



Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society

P.O. Box 9012 Sylvan Lake
Alberta, T4S 1S6

March 23, 2007

Hon. Minister Rob Renner
#425 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Renner,

The SLWSS would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of the Environment and to introduce our organization.

The leadership your Department and the Stelmach Provincial Government are taking regarding the protection of Alberta's natural capital, and particularly its environmental quality, encourages us. Without question your background as Minister of Municipal Affairs will be extremely valuable when it comes to enhancing Alberta's Land Use and Water for Life policies that guide the protection of environmental assets including aquatic ecosystems like those found at Sylvan Lake.

The SLWSS is a not for profit society concerned with and focused on stewardship. As a volunteer organization, the Society's Directors and membership are working diligently toward maintaining the environmental quality of Alberta's Sylvan Lake Watershed. Today we realize that the natural capital value contained within the Sylvan Lake basin has been very much undervalued; yet in 2006 alone, Sylvan Lake hosted nearly one million visitors.

If you wish, we can provide to you, under separate (electronic) cover, a PDF file that describes the Society's current outreach efforts. This outreach program is based on a thorough analysis of relevant scientific reports, governance planning documents and our Director's experience with the current situation.

We would be interested in engaging in further discussions with your departmental officers regarding the very urgent need to mandate a meaningful Strategic Plan to guide development of the Sylvan Lake Watershed and assure its future sustainability.

There is one important stewardship situation that, unfortunately, has reached an urgent stage and requires much more immediate attention. As a Society we have been reluctant to bring forward this difficult issue, hoping it would be resolved at the local level. This has not been possible, due to what appears to be an "unusual" development approval process, whereby the municipal government has accepted payment from the developer and has directed the developer toward very significant expense prior to a thorough review by Alberta Environment or Environment Canada.

This situation has put your department officials under tremendous pressure to approve a project that, in its current form, will be the cause of significant damage to the environment. Further, the process seems to have removed the municipal government from its full responsibility for project approval and has somehow delegated responsibility and substantial risk to the Provincial Environment Ministry.

After significant discussion, the Society's Directors have agreed that given the urgency and potential negative impact, not only to the environment, but also to your Department and Alberta's reputation, that we had little choice but to bring this matter forward.

One of the many pending sub-division proposals at Sylvan Lake includes a development by Westend Landing Corp. Westend Landing Corp is currently approved by the municipal authority to build residences within a fen wetland complex on the northwest shoreline of Sylvan Lake. This proposal creates an unacceptable level of risk to the current and highly valued, meso-eutrophic water quality condition of the lake, as well as other natural capital values such as fisheries and rare, nesting bald eagles.

Given that residential development on the shoreline of a lake is a purely "optional" undertaking when compared to the forced expansion of a growing city, we believe there is a strong case for your Department's intervention and leadership to ensure that this fen-wetland is conserved. Preserving the fen-wetland area would retain a host of ecological services that are essential to the health of the lake. Alternatively, development within this wetland would have the opposite effect and result in increased risk of pollution and the downloading of unacceptable risk to Albertans.

We wanted to bring this matter to your attention due to the high profile nature of this pending, and yet still preventable environmental damage.

As mentioned earlier in this letter, we would look forward to working pro-actively toward a Strategic Plan for the Sylvan Watershed. It is quite possibly the fastest growing recreational development area in the province and our volunteer organization is overwhelmed by what is at stake – particularly as the magnitude of development pressure increases.

Sincerely,



Kent Williamson
Chairman
Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society