

WILLOW BEACH FIELD NATURALISTS
c/o R.R.#4, 7106 Telephone Road,
Cobourg, Ontario K9A 4J7

July 3, 2001

The Mayor and Council,
Town of Cobourg,
Town Hall,
Cobourg

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of Council,

We are writing to express our dismay and concern at the approach taken in preparing for the fireworks display on the West Headland during the Waterfront Festival this past weekend.

The West Headland and the adjacent open waters of the harbour have considerable natural significance, and the headland is used extensively by both our own members and others for passive recreation through much of the year. This importance is reflected in sections of the West Harbour Plan, but even in an undeveloped state it plays a major recreational role. This is in spite of successive waves of seemingly mindless land filling by the Town over the past 10 years: the natural habitat has slowly struggled back each time, and some of the pioneering plants have in fact proved to be very rare in our region. While it is certainly not everyone's idea of a pleasant place to walk, it is full of life and is, in fact, a tiny wilderness area of a kind.

The Town is not unaware of all this, and indeed Council may recall approving our request for barriers to prevent automobile access at the foot of Hibernia, to prevent SUVs from destroying the area. However, this has not deterred people from treating it as if it was of no consequence, and at different times it has served as a parking lot, contaminated soil dump, and at present a Works Yard. However, prior to this year there has at least been consultation on the actions, which enabled the impacts to be minimized.

There was no consultation whatever with the current assault. A bulldozer simply ploughed a path from the current 'works yard' area through the vegetation to a point about halfway down the headland. It then cleared the entire area to the south with the exception of a narrow strip along the east shoreline, leaving a flat expanse of rough earth and rocks, with a small mound at the far end where we assume the fireworks were located.

We do not suggest for one moment that the fireworks should have been abandoned: they are an enjoyable and spectacular part of the festivities. But many other communities

have waterfront fireworks without wrecking their recreational open spaces in the process, and we feel that this should be possible here also with more careful planning.

As it is, once again a large section of the headland is now destroyed, both as a natural area and as a recreational one, this time for a 20-minute event on one day of the year. If left alone nature will struggle back again over a few years, but in the meantime a valuable recreational area has been significantly debased for an indefinite period. Unlike repairs to playing fields, just laying new sod doesn't work. About all that is possible in the short term is to reinstall a barrier of some kind to prevent joy-riders from starting to use the place for off-road competition, and we hope Council will take this action.

In closing, however, we would like to point out that this event is just the latest in a long series of assaults on Cobourg's natural areas. While the Town's official documents have some pious words about recreation in natural settings, in practice these always seem to be discounted when someone wants to do something else with a property. In part the problem perhaps stems from a failure to recognize a natural area as a recreational facility, if nothing else - to some it is just 'undeveloped'. We attempted to address this issue in our submission on the recent Recreational Facilities Master Plan, only to have it wholly ignored. We urge Council to move to identify the Town's natural recreational open spaces more formally, and to include them in its recreational planning.

Yours faithfully,

B. Short,
President