

Endangered Black Ash at Southdale Site – Group Calls on Minister to Halt Development

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Punamu'kwati'jk / Dartmouth – Having located probable Black Ash at the Eisner Cove Wetland, Bill Zebedee, President of the Save Our Southdale Wetland Society, is calling for the immediate cessation of Clayton Developments' activities in Southdale.

Black Ash Significance

The Black Ash is officially a Species at Risk, with only a dozen known populations of Black Ash scattered throughout Nova Scotia. Historically, the Black Ash is an important species to the Mi'kmaw people, as it is uniquely suited for making baskets, canoes, and other useful items. It is known as Wisqoq in the Mi'kmaw language. Conservation efforts have been underway for decades but the overall population of Black Ash is still low.

“Black Ash is exceptionally rare, and to find it here at the Eisner Cove Wetland is really significant. We have had groups of citizens helping us identify species of flora and fauna at the Eisner Cove Wetland in a series of BioBlitz events since the development was announced in January. Black Ash has been on our radar since the start but it was difficult to get a clear identification in winter. Now that the leaves are starting to open we can really see what we have.” – Dr. Tara LaPointe, supporter

“I was part of a BioBlitz at Eisner Cove Wetland in January,” said Jon Stone, former manager with the Canadian Wildlife Service. “That was when I found what iNaturalist identified as a Black Ash. As a former Wildlife Officer, I knew what I had found.”

Experts Weigh In

To get a clear identification, the Save Our Southdale Wetland Society has consulted experts including botanists, arborists and an environmental educator before releasing information about their potential find.

On May 9, 2022, Clarence Stevens, a prominent environmental consultant, indicated there “is a high probability of Black Ash being on site, but further research is required when leaves come out, because there also appear to be hybrid trees, so there will probably be Black Ash found deeper in the woods.”

Attached is a photo identification resource prepared this week, comparing white and Black Ash characteristics and showing findings at the Eisner Cove Wetland.

Development Proposal Ignored Signs

“As part of the process for a development proposal with HRM City Council, a Land Suitability Analysis (LSA) must be prepared and presented,” said Zebedee. “The LSA examines the proposed development site from many perspectives, including the presence or potential of Species at Risk.”

The LSA presented by Clayton Developments to Halifax City Council in January 2022 was prepared predominantly as a “literature review.” Although a field study is mentioned in the report, no details are given on the timing, duration, location or extent of actual fieldwork. The LSA noted that Species at Risk were present near the site, referencing a report by the Atlantic

Canada Conservation Data Centre, but concluded that “no rare flora or fauna were observed” while onsite. No mention is made in the report of Black Ash.

Destruction Must Be Halted

The Provincial Task Force on Housing and Minister of Housing John Lohr have designated the Southdale development as a fast-tracked Special Planning Area, with the intention to have the site “shovel-ready” by September 2022. Clayton Developments has already cleared a wide access road that runs across the forest and back, and they have applied for approval to allow early tree removal and earthworks to speed up the process even more.

Minister Lohr stated, in a CBC interview in April, that "It is always possible that one of them (Special Planning Areas) would not go forward, we don't know. They also have to go through a process and we hope they will all succeed and go forward, but they still have to go through a process."

“It’s time for a proper Environmental Impact Assessment at the Eisner Cove Wetland,” said Zebedee, “before any further damage can be done to this ecologically significant site. What else in the wetland is being forgotten or ignored in favour of this development?”

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attachment: Black Ash Identification Poster.pdf

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