



September 10, 2014

To: Councillor Reg Rankin (Councillor for the Otter Lake area, Timberlea, Beechville and Clayton Park West and Member of the Halifax Waste Resource Society)
cc: Mayor Mike Savage and Councillors, HRM; Ken Donnelly (Community Monitoring Committee)

Subject: Impact of Extending the Life and Extent of the Otter Lake Landfill on the Wilderness Recreational Values of The Bluff Trail

This document is a follow-up, with photos and maps, to our letter of September 20, 2013, in which we raised concerns about impacts of the proposed extension of the Otter Lake landfill on The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail.

The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail (blufftrail.ca) is a popular wilderness hiking trail and major tourist destination located in HRM just minutes from Halifax west of the Nine Mile River. The trail, conceived, built, and maintained by a volunteer community group, the Woodens Rver Watershed Environmental Organization (WRWEO), has grown in popularity since its opening in 2005 and is now a major tourist destination. Recent entries in a visitor book included folks from England, Scotland, California and South America. In 2008 *Explore: the Canadian Outdoor Magazine* named this trail one of the eight best urban escapes in Canada. A recent post on [Halifax Sociable](#) ranked the Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail as one of the top ten adventures that you must have in Halifax. The success of The Bluff Trail is one reason that in 2011 the Province of Nova Scotia legislated protection of the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area which includes close to 10,000 hectares of wilderness surrounding the trail. The Bluff Trail has received financial support from HRM via the Halifax Regional Trails Association and from the Province via Health and Wellness and Nova Scotia Environment.

Nevertheless, the continued success of this trail and indeed its prime purpose, which is to promote the value of wilderness experience within easy access from the urban core, are now in jeopardy. The reason is: HRM is considering breaking its 1995 agreement with the community that led to the creation of the Otter Lake landfill by extending its life 17-23 years beyond the originally planned 25-year operation.

While the landfill, opened in 1999, was visible when the trail was planned (early 2000s) and completed (2005), the understanding was that it would be closed within two decades and trees and other vegetation planted at the site. If the landfill is kept open beyond 25 years (2024), the height of the landfill cells would be raised by up to 15 meters and the footprint enlarged. The negative impact on the trail would be not only extended over time but also substantially increased. This would clearly detract from the wilderness experience offered by The Bluff Trail, and the reputation it has gained.

The Stantec Report (January 2013) acknowledges the visual issue:

"The final decision to expand the RDF vertically or to maintain the current design limits must weigh the broader community benefits of significantly extending the life of the landfill at minimal capital costs, compared to the impact of the increased visual presence of the RDF on its immediate neighbours."

The SNC-Lavalin Peer Review (April 2013) went further and conducted tests to assess the visual impact, but only from residential view planes: 2 "The original design accommodated restrictions related to view planes. Our February 2013 Balloon Study tested how visible the proposed additional cell elevation would be from residential view planes in the area. Aside from a bedrock outcrop in the anticipated commercial area of the Brunello Estates commercial / residential / golf course (Exist 3, Highway 103), we are confident that the increase in height of the landfill cells will not be visible from the other locations we visited for the study."

Obviously no attempt was made to determine whether the view planes of The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail would be affected since even now the landfill is visible from the trail, for example from the ridge at the south end of Cranberry Lake where the first and second loops of the trail join. This spot is heavily visited since it is at the place where the first loop joins the second and most visitors hike just the first loop (2-3 hours hike) and see the landfill now in the distance. The sense of a wilderness experience would be badly compromised by increasing the height of the landfill in the manner proposed to extend the life of the landfill.

The landfill is visible also from other places, such as The Bluff plateau on the third loop, The Bluff loop, from which the trail derives its name. An increase in height would in effect undermine the purpose of the trail: to give residents and tourists an opportunity to experience the beauty of wilderness next to a major urban centre. Instead of a tourist destination, it could become a destination to avoid.

The accompanying panoramic views of the landfill as it currently exists (Figs. 2-9 below) were taken on September 4, 2014, from various sites on the second and third loops of The Bluff Trail that are indicated exactly on the accompanying map and aerial view (Fig. 1).

We suggest that the negative impacts of extending the life, extent and height of the Otter Lake Landfill on The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail add significantly to the environmental, legal, ethical, and economic reasons for closing the Otter Lake landfill on schedule, i.e. in 2024.

Respectfully,

Richmond Campbell (Board Member)
David Patriquin (Co-Chair)

Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization

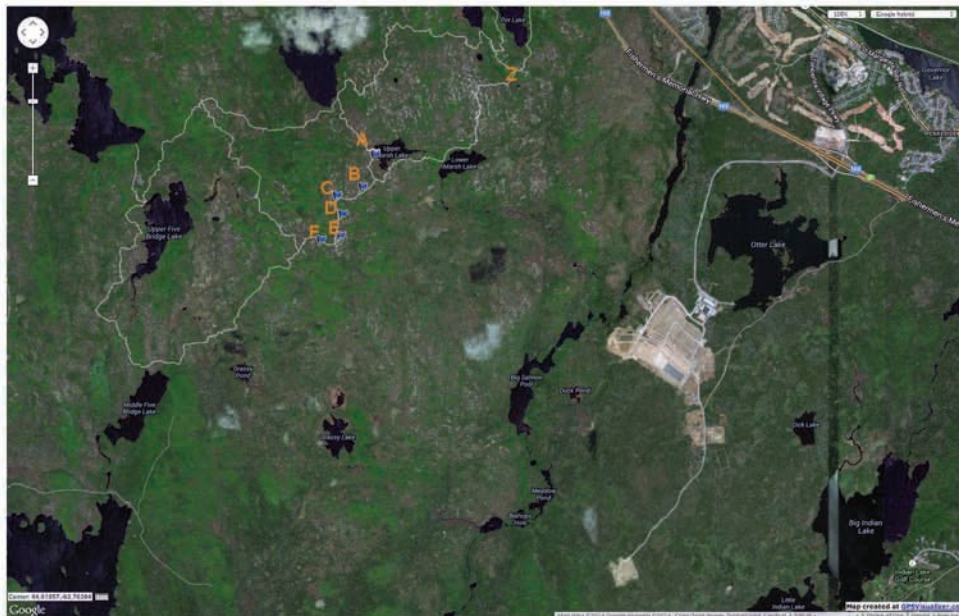


Figure 1. Sites on The Bluff Trail from which photos were taken (A-F on Sep. 4, 2014; Z on July 10, 2014), and Google image of the Otter Lake Landfill.

Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Position A, FL=25 mm



Fig. 4



Position B, FL=64.5

Fig. 5



Position C, FL=5mm
(Landfill hidden by trees)

Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Position E, FL=25mm

Position F, FL=11.1mm



FL=18.8mm



Fig. 8

Fig. 9

