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February 3, 2020

The Honourable Gordon Wilson  
Minister of Environment  
PO Box 442  
Halifax, NS B3J 2P8

Dear Minister Wilson,

I write on behalf of the Hike Nova Scotia Board concerning the delisting of Owl's Head Provincial Park Reserve and its removal from Nova Scotia's Parks and Protected Areas Plan.

Hike Nova Scotia has been encouraging and promoting hiking, walking and snowshoeing throughout Nova Scotia since 2007. Nova Scotians identified hiking as their top physical activity in a 2016 survey. Hike Nova Scotia is the voice of the hiking community in Nova Scotia with a membership representing over 2,200. Our reach goes even further on social media where we enjoy 30,800 Instagram followers, 21,425 Facebook followers, and 6,875 Twitter followers.

Hiking and connecting with nature improves physical health, mental health, social well-being, economic prosperity and environmental protection. The tourism industry is heavily reliant on hiking, as one of the top three outdoor tourist activities. Outdoor enthusiasts like hikers stay longer and spend more than most other types of tourists in Nova Scotia.

Our vision is to see more Nova Scotians and visitors enjoying a broad network of quality places for hiking, walking and snowshoeing in healthy, natural environments and doing so in a responsible manner.

Hike Nova Scotia supports the 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan particularly because of the vast amount of consultation and research that informed its creation – more than six years of comprehensive consultation with the public and Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, numerous stakeholder meetings, written submissions, interviews with park users and non-users, and public open house sessions held across the province.

The resulting list of proposed parks and protected areas is not a random pool of properties but a carefully considered representative selection of the most ecologically significant habitats in the province. Some, like Owl's Head, also provide and protect public access to important areas for outdoor recreation.

Hike Nova Scotia is concerned about the potential loss of public access to coastal areas. In a province where less than 5 percent of the coast remains in public hands, the government must prioritize protection of access to the ocean for local residents and visitors alike.



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Also a public and protected Owl's Head would play an important role as an ecologically significant headland within the Wild Islands Coast. The local community, with the support of municipal, provincial and federal governments have invested in planning and promotion of a sustainable tourism destination and brand for the Eastern Shore built around what the Nature Trust of Nova Scotia calls, "one of the last remaining intact and ecologically rich island groups of its size in North America."

The government's unilateral decision to encourage a golf course development is contrary to the communal efforts underway in the area to create opportunities for recreation and ecotourism through the preservation and celebration of the region's ecological features.

Considering the vast amount of public input at the heart of the Parks and Protected Areas Plan, it is disheartening that Cabinet would decide, on their own, to go in a different direction, without at least consulting or seeking input from those concerned.

In the spirit of transparency and respect for those who provided input to the Parks and Protected Areas Plan, the government should reverse the delisting of Owl's Head and start again with appropriate, meaningful and informed public consultation about Owl's Head's role within the Parks and Protected Areas Plan.

Hike Nova Scotia supports a strong Parks and Protected Areas Plan and asks that the government proceed with official designation of the outstanding properties. No change to the plan should happen without appropriate, meaningful and informed public consultation.

We thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vince Forestall", written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Vince Forestall, President  
Hike Nova Scotia