

Region of Queens Municipality

249 White Point Road P.O. Box 1264 Liverpool, NS B0T 1K0 Phone (902) 354-3453 Fax (902) 354-7473
website: www.regionofqueens.com



Region of Queens Municipality

June 6, 2012

The Honourable Peter Kent PC MP
Minister Parks Canada
25-7-N Eddy Street
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0H3

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Region of Queens Municipality respecting the decisions taken by your department that will impact Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site and Keji Seaside. Much of the former and all of the latter are located in our municipality and are vital to economic opportunity associated with year round tourism.

Personally I have had extensive involvement with both Keji and Keji Seaside. In the matter of the former, I have been a camper for four decades, for 21 years I worked closely with Parks Canada personnel in my capacity as Member of the Legislative Assembly and as Minister of Natural Resources and Minister of the Environment and for the past 12 years as Mayor of the Region of Queens Municipality. I also led a team that co-authored the book *Kejimikujik National Park: A Guide*.

As MLA Queens, I was given the opportunity by then Minister of Natural Resources Honourable George Henley to create a process to move what was then known as the Woods Property from the Provincial Crown to the Federal Crown for inclusion in the Parks Canada family which was accomplished in 1986. I hasten to note that unlike several other additions to Parks Canada's inventory such as Kouchibouguac and failed attempts on Nova Scotia's Eastern Shore and the LaHave Islands, Keji Seaside was accomplished as the consequence of great co-operation between provincial and federal government public servants and inclusion of a respected independent public process established by the province.

I make note of these tidbits of history for no reason other than to establish something of a personal *bone fide* in this matter. I will now speak to the two park areas separately.

The South Shore's Great Experience!

Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site

When Kejimikujik was established, it was sold to the local community as an opportunity to create economic development in northern Queens and southern Annapolis counties. The cuts iterated by Parks Canada fly directly in the face of that commitment by the Government of Canada. The proposed changes essentially will cut off the fifty square miles of parkland from late autumn to early spring. Gone will be year round camping, hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. All have been hugely successful over recent years drawing people to the park throughout four seasons. The trout season for western Nova Scotia commences April 1, but sport fishermen will now have limited seasonal access to backcountry campsites. As you know, there has been a significant and much applauded capital expenditure in the park on bringing power to a growing number of campsites as well as the erection of gurts to attract additional winter campers. Such welcome initiatives have resulted in increased usage well beyond the summer season which is without doubt welcomed by the many businesses that in large measure look to the park and its visitors for increased economic opportunity. I am confident the park's statistics will bear this out.

I fully understand Keji is a unique Parks Canada property in that it is both a National park and a National historic site. How regrettable that budget cuts at Keji will adversely affect Mi'kmaq cultural initiatives. The relationships between First Nations and Keji have been very positive. For example, a recent Maple Syrup Festival held for the first time this year attracted 300 participants in March. I cannot help but suggest that the decision to reduce funding in this area will have an adverse impact on cross-cultural relationships that have been built up over a long period of time. Good will is hard won and easily lost.

Kejimikujik Seaside

As previously noted, this pristine Atlantic headland was transferred from the provincial to the federal government in 1986 and became part of the Kejimikujik administrative responsibility in 1988. It consists of a sensitive seashore habitat with miles of white sand beach and a lagoon dune complex with extensive rocky foreshores. Due to the fragility of much of the landscape and the seasonal presence of the endangered piping plover, it is suited only for day use. Visitors come from urban and rural homes, many from outside Canada, some are seasoned hikers, most are not. There are dangers associated with Keji Seaside including extremely cold water, dangerous currents and strong undertows. Persons not familiar with the power of the ocean have a tendency during periods of high surf to climb on rocky headlands for a better view not understanding how quickly one can be washed out to sea.

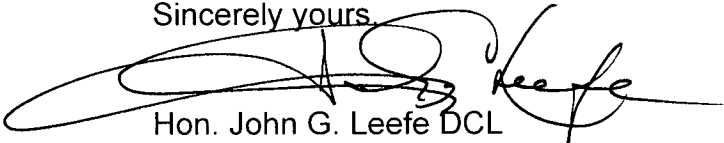
There are two self-guided trails with interpretative and directional signage. The shorter is 5.2 km return through dense forest. The longer is 8.7 km return often over very rough beach cobble. There is always the danger that visitors not

familiar with Atlantic headlands may not fully understand the need to take great care during their visits. Appropriate footwear, sun block, a hat, water, knowledge of resident wildlife including bears, warnings about currents and undertow, disorientation in fog can all pose significant, even life threatening dangers for the unaware.

It is for these reasons that during the peak summer season having Parks Canada personnel on-site is very much in the interest of public safety. Not only can staff ensure that potential campers understand there are no sites, staff can also be watchful for the safe return of visitors and lend a hand in the event of emergencies. As with the case of improving campsites at Keji inland, so too have tax payer's dollars invested in capital improvements at Keji Seaside. The integrity of the capital improvements at Keji Seaside both structurally and sanitarily cannot be effectively managed from an administrative office that is an hour and a half away.

In conclusion, it is clear to our community that there are two major issues at play respecting Kejimkujik National Park and National Historic Site and Kejimkujik Seaside. Public safety and economic opportunity are both going to be put at risk if the proposed cost-cutting measures are adopted including the livelihood of rural families who may be forced to move from the area or remain and fall on reliance of Employment Insurance. I am firmly of the view that the economic consequences of decisions at Kejimkujik are in complete contrast to your government's drive to create and sustain economic opportunity, support rural communities and reduce the number of citizens who rely on seasonal employment. Speaking on behalf of our Council, our community, our business sector and indeed those who come to enjoy what Parks Canada has to offer at Kejimkujik National Park and National Historic Site and Kejimkujik Seaside, we respectfully request that these decisions be reversed. I must reiterate that the current cuts certainly are at odds with your government's economic plan to expand economic opportunity and reduce dependence on EI.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John G. Leefe', written over a horizontal line.

Hon. John G. Leefe DCL
Mayor

c: Council
Gerald Keddy, MP-South Shore-St. Margarets
Hon. Greg Kerr, MP-West Nova
Hon. Peter MacKay PC MP
Senator Donald Oliver PC MP
Media