



4 June 2011

To: Mayor Derm Moran and Town Councilors, Witless Bay

Fr: Bill Montevecchi

Re: Ecological Concerns about Proposed Ragged Beach Development

CC: Hon. Ross Wiseman, Minister – Environment and Conservation; Hon. Ryan Cleary, MHA;  
Save Ragged Beach Committee

---

In support of many people in Witless Bay and surrounding communities, throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, across Canada and internationally, I want to add my serious concerns about the ecological consequences of the proposed Ragged Beach Development in Witless Bay.

My concerns are based on more than 25 years of seabird research with my students and associates in the Witless Bay Ecological Seabird Reserve. Ragged Beach has been a traditionally important area for marine bird, duck and mammal observations for decades, often being a particularly important site during the fall, winter and spring non-breeding seasons of the birds.

We are very well aware of the detrimental effects that artificial night lighting can have on seabirds that are active at night. In the case of the Witless Bay Ecological Seabird Reserve, the species most seriously affected are the Atlantic Puffin and Leach's Storm-Petrel. Strandings of these birds are particularly common during late summer when the young birds leave their nest burrows and go to sea for the first time. Ongoing efforts in Witless Bay are being made to reduce unnecessary night lighting and to work with the local youth to rescue the stranded puffins. To add increased human impact through artificial night lighting, noise, etc. that would be imposed by a development at Ragged Beach, the closest point of land to Gull Island would impose added risk to seabirds nesting there, as well as on Green, Great and Pee Pee Islands.

We are also well aware of the very considerable benefits the Witless Bay Ecological Seabird Reserve has brought to Witless Bay and surrounding communities on the Southern Shore. It would not be an overstatement to say the Witless Bay Ecological Seabird Reserve has literally changed the economic landscape of the Town of Witless Bay and surrounding communities. Clearly there have also been enhanced benefits surrounding fishing and cultural traditions in the community.

There are five major Seabird Ecological Reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador – 1) Witless Bay, 2) Cape St. Mary's, 3) Baccalieu Island, 4) Funk Island and 5) the Gannet Islands. All of these reserves are global seabird capitals that warrant very careful and special protection. It must be emphasized that of the Ecological Seabird Reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Witless Bay Ecological Seabird

Reserve is the one in closest proximity to coastal communities and the one most at risk to human activities and development. The protection and well-being of the Witless Bay Ecological Seabird Reserve cannot be simply taken for granted and ignored. To further increment these risks by approving a development at Ragged Beach that will require re-designations of land classifications and incorporating crown land to meet the wishes of a developer seems beyond the pale to me.

From ecological, economic and social perspectives, it is totally baffling why the Town Council of Witless Bay would even entertain such as particularly environmentally compromising development? And more so, go such extraordinary lengths to advantage developers and development to the detriment of an internationally significant seabird reserve?

Fortunately, you have the opportunity to support the many concerned and dedicated people in your community who want to prevent this unnecessary and unnecessarily environmentally risky development.

I trust that you have vision and wisdom to make an informed decision to protect the coastline of the Witless Bay Ecological Seabird Reserve.

If you might consider it helpful in your deliberations and considerations, I would be glad to me with you with others from Memorial University of Newfoundland,

Yours sincerely,



W. A. Montevecchi, Ph.D.  
University Research Professor  
Psychology, Biology and Ocean Sciences