "A" in the World Wildlife Fund's *Endangered Spaces Progress Report* that measures the achievements and failures of Canadian provinces and territories in preserving biodiversity.

The uniqueness of the barren, however, is not limited solely to ecological interactions on the surface. Mining exploration companies maintain that the rocks beneath the Jim Campbell Barren contain deposits of precious and base metals, most notably gold, that should be mined.

The suggestion of potential job creation, in a region as economically depressed as Atlantic

Canada, sent local politicians into a frenzy and set the stage for yet another tug-of-war between economic and environmental interests.

A local exploration company, seeking claims within the Jim Campbell Barren protected area, partially funded a study by W.G. Shaw & Associates Ltd that examined the mineral potential of the site.

This report concluded that the barren should be "withdrawn from the process that will eventually establish a series of protected areas in the province." It was then used by a group of local business leaders, known as the Cheticamp Development Commission (CDC), to lobby the government against protecting the site.

Following a "fly over" of the barren by the former Premier of

Nova Scotia, John Savage, the provincial government decided to do just that.

To the dismay of environmentalists, the Jim Campbell's Barren lost its status as a candidate protected area in favour of mineral exploration in the fall of 1996, despite an intense open public review process that recommended protecting the site in the first place.

Regal Goldfields Ltd, the Ontario company interested in exploring the barren, experienced a dramatic and immediate increase in the volume of its shares trading on the stock exchange. This surge occurred, however, prior to the public announcement on December 3, 1996 that the Jim Campbell's Barren was to be de-listed, but after the decision was actually made by

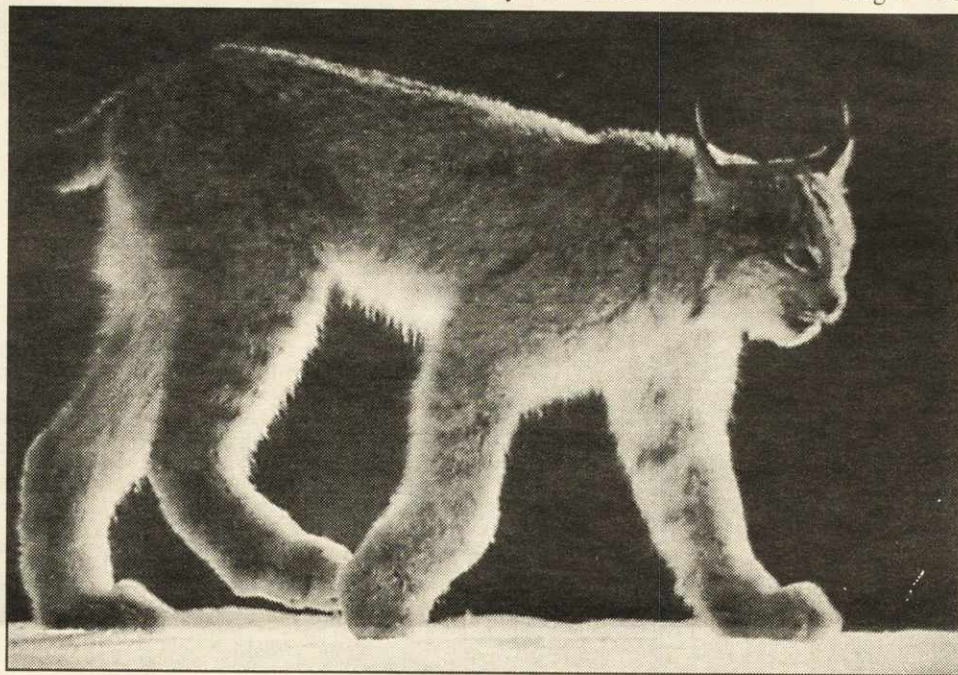
cabinet on Nov. 21, sparking allegations of insider-trading.

