

On the right track

Source: TES - The Edmonton Sun
Apr 26 04:03

Page: 78

Section: News

Edition: Final

Column: Outdoors

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH

A very interesting piece of legislation passed easily over its first hurdle, down at the Alberta legislature last week.

And as long as the creeks don't rise or the opposition starts playing politics with it, it could be well on its way to receiving Lieutenant Governor Normie Kwong's "John Henry" before the spring session breaks in the middle of June.

It's a pretty rapid progress for something that's been 100 years in the making and, only short months ago, was being actively opposed by the Sustainable Resource Development and Parks departments.

While it may appear to be all motherhood and apple pie on the outside, hopefully the Alberta Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act - sponsored by Cypress-Medicine Hat MLA Len Mitzel - has the teeth of a jackfish and the claws of a cougar, and will serve as a warning to any outfit that wants to mess with our outdoors traditions that, from now on, Albertans "have a right to hunt, fish and trap in accordance with the law."

The preamble to Len's Law makes specific reference to how hunting, fishing and trapping "played important roles in shaping Alberta's social, cultural and economic heritage."

It also gives a special tip of the camo cap to outdoorsmen and women and their organizations for their "important contributions to the understanding, conservation, restoration and management of Alberta's fish and wildlife resources."

But probably the most important part of Mitzel's private members bill - which is all but guaranteed to be the law of the province before Canada Day - is a commitment that hunting, fishing and trapping should be "valued by future generations."

A clear shot at the antis that their constant attempts to interfere with our way of life are not only unacceptable, they're against the law here in Wild Rose Country. Or at least they soon will be.

"Hunting, fishing and trapping have been significant activities in Alberta in the past," Mitzel told the legislature, "and continue to be practised by many who keep this tradition alive today."

He spoke of how the activities have "evolved into conservation, wildlife management and stewardship," including the Alberta Fish and Game Association - which began in 1908 when the Calgary Fish and Game Protective Association got together as a lobby group

to push the rookie Alberta government to bring in angling and hunting regulations and is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

"Environmental stewardship is of paramount importance with our abundance of wildlife and natural habitat," continued Mitzel, who carries an Alberta Fish and Game Association membership in his wallet.

"This is not meant to insinuate that people who do not hunt, fish and trap are any less Albertan," he stressed.

It's to recognize hunters, anglers and trappers for the "vital role they play today."

SRD Minister Ted Morton picked up where Len left off.

"There are many different types of environmentalists," he told the legislature. "Some hunt and some don't and that's fine."

But there's one thing in common.

"They understand that a healthy environment and, in particular, healthy habitat is the key to wildlife," Morton said, describing hunter and angler conservation organizations as "the oldest forms of environmental advocacy in North America."

The above-mentioned Calgary Fish and Game Protective Association "was founded for the same purpose," pointed out Morton - who promised in his February AFGA convention speech to bring in a hunters, anglers and trappers Bill of Rights as a 100th anniversary present to the province's oldest and largest conservation outfit. Ted's a man of his word.

Calgary Liberal David Swann also stepped up to the plate for Alberta hunters, anglers and trappers' rights.

"There's a real need to honour our heritage," Swann said.

He then schooled the legislature about the "public trust doctrine" that made fish and wildlife the peoples' resource.

"It's time to remember these important responsibilities and threats that continue with our unfettered growth and development in this province," he said

Swann also challenged the PCs to "move quickly and decisively" with the Land-Use Framework that protects "our river systems in association with all land-use decisions for the long-term, well-being of people and animals."

Do it or "the principles and values expressed in this bill will be lost," Swann spat.

West Yellowhead MLA and my Maligne Lake fishing guide buddy Robin Campbell talked about hunting, angling and trapping being a "pillar of our history and the province's founding for generations to come."

Porcupine Hills cowboy and MLA Evan Berger praised anglers for their "sense of ecological fortitude.

"Fishing creates a connection between man and his environment," Berger said.

A lot of responsibility

He spoke of the "heightened sense of responsibility which deserves to be recognized."

But it was up to Ed Stelmach's treasury board president to put Len's Law into its true perspective and fire a volley at maverick bureaucrats and their pals in the anti movement

- especially in the obstructionist parks department: Don't mess with Alberta outdoorsmen and women.

"This bill sends a message to our government that we respect hunting and fishing," Lloyd Snelgrove blasted.

"It's said: Feed a man a fish and you've fed him for a day," mused the burly Vermillion MLA, whose son is a whitetail guide in the Battle River breaks.

"But teach him to fish," the Alberta legislature's resident philosopher continued, "and he's drunk for a weekend."

And with that piece of brilliant advice, Mitzel's Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act cleared second reading like grass through a goose.

PHOTO/IMAGE:

photo by Neil Waugh, Sun Media\

MLA Len Mitzel's Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act is all about protecting Albertans' rights for future generations, like these fellows casting a line on a West Pembina grayling creek.

This media story is protected by copyright. e-Clips users are licensed to copy, review and redistribute the content for the purpose of delivery of government programs and services only. Any other use is strictly forbidden. Content may be archived for 90 days.