

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

McNab's Island a little bit cleaner this week

BY JANET FRENCH

Despite the rain and the cold, 40 people came out to volunteer for the 17th beach sweep of McNab's Island on Sunday, September 27. The beach sweep was organized by the Friends of McNab's Island Society.

The Friends of McNab's Island Society (FOMIS) is an organization devoted to the preservation of McNab's Island and is heavily involved in politics surrounding the island. FOMIS members feel that such a clean-up is necessary because of the huge amount of debris and sewage that wash up on the shores of the island. The beach sweep occurs twice annually and has been coordinated since 1991, when FOMIS was originally founded.

Located alongside Eastern Passage and Shearwater, in the middle of Halifax Harbour,

McNab's Island is around 1000 acres in size and is home to many historical sites such as Fort Ives and Fort McNab. The island's scenic beaches, historical archives, and picturesque trails serve as a popular attraction for many visitors and tourists. However, because of its harbour location, the shores of McNab's Island collect a lot of the debris from industry and sewage.

Although beaches strewn with trash are unappealing to visitors, Dusan Soudek, member of the FOMIS board of directors, insists that the motivation for the sweep is "not just for cosmetic purposes." The island wildlife and surrounding sea life, such as turtles, rodents and birds, can choke on, or become entangled in various debris.

During garbage pickup, the most common objects found were plastic, styrofoam and glass, most of which originate from the sewers. A copious number of unnecessary

pollutants such as plastic tampon applicators and styrofoam cups were found. These items are easily replaceable with their more biodegradable cardboard counterparts, a choice that is in the hands of consumers. Although FOMIS members are pleased at how much less trash is found on the island's beaches as compared to when the beach sweeps began, FOMIS board of directors member Catherine McCarthy claims she is still surprised at some of the garbage that appears.

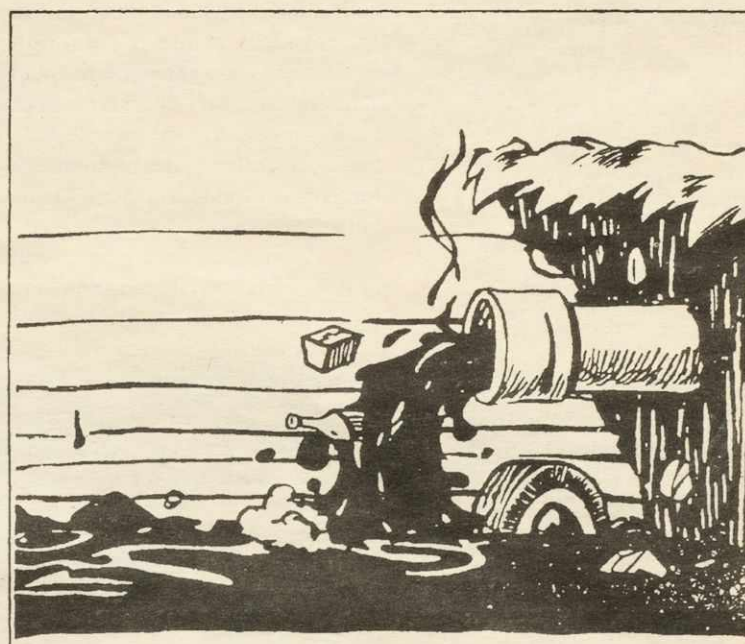
"You'd think there would be more public education for these things," McCarthy says about the amount of biodegradable materials found on the island's shores.

Unfortunately, the turnout of this season's sweep was uncharacteristically low due to the poor weather. In the past years, as many as two hundred people have turned up to help with the island

cleanup, with up to 300 bags of garbage collected. Despite the appeal of the free boat ride and a virtual island tour, only 39 people

were willing to brave the rain and give a little something back to their

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CUP graphic/ John Klossner/ The McGill Daily

Can Nova Scotia foresters see the forest for the trees?

BY CHRISTINE PRESTON

Will Nova Scotian forests be able to exist despite the onslaught of foresters? A panel discussion on the state of Nova Scotia's forests was held last Thursday evening. The aim of this meeting was to examine whether or not our forests are a sustainable resource.

The panel consisted of four members, all with special interests in forestry management. Anthony Hourihan, woodlands manager for J.D. Irving Ltd., accepted invitation to the discussion, but did not attend.