The volume of shares traded in Regal Goldfields jumped from 5,200 on Nov. 20 to more than 300,000 shares a few days later, driving the stock price from 10 cents up to 90 cents. The single day of trading was more than occurred during the entire previous month of October. This spike in activity has prompted the Ontario Securities Commission to investigate Regal Goldfields for insider-trading.

Richard Brissenden, Regal's president has publicly denied having advance knowledge of the Jim Campbell Barren decision and suggests that the increase in volume probably resulted from a bid to takeover two Cape Breton exploration companies, or from speculation of mineral potential in the vicinity of Kidd Creek near Timmins, Ontario; also a project of Regal Goldfields.

A letter dated Nov. 15, 1996, however, appears to show that the local business leaders of the CDC knew, sometimes within hours, when cabinet discussed the barren issue, and they subsequently relayed this information to the directors of Regal Goldfields. When asked about their involvement with the cabinet, the CDC refused

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The Canada Lynx: just one of the rare species living in Jim Campbell's Barren

Oceans '97: 500 years since Cabot

BY ERIN SPERLING

It has been 500 years since John Cabot graced the shores of the Maritimes. We have come a long way since those days of wooden ships and burly sailing men. Marine science and technology are paving the way into the next millennium of ocean exploration, and Halifax is playing a part.

The days of October 6 to 9, 1997, were important in the progression of Halifax, especially in the realm of marine science. For more than twenty years marine scientists and technologists from around the world have been gathering to share their research and ideas at *Oceans* conferences. Held at the World Trade and Convention Centre, Halifax was hosting the conference for the first time in ten years.

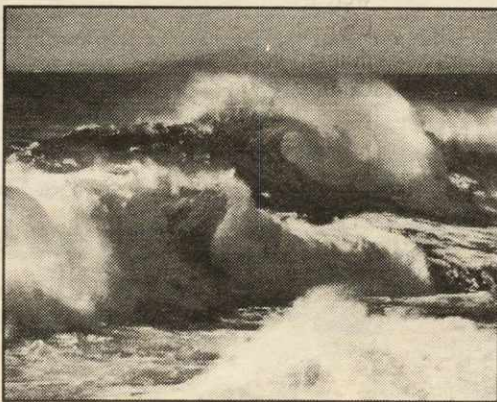
Ross Piercey, executive director of Nova Scotia Oceans Initiative (NSOI), seemed pleased with the overall success of the event.

"It was very effective. We had one of the best attendance rates in

several years," he said.

NSOI, who were themselves exhibitors, represent 80 Nova Scotian constituents from private sector, education and government agencies.

Many of the volunteers at the



conference were students. Each volunteer, although responsible for certain duties, were also able to attend many of the seminars and exhibits that took place.

"By having student volunteers, [the students] were enticed into attending the

technical sessions," said Piercey.

"In order for Canada to remain as a leader [in marine science and technology], we need to attract new blood."

Darla Day is a third-year student at Dalhousie. She is studying Marine Biology and spent two days as a volunteer at *Oceans '97*.

"I got a lot of information from stopping to talk to people at the exhibits. [The conference] was really beneficial for students. It is a perfect place to make contacts — there was a wide array of companies and business," said Day.

Michael Browne, a fourth-year Marine Biology student at Dalhousie, agreed. He worked 14 hours as a volunteer, and appeared surprised by the amount of industry-related science and technology.

"I thought there was a lot of cool

and interesting technology. Some companies were there that I had heard of before. It was useful to get an idea of what the future of oceanography is going to be, the kind of equipment that will be used in the field," he said.

Browne was particularly interested in the smaller companies, such as Jellet Biotechnology.

"They were designing their own equipment for the toxicity testing of algal blooms."

Overall the conference was well attended, on local, national and international levels. There was a positive atmosphere and much sharing of ideas and information.

"There were many scientific introductions to foster the oceans community on an international level," said Piercey.

Leaving the event, there was a sense of community about the maritime and oceanography industry.

Oceans '98 will be held in Nice, France.



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