

Marsh proponents want it all

By Neil Horner - Parksville Qualicum Beach News - February 26, 2008

Proponents of the retention of Hamilton Marsh as a wetland came away encouraged after meeting with Environment Minister Barry Penner last week.

"We were very pleased," said Ceri Peacey, a member of the Friends of French Creek Conservation Society. "They paid very good attention to us and indicated an interest that their ministry would support this kind of effort."

The meeting was arranged by Alberni-Qualicum MLA Scott Fraser, who also came away encouraged.

"We met with Penner and senior staffer Dick Heath and talked about the importance of this wetland," Fraser said. "We took them through the history of trying to negotiate with Island Timberlands and impressed on them the marsh is in its most valuable state, for all kinds of reasons, as a wetland, so we must protect it for future generations."

Fraser said Penner responded that it appeared to be in the ministry's interest to protect the marsh.

"That's encouraging," he said. "We may get nothing but moral pressure from him, as he pointed out it's private land, but we pointed out that ... the impact of removal of this valuable wetland would affect the public interest." We got him involved, and that's good."

Peacey agreed.

"We drove home the fact that the whole 360.5 hectares should be preserved and not logged," she said. "We want the whole thing. We don't just want a portion of it."

Earlier, Fraser presented a stack of postcards in the legislature sent to him by area residents in support of preserving Hamilton Marsh and gave a brief member's statement to his legislative colleagues on the subject.

"It was a one-two punch," he said. "We don't expect anything concrete from the initial meeting, but the minister is now going to have to assume some sort of responsibility and he has indicated it's in his ministry's interest to do so."

Barry Penner was unavailable for comment on the meeting at press time.

news@pqbnews.com