

# OBSERVATIONS

## Serious Implications from Environmental Changes

Am I taking obvious changes in weather patterns and climate condition seriously? Upon reflection, I ask what appears to be the attitude of my circle of friends and colleagues to the same question. Generally in any conversation concerning the weather, we lament the terrible changes, we are unable to explain the absence of snow for Christmas, we complain of cold if not frosty weather on our recent holiday in Florida or express disbelief that airports in Europe are so ill-prepared to cope with unexpected snow and typically Canadian type winter conditions. It doesn't help much to complain about the weather forecasting of Peter Coade or Cindy Day; they simply duck when they see us coming.

Seriously, whether we pay attention or not, we have been told repeatedly over the past decade to expect surprising and major changes in atmospheric conditions with implications for our lifestyle and serious consequences in costs incurred to repair storm damage, rising insurance fees, if in fact, not outright cancellation of coverage. For those of us who have properties adjacent to the Bras d'Or Lake, near oceanside or near any major body of water, the time for planning and action is long past. In particular for those who understandably wish to build cottages and bungalows close to the water, be prepared to accept the risks. In the absence of government regulations governing zoning, setbacks and elevations, all of which are essential elements in the application for building and construction permits, we are flying on our own.

Some serious work has been underway over the past decade to both warn citizens of the coming perils and risks and in fact, establishing some new rules or guidelines. For example, caught by the surprising level of coastal zone damage on the northeast coast of New Brunswick, governments in that province have set down firm rules and recommendations for setbacks respecting new construction near oceanside. Recent experience with damage caused by storm surge near Shediac and surrounding area is clear evidence that even recently established rules may be inadequate.

Currently, the government of Nova Scotia, with strong encouragement from environmental organizations and expression of concern from some members of the insurance industry, have committed to establishing a coastal zone management policy for this province. While an important move in itself, it is running late and requires much more precision in its framework and execution. Again, the property damage recently created by storm surge in Nova Scotia is a wakeup call, if in fact we need one.

With respect to the Bras d'Or Lake and its watershed, the Bras d'Or Stewardship Society, together with the Collaborative Environmental Planning Initiative (CEPI), commissioned a significant study in Land Use Development Practices in 2008. The work carried out by Environmental Design and Management Limited (EDM), prescribed a set of best use management practices focusing specifically on use and environmental protection of lands within the Watershed. In large measure its recommendations laid out measures on distance or setbacks from lakeside and waterways as well as guidelines on elevations, waste water disposal and road construction. The study, including its recommendations, was presented to the five municipal councils and five area Band Councils in 2009. A follow-up letter was forwarded to the respective councils in the fall of 2010 encouraging some follow up on the EDM Report. The letter also brought to the attention of councils new and additional information including measures taken by the Ecology Action Center on Coastal Zone risk and damage as well as new published work on anticipated impacts of climate change published in the October 2010 edition of the Canadian Geographic. These impacts on land erosion and destruction of infrastructure are already in evidence and are expected to worsen.

Although the Bras d'Or Lake does not experience the same level of tidal rise as the Atlantic reports of bankside erosion, instances of requirements for armour stone and cribbing construction and flooding of barrier reefs are increasing. One serious occurrence has been the washout of the traditional Mi'kmaq burial site at Malagawatch. This is a result of water level rise coupled with increased wave action.

As citizens, we sometimes need to be protected from our own impulses. Some cottage owners have already said wistfully had more rigorous rules been in place before or at the time they built their homes, it could have saved them money and grief.

Good planning simply makes good sense. For many years, design engineers and planners designed infrastructure and buildings against notional one hundred years major storm or catastrophic event. Given the frequency of events in climate and atmospheric change, we can only guess of the dilemma currently facing construction design professionals.

Pat Bates, Chairman, Bras d'Or Lake Stewardship

# Tax bills are in the mail

## Special

Property Valuation Services Corporation (PVSC) mailed approximately 590,000 assessment notices to Nova Scotia property owners on January 17th.

"The real estate market remains quite stable. Property values continue to rise with an overall increase of 6.4 per cent from 2010," said Jean Thorburn, Vice President of Operations for the PVSC.

Across the Province, the assessed value of residential property is approximately \$65 billion, an increase of 6.8 per cent from 2010. The assessed value of commercial property is approximately \$19.5 billion, up of 5.2 per cent from last year. Assessments for 2011 are based on the market values for 2009.

The Capped Assessment Program (CAP) rate has been set at 2.9 per cent for the 2011 assessment year. This means that in most cases, capped assessments will only increase by 2.9 per cent unless a property underwent construction or had a change in ownership. Approximately 375,000 properties are included in the CAP program.

Property owners can view their assessment account details and appeal sta-

tus online by visiting the PVSC web site [www.pvsc.ca](http://www.pvsc.ca) and accessing the "Assessment Online" tool. The Assessment Number and Personal Identification Number (P.I.N.) featured on the top right-hand corner of the notice are required to access your account information.

"We encourage property owners to contact us and discuss their account details if they have questions when reviewing their notice," said Ms. Thorburn. The PVSC toll free number is 1-800-380-7775. The PVSC call center operates from 8:30 - 4:30 and if a higher volume of calls is received, operating hours will be extended until 6:00 pm.

Property owners may appeal their assessment by filling out the appeal form on the bottom of the assessment notice and either mailing, faxing or delivering it to a PVSC office. Appeals must be received by midnight on February 7, 2011.

Property Valuation Services Corporation is a municipally funded organization that determines the market value of properties in Nova Scotia as legislated under the Nova Scotia Assessment Act.

## I SELECT:

# Winter Fresh Flavours



**Enjoy the best local ingredients**

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**DISCOVER**  
Enjoy **Seasonal Local Ingredients** this season with one of our new **Winter Recipes**. Find recipes at participating retailers and farm markets or at: [SelectNovaScotia.ca](http://SelectNovaScotia.ca)



**TASTE**  
Attend a **Community Supper, Soup Tastings at Markets** or in-store food **Sampling** this February. Find one near you at: [SelectNovaScotia.ca](http://SelectNovaScotia.ca)

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**WIN!**  
Enter our contest on Facebook for a chance to win weekly giveaways of **Cookbooks** featuring **Local Chefs**. Enter on the Select Nova Scotia [facebook](#) page



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