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No happy trails here

Lakefront residents oppose further development of walking paths around First Lake



Watch your step: Bob Taylor watches while his grandchildren, Lauren and Nicholas Taylor, navigate exposed roots on the trail around Lower Sackville's First Lake. (Photo: Darrell Oake)

By Marilyn Smulders
The Daily News

LOWER SACKVILLE - A roadblock has been put up against a community group's plan to fix up a rough trail along the shores of First Lake in Lower Sackville.

Sackville residents whose properties abut the greenbelt around the lake don't want the trail upgraded.

Eighty people, representing 40 households on First Lake Drive, Chandler Drive and Johnson Crescent, signed a petition opposing further trail development.

The petition, tabled by Lower Sackville Coun. Bob Harvey at HRM council's meeting earlier this week, outlines six reasons for residents' opposition, including environmental degradation, vandalism and a decrease in property values.

Harvey also tabled a letter from Friends of First Lake addressing each of the six issues.

"I'm just hoping this can be resolved," Harvey said yesterday. "That once people know more about the project, there can be a consensus that we're looking at a positive."

In tomorrow's paper



Protesters plan picket the grand opening of a new strip club in Dartmouth. We'll have a report.

Daily News

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Mark Derrah, a resident of First Lake Drive, says homeowners are concerned about the health of First Lake.

Widening the trail along a thin strip of greenbelt between homes and the lake "would interrupt natural drainage" to the lake, Derrah said. More people using such a trail would lead to an increase in litter, graffiti and pet feces, he said.

Vandalism is also bound to increase: "We already have issues with partygoers and revelers. They're making bonfires and, in some cases, breaking into houses from the greenbelt. You open it up and it's much easier for people to case your backyard," he said.

But members of Friends of First Lake, a community group established a decade ago out of concern for the lake environment, say public lands should be accessible to all Sackville residents - not just those whose properties border the green space.

"Property owners have adopted this public space for their own use - in some cases, they've cleared trees, built boardwalks and wharfs," said Bob Taylor, who's on the group's volunteer board.

Taylor says having more people use the trails will give them greater ownership and pride in the area, and ultimately lead to less litter and graffiti.

The existing trail is difficult to navigate, with exposed tree roots and wet sections. Improving the trails will allow people to enjoy nature and get exercise by walking, jogging, biking or pushing strollers, he said.

"In some places, because of the roots, the trail is more like a ladder than a trail," says Gordon Kyle, co-chair of Friends of First Lake.

"The vast majority of people in the community can't use the trail now unless they're very fit and can scramble along ... I can't think of anything nicer than letting people enjoy this pristine little lake right in the middle of Sackville."

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The entire project, for about 10 kilometres of trail, has a price tag of \$500,000, but the Friends want to get going this summer with \$50,000 they've got from HRM's trail-development fund.

The group is also commissioning a study on the specifics of the trail, to determine what form it should take.

msmulders@hfxnews.ca

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No happy trails here [1/13/2006]



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