

## Mink Regs: The “Scoop on Poop”

Approximately five years ago residents of Yarmouth and surrounding areas joined together and formed the Tricounty Watershed Protection Association to stop the pollution being caused by mink farms at the headwaters of the Meteghan, Sissaboo, and Tusket Rivers. The Department of Environment conducted water tests in ten lakes and 75 km of the Tusket River for three consecutive years. The final water test results concluded that the mink farms were the probable cause. The government cancelled further water tests and no action was taken despite the protests from citizens and environmental groups.

The NDP government held consultations with us, the stakeholders, and the fur industry to help develop regulations for fur farms - in spite of the fact that existing environment laws could have been enforced to stop the pollution.

Our primary concerns were the disposal of manure, urine, carcasses, surface water runoff going into the river and lakes, set backs from wells, adjacent properties, watercourses and the lack of inspections by the Departments of Agriculture and Environment and the high phosphorous levels that caused blue-green algae to grow and contaminate our waterways. We suggested that bonding insurance be purchased by these industrial farms and a substantial increase in fees to be used to pay clean up, monitoring, and spills. We also were concerned about the close proximity of the farms in such a small area along the water, and the over saturation of the soil with urine and manure. Our final concern was the secrecy surrounding this industry and the lack of transparency of the fur industry, and government to the tax payer who fund them.

There were two drafts proposed for the fur farm regulation. The first draft was very promising and we felt that many of our concerns had been heard. The second draft bore no resemblance to the first draft and we had a meeting with government and once again voiced the same concerns.

It would appear we have wasted our time and effort because nobody was listening. The fur farm regulations that have now been passed into law are watered down even more and have no real defined consequences such as fines for non-compliance and would appear to be un-enforceable. Almost none of our concerns were addressed.

The regulations state manure must go to a facility approved by Nova Scotia government but two lines down says it can be composted on the land. Urine collection is not addressed at all for existing farms and continues to seep into the ground under cages.

The scientists we contacted tell us the phosphorus levels allowed by the regulations are too high to stop blue-green algae from growing.

The regulations say that carcasses must be frozen until disposed of at a NS Environment approved disposal facility, but in the next sentence on-farm composting is allowed.

On-farm composting can be used to dispose of waste feed, with the "suggestion," that waste feed cannot be put in the woods or in manure. This is a major seagull, filth fly, stink and rodent issue. Even if composting is done according to regulations, the phosphorus levels will be far too high for land application.

The regulations say water testing is to be done by someone independent from the farm: this is far too vague. Monitoring should be conducted regularly by a certified professional.

The set backs required by the regulations are dismal. The regulations state solid manure storage, open shed mink shelter or a on-farm compost site can be as close as 50 metres from the property line, and uncovered liquid manure can be stored as close as 50 metres to a well.

The regulations state there will be a committee "Fur farmers" can appeal to if they wish to contest a charge. It is made up of a MINIMUM of 4 people: a professional agrologist, an environmental inspector, 1 fur industry rep, and 1 community rep. The quorum for this panel is one person. To me, this means there could be a very unbalanced number representing any of the four interested parties. And a quorum of one?? And what recourse is there for "citizens" to make their case or get redress for contamination?

The regulations say there will be ONE officer to monitor the 99 farms, that we know about, and it is my understanding there are dozens with of new license waiting to be approved.

The regulations also don't address the animal care, size of cages, and vet services including the humane killing of the mink.

These regulations should have been the solution to our pollution issues; instead we have a document about licensing and fees. It is mostly self-regulating with one man The minister of Agriculture, who is the biggest supporter of the mink industry at the helm. We may be no better off than before the regulations were in place.

Now fur farmers have permission to continue to pollute the same as they have in the past. The Dept of Environment did not do an adequate job in the past and is not likely do any better in the future.

This is another example of the NDP consulting with stakeholders and ignoring the advice they sought.

The most positive thing about these regulations is at least there is something written down and we can start our fight to change them.

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P.S. (*PoopScoop*): .As of 2010 there were about 2,000,000 mink and fox in Nova Scotia pooping 40 lbs per year per animal. YOU DO THE MATH. Where is this manure going to go???