

Green Light to Mink Farmers means Green Lakes for Nova Scotians

HALIFAX – New regulations governing the fur farming industry released late last week spell more pollution for lakes and rivers in Nova Scotia according to concerned citizens and environmentalists. Residents in Yarmouth, Digby and now Annapolis Counties feel that the mink farming industry, propped up by the Department of Agriculture, has ridden roughshod over them.

“This industry has been allowed to pollute our lakes and drinking water to the point of toxicity for over 6 years and these new regulations will do very little to stop it.” says Gretchen Fitzgerald, Executive Director of the Sierra Club of Canada, Atlantic Chapter. “Worse still, existing operations will be exempt from these regulations for 3 more years and they can obtain an additional 3 year extension from the requirements to construct closed style animal housing and liquid feces storage systems” adds Fitzgerald.

“The government of Nova Scotia has known for many years that the poor practices of the mink industry have severely impacted otherwise pristine lakes and watercourses and they could have stopped this pollution with rules that are already in place. Instead they failed to enforce those rules, not to mention their oft-promoted Water Strategy that is supposedly working to ensure ‘safe, secure water for consumption, recreation and livelihoods’. Do they expect us to believe that these new regulations will make any difference?” says Jocelyne Rankin, Water Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre.

Specific examples of weak rules in the regulations include:

- The maximum allowable limits for *E. coli* and phosphorous in surface water are far too high. Limits should correspond to Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines;
- Establishing a single inspector to monitor a heavily polluting industry;
- The regulations allow for mink carcasses to be “disposed of” on-site. This is a weakening from a previous draft that said carcasses had to be disposed of at an approved waste disposal site;
- The regulations allow for untreated mink manure to be disposed of on land as fertilizer;
- There is nothing in the regulation that prohibits the discharge of waste from mink farms into watercourses despite a promise from government that the regulations would do just that;
- There is no requirement for operators to monitor the impacts of their operation on groundwater;
- Biannual surface water monitoring (spring and fall) is insufficient for this industry;
- There are no requirement for monitoring air quality – which is supposed to be a part of any monitoring program (S. 34 (1) of the Fur Industry Act). Odor from these farms is a serious concern.
- Complete and utter discretion allows the Administrator to exempt operators from any requirement, such as obtaining a site approval or management plan; and,
- License holders have the right to appeal any administrative decision that goes against them but community members and concerned citizens have no such right or opportunity.

“It was local community members that brought attention to the uncontrolled pollution being caused by the fur industry, forcing the government to step up and do something, but this law does nothing to ensure that the pollution will stop” says Lisa Mitchell, Lawyer with the East Coast Environmental Law Association. “Instead, it would seem the Department of Agriculture is doing the absolute minimum to regulate an industry that they actively promote. The peoples’ trust in government to properly regulate this industry has been eroded” adds Mitchell.

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