In 1996, the amount of wood harvested exceeded the number set by the Department of Natural Resources by a million meters squared. There also appears to be little information on how much wood is being exported from the region. Only recently did the Dept. of Natural Resources implement a registry of buyers, which could be used to assess the amount of wood leaving Nova Scotia.

Another major problem contributing to the crisis in our woodlands is the predominance of the use of clear-cutting, which can have devastating effects on biodiversity.

Current practices of overcutting are "absolute suicide," said Charlie Restino, a private woodlot owner and environmentalist from Cape Breton. "About 90% of logging in Nova Scotia is done by

clearcutting," Restino said.

Many clearcut areas are used for plantations. This has caused a shift natural, mixed forests to a

forest," said Jim Drescher, private woodlot owner and ecologist from New Germany.

"If trees are used wisely they can last for a very long time," said Bill Freedman, professor of Biology at Dalhousie and author of books on environmental ecology. "Trees are a renewable resource," Freedman said.

He also maintained that the ecological values, like biodiversity, must be considered in forestry management.

"Nothing is sustainable," says Drescher, who denounces the notion that sustainability is possible. "(People must) rediscover a personal... connection with the forests. We must show the importance of recognizing forests for the ecological value, not only their economic value."

Government policies play a major role in the current harvesting practices. Large subsidies are given to private and corporate land owners who clearcut then replant. There is little incentive for those who use ecologically sound practices when harvesting.

The Department of Natural Resources has been slow in developing and enforcing regulations which would ensure that foresters use biologically sound ways of harvesting. The Forest Improvement Act, which has one of the more stringent

guidelines for cutting, was never implemented due to pressure by Nova Scotia's pulp and paper industry.

Scott Paper and Stora Forest Ind., two of Nova Scotia's pulp and paper giants, which moved into the region in the 1960's, "did not follow the regulations of cutting set by the Department of Lands and Forests," said Dr. Willfrid Creighton, Deputy Minister of Dept. of Lands and Forests during 1949-69. "There was little done to enforce the regulations on these companies."

The issue of pesticide and herbicide spraying was also addressed.

"There are alternatives to spraying," stated Charlie Restino. "Insecticide programs are paid for by tax-payers," Restino said, "but there is little input from the public and a lot of input from big business into the decision to spray areas."

Spraying threatens species other than the target organism and chemical run off may enter soil and natural water sources. Gary Westoll, of the Dept. of Natural Resources, admits that there have been no cost/benefit analyses of

not spraying areas infected with pests.

The problem of sustaining renewable resources like our forests is not new to Nova Scotians. The current collapse of the fisheries may give us insight into what Nova Scotia's forestry industry may face if current practices continue.

The consensus is that changes are desperately needed. What remains to be seen is how quickly these changes will come and what will be the driving forces behind them.

"We have a window to do something about our forests," said Freedman.



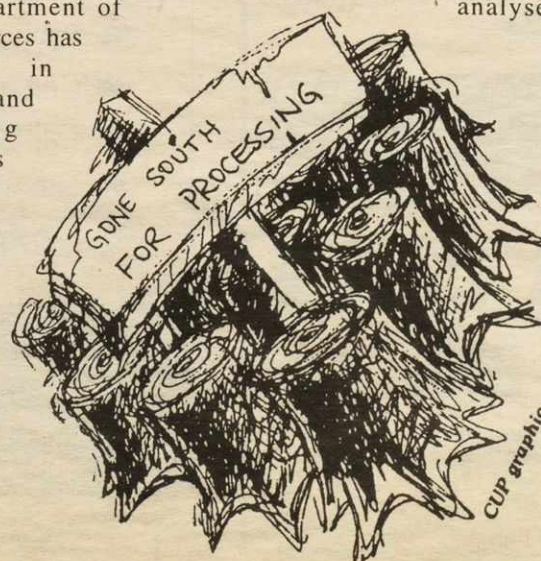
Dal Professor Bill Freedman discussing the state of N.S. forests.

photo by Luke Dobek

monocultured forest. Because plantations usually have one species of tree, it results in a loss of wildlife, resulting in low biodiversity and altered ecosystems.

These forests are also more susceptible to infestations and fire because the natural regulating mechanisms have been greatly reduced.

Over 16,000 Nova Scotians are employed directly or indirectly by the forest industry. Some believe that changes may result in job losses, but selective cutting requires "five times as many workers per unit of biomass removed from the



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