



Escarpment safeguards sagging, says an environmental coalition

The future of Niagara Escarpment lands is in jeopardy, say members of environmental groups.

Bill Baker, outgoing president of CONE (Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment), highlighted his concerns regarding provincial budget cuts and the continuing integrity of the escarpment environment. The provincial government is expected to make announcements regarding the future of the Niagara Escarpment Commission this month.

"Budget cuts to the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) and conservation authorities, and the outright cancellation of some other escarpment related programs have created a real crisis," Mr. Baker said.

Incoming CONE co-presidents David Hahn and Linda Pim said that reduced government commitment to environmental protection presents new challenges to groups like CONE.

"People are always concerned with change," said Halton North MPP Ted Chudleigh. "Above all the Niagara Escarpment Plan is being protected. I'm committed to the plan and the overriding legislation that supports it."

Mr. Chudleigh said there have been a number of proposals regarding the future of the NEC but he is not privy to specific decisions at this time. He said he would be surprised if the commission was entirely disbanded and agreed it would likely take on a narrower role.

CONE is a coalition of six environmental groups and scores of concerned individuals which has existed since 1978. The organization this year received the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Conservation, recognizing excellence in environmental protection and resource conservation.

At their recent meeting Joan Little, chair of the NEC, spoke, outlining impacts of budget cuts announced late last year. She noted the loss of 16 staff members and outlined efforts to maintain the NEC's mandate.

At the same time members of the escarpment committee of the Halton/ North Peel Naturalist Club have expressed their concerns to Mr. Chudleigh.

"Our members do not believe that the municipalities will have the resources to administer the Niagara Escarpment Plan," said committee chair Sydnie Young. "The overlap and inconsistencies which would result from 37 municipalities and eight counties or regions individually interpreting the Niagara Escarpment Plan and having to hire separate staffs to administer just their portion of the escarpment, will lead to greater expense to taxpayers."

According to Mr. Chudleigh the future of the NEC will depend greatly upon those appointed to it. They will forge its new direction in keeping with new provincial policy announcements.

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Going batty

Mountsberg's Debbie Jackson shows off one of the stars of the conservation area's Bat Night Friday and Saturday, Aug. 16-17 at 7:30 p.m. The family-oriented evenings will feature more than bats. Puppet shows and other entertainment will be part of the fun.

Photo by Graham Paine

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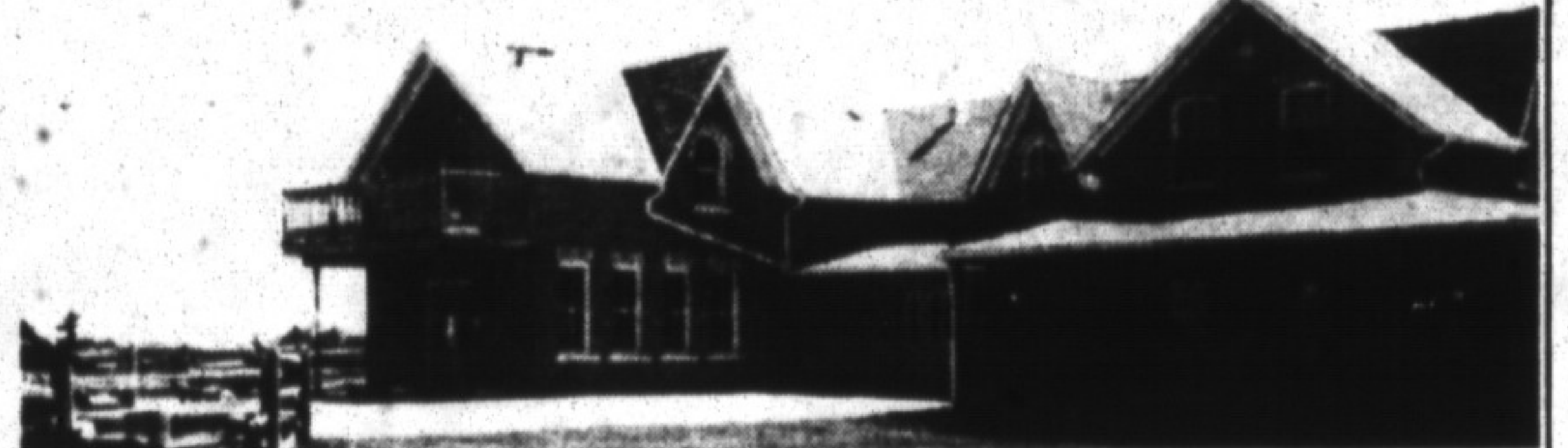
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