

Dam meeting packs rural centre

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Forest City dam was
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A save-the-dam meeting in a packed North Lake Community Centre Saturday afternoon highlighted the passion and commitment, along with a widespread consensus, to see the Forest City Dam continue to operate. What was less clear after the four-hour meeting was how that will be achieved and who will make that decision.

Lakeside residents, numerous stakeholders and several politicians gathered in North Lake to share concerns about Woodland Pulp's application to open gates on the Forest City Dam.

The North Lake local service district advisory committee organized a public forum at the North Lake Community Centre, put together by member Lorne Drake, shared information, concerns and advice, but failed to identify a final solution.

The afternoon opened with lengthy presentations from Bill Appleby, Canadian co-chair of the St. Croix Watershed Board of the International Joint Commission, and the Chiputneticook Lake

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International Commission president David Townsend.

Appleby explained the purpose of the International Joint Commission, which protects the watershed of the St. Croix River, designated as a heritage river.

Townsend offered explicit detail on the history of the century-and-a-half-old dam and the overall situation as it has played out. Without the dam's operation, water levels in East Grand Lake, North Lake and St. Croix watershed above the dam will drop significantly with widespread repercussions.

Townsend also gave a brief explanation of the commission's Save the Dam Project, and Andrew McCain, a stakeholder and Chiputneticook Lake International Commission member, addressed the crowd, encouraging them to get more people to sign their petition. He also recognized the dilemma facing those battling to save the dam.

"It is clear we are in a fight," said McCain. "It's not so clear how we should conduct ourselves in that fight, and in fact it's not even completely clear who we are fighting. But we have a problem. If we band together and stay together with this common goal we have a chance of winning this fight."

Three area residents gave presentations, expressing the importance of the dam to the community, and informing the politicians and representatives in attendance what the community expects for an outcome.

Bob and Mary McGinn, Fredericton residents who have property in the area and have spent many summers there with their family, said when first learned about Woodland Pulp's intention to open two gates on the dam they immediately took action. After studying a 48-page document from the mill, they sent a letter to the Chiputneticook Lake News e-newsletter about their concerns.

"Sometime in the near future that dam will require major repairs and/or replacing," Bob McGinn said. "I doubt if foreign investors will want to absorb the cost."

He said Maine and New Brunswick governments must unite with stakeholders to protect the watershed, and take control and save the dam. He said the first step is preventing Woodland Pulp from opening the gates.

Shea MacLaughlin, who said seven generations of her family have lived in the Forest City area, offered a detailed history of the dam and its importance to the region. Not only would opening the dam gates damage the established ecosystem in the lake area, she said, it would



Lorne Drake, organizer of the public forum on the abandonment of the Forest City Dam, addresses the crowd. PHOTO: DOUG DICKINSON/BUGLE-OBSERVER

significantly lower property value for local homeowners.

"The province should be expected to protect the tax base, and they should have concern for potential environmental issues and degradation that would result if the dam is not retained," said MacLaughlin.

She said residents expect local politicians to provide assistance to residents.

George Guimond and Brian Higgs gave a presentation on Woodland Pulp, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the dam, and presented a statement from Woodland Pulp Environmental Manager Scott Beal.

Beal, who was unable to attend due to a prior commitment, offered background on Woodland Pulp's decision to apply to the energy commission to surrender ownership, citing changing regulations as the biggest concern.

"After a detailed analysis we have concluded as a business we cannot reasonably operate the dam under the new order's conditions," said Beal.

He said the commission's demands under the new licence would make for less local state control, shifting it to the federal government and taking away capital for Woodland Pulp that could be used for job creation or infrastructure upgrades.

Beal said the surrender process with the energy commission is protracted and stakeholders will have an opportunity to be heard.

Beal said Woodland Pulp is committed "to working with neighbours in surrounding communities and governments on both sides of the border to provide a resolution that works for all."

Paul Bisulca, former chairman with the Penobscot Nation Hydro Committee, talked about going through similar situations with dam abandonment in Mill Cove, Maine.

Drake presented what he described as his own research into how the tax base and property values would be affected

negatively should Woodland Pulp open the two gates.

Later in the meeting Peter Kavanagh, local service manager for the New Brunswick Department of Local Government, described Drake's figures as "speculative to say the least" and that the matter will be dealt with later.

As the meeting came to a close, each of the politicians and representatives addressed the crowd, each pledging support for the matter.

Drake closed the meeting by saying concerned residents and stakeholders need to make their voices heard.

"What we have done is put the decision makers in front of you and given you a chance to tell them how you feel," he said. "I think the message was fairly clear. We would like you, our elected officials, our civil servants, our commissioners ... to step up and help us. We want you to save our dam."

Following the forum, politicians in attendance told the Bugle-Observer they were impressed with the passion and participation from local residents.

Carl Urquhart, MLA for Carleton-York, said he is proud of the community, which is in his riding.

"There is nothing that makes you prouder than when you see a community like North Lake in rural New Brunswick ... when there is a problem they don't stand and complain, they get together and get a solution," he said.

Tobique-Mactaquac MP T.J. Harvey said the commitment from area residents to find a resolution "speaks to the cohesiveness of the community."

"I'm optimistic that down the road collectively they will be able to work towards a solution," he said, adding that the federal government is working with Global Affairs Canada to provide assistance.

He said he is also taking part in meetings with former premier David Alward, currently serving as Canadian Consul in Boston, to work on the issue.