

NEWS

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Opposition taking up cause

Committee continues pressure for action on moose collisions

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The Save Our People Action Committee may not have garnered the attention they wanted from the provincial government with their 20,000 - name petition seeking action against the growing number of moose accidents in the province - but they have gained the another voice.

Opposition leader Yvonne Jones met with the committee and is determined to further the cause of its members by bringing the names to the House of Assembly when it opens this month.

"I want to recognize the efforts of SOPAC, and committee chair Eugene Nippard, in organizing this petition to bring further attention to the growing concern of moose - vehicle collisions on the province's highways," said Ms. Jones. "Through debate and discussion I am hopeful that government will recognize that this is an increasing problem that must be addressed."

Mr. Nippard said he was pleased with the opposition's response.

"It was a good meeting," he said. "I sat and talked with Ms. Jones in her office and it wasn't the first time I've talked with her. We've talked before but she definitely showed interest in our committee and said she would take the petition to the house and do whatever it took to get some answers and that impressed us."

Mr. Nippard said that in past attempts to bring their cause to the Department of Transportation, meetings have been postponed, transferred to other departments and passed down to other ministers.

"The last meeting we had with them, we came away, disgusted, frankly," he said. "The deputy minister came in to the meeting with a grin on his face like he was attending a garden party or something. He said to us, 'you've got 30 minutes.'"

Mr. Nippard said correspondence with the Department of Wildlife have only proven slightly better in that they have met with Charlene Johnson, the minister responsible, who seems to acknowledge there is a problem.

"They realize there is a serious problem but they keep saying to us that we got to protect our moose herds, our moose population," he said. "It seems like our moose comes before our people to them and again to us that's disgusting."

Mr. Nippard said the committee is glad to have another voice and some support in pressuring government toward action on the issue. In the meantime they are moving ahead on another important front. The committee is utilizing its public support for their cause to help the people whose lives have been irreparably damaged as the result of moose - vehicle collisions.

The committee is in the process of developing its own support badges, license plates, place mats, and fridge magnets, which they plan on selling to raise money. "Right now, myself and other committee members are traveling and meeting with people and we are doing this out of what little but we have," he said. "I am on a fixed income, but we are doing this because people need our help. There are people in our province who have lost their incomes because of a moose accident, some live with pain every day, there are some who are starving. This is a serious issue."

Mr. Nippard said he feels government is not taking the issue seriously enough and it shows in road signs like the one motorists can't help seeing when they travel west bound on the Trans Canada Highway outside St. John's. The large yellow sign reads, "IS THIS THE RUSH YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?" and shows a vehicle colliding with a moose. Mr. Nippard said the intent may be to slow people down but it also seems to imply that it is the public who are squarely to blame if they have a collision with a moose. He said the sign also fails to reflect the ever-climbing number of moose vehicle collisions. "The number says 716, moose accidents this year, well 760 is more accurate. They can't keep up with it."