

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY *Under embargo until speech begins*

Date: **April 21, 2015 - South Rustico**

Thank you for coming.

I am pleased to be here today with members of our Liberal team to speak about our environmental policy, including land use and land protection issues.

These are subjects that mean a great deal to me and to our Liberal party.

Islanders take special pride in our landscape and natural resources.
We understand the importance of clean air and water.
We value and appreciate our Island wildlife, the wind and the weather, and the seasons.

We have a very beautiful and unique Province.

With travel to other parts of Canada and the world, we gain a greater perspective of how blessed we are to live in this place.

As beautiful as PEI is, however, we must always be on guard ... because it is equally fragile. Our sense of place includes an awareness of our fragility, as we can see and are alert to the changes taking place around us.

Is there a single Prince Edward Islander who is not thinking this morning about how much rain might fall overnight tonight? And whatever happens tonight, we are also mindful of how fortunate we are that the heavy rains didn't come two weeks ago.

Our wildlife continually respond to changes in their habitat and environment. When I arrived at the office early this morning, I was met by two beautiful foxes, one red and one silver-black. There is a photo on my web site.

Dr. Ed MacDonald, in his book *If You're Stronghearted: Prince Edward Island in the 20th Century*, commented, "On a small island, it bears repeating, land is a finite and fragile resource. Most of us have yet to concede just how fragile."

I agree with that statement ... and would extend it to apply to our air and our water.

We have a limited land base.

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Leader's Remarks

Our soil and coastline are subject to erosion.

We are entirely dependent upon groundwater for our water supply.

And recent events confirm that we are not immune to the impacts of climate change.

Within this context of change and evolution... a carefully crafted and robust plan for our environment is essential.

The protection of our environment for future generations is a fundamental responsibility of government, guided by the best available science and working in close collaboration with community partners.

In carrying out our responsibility for environmental stewardship ... it is essential for communities to be involved.

We believe that a shared vision among Islanders regarding how best to protect our environmental resources is essential for success.

It is for this reason that I recently announced that a New Liberal Government would create a department responsible for communities, land and environment.

The announcement of this new department represents a shift in perspective and approach.

As the Task Force on Land Use Policy chaired by John Handrahan recognized in their 2014 Report, proper and effective land use planning must be founded on citizen engagement at the local level.

The efforts of local watershed groups offer a commendable example of community engagement in the name of environmental stewardship.

I am pleased to announce that a New Liberal Government will increase funding to Watershed groups by \$250,000 annually.

Recently two groups – Bedeque Bay Environmental Management Association and the Southeast Environmental Association – saw their core funding from Environment Canada discontinued. The additional funding we are announcing today will ensure all eligible watershed associations receive provincial support.

Let me come back to the question of land use. Many of the conclusions contained in the Handrahan Report are compelling.

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Leader's Remarks

PEI is growing.

Cities are becoming more populated.

Agricultural operations are increasing in size.

Food product innovation is continuing to develop.

And coastal conservation and recreational use make us unique, and by times congested.

It is imperative that any environmental policy take into account this context ... and ensure smart ... sensitive ... and sustainable development for generations to come.

The Liberal Party agrees with the authors of the Handrahan Report - there is a clear need for comprehensive land use policies in this Province ... policies that will apply to all land under both provincial and municipal jurisdiction.

We believe that ... in applying these policies ... there must be provincial support and coordination ... and strong community engagement.

Specifically ... a New Liberal Government will ... after public engagement ... move forward with amendments to the Planning Act.

These amendments will guide decisions on land use planning.

To support these efforts ... we will enhance planning and technical services ... increase education on land use planning ... and enhance assistance to areas of the Province that are without official plans.

The Liberal Party believes that PEI has an opportunity to be a model for the rest of Canada in the public development of smart development principles and practices.

Principles and policies that protect sensitive environmental areas ... promote sustainable land- and sea-based resource development and innovation ... and ensure sensitive stewardship in all regions of the Province.

In addition to the issue of land use ... we must also give attention to the equally important issue of land ownership.

It is difficult to overemphasize the positive impact that the Lands Protection Act ... which imposes limitations upon land ownership ... has had upon our Province.

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Leader's Remarks

This legislation has allowed us to maintain control over our land base and to balance the interests of many different individuals and organizations.

As important and essential as the legislation is ... however ... it is also in need of updating and amending.

Recently Horace Carver took a very close look at this legislation and ... after public consultations ... made a number of excellent recommendations on how we can update this legislation to ensure that it remains relevant and effective.

The Liberal Government has already announced that it will implement a number of Mr. Carver's recommendations ... including all five of the recommendations that impact land holding limits.

In addition to moving forward with comprehensive land use planning ... and updating and strengthening our Lands Protection Act ... there are other important issues that we must address.

We must work in cooperation with the federal government and other provinces to decrease our reliance on fossil fuels.

There are a number of initiatives that we intend to pursue in this area.

We are fortunate to have a wind regime that has allowed Prince Edward Island to play a leadership role in the area of renewable and, in particular, wind energy. We are equally fortunate that we have had visionary governments, going back to the pioneering efforts of Liberal premier Alex Campbell, that have made a priority of renewable energy.

As technology improves, the ability to increase the amount of renewable energy used by Islanders also increases. Where there is an opportunity to increase the amount of renewable energy further ... we will do so.

The undersea cable project will ... once completed ... bring a more reliable supply of electricity for PEI, but will also have the added benefit of reducing the need for expensive, fossil-fuel powered backup generation on PEI.

We must take other steps to make PEI a greener Province. Demand Side Management programs must be expanded ... and other initiatives taken ... to encourage a reduction in energy and water consumption.

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Leader's Remarks

Even as we work to mitigate the impacts of climate change ... recent experience and ... in particular ... damage caused in the western part of the Province confirm that adverse impacts will occur.

The Liberal Party is committed to ensuring that public infrastructure impacted by climate change is repaired or replaced in a timely way ... and will make provisions in the capital budget to prepare for these incidents.

Any discussion about the environment must also involve a consideration of our water supply.

As mentioned earlier, we are entirely dependent upon groundwater for our drinking water ... and it is therefore essential that we take greater steps to protect and improve the quality of our water resources.

A New Liberal Government will carry through with the release of a white paper, followed by consultations with Islanders prior to introducing a Water Act.

Current provisions on buffer zones around waterways ... sloped land ... crop rotation ... and soil erosion ... will be part of that discussion.

Island watershed organizations play a valued and effective role in protecting and enhancing our water resources. A New Liberal Government will maintain our commitment to these organizations.

And the Government ... in cooperation with our farmers ... must expand joint efforts to enhance the protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

Ultimately ... smart ... sensitive ... and sustainable policies on land use ... and land protection ... will have the added advantage of helping us build our brand as "Canada's Food Island".

Finally I want to say a few words about our farming community.

Many Islanders care deeply about the environment. And that includes our farmers.

Our farming community has taken many positive steps to improve our environment. They are true stewards of our environment and it is important that their contributions ... efforts and commitments ... be recognized and proactively communicated to the general public.

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Leader's Remarks

A Liberal Government will work with our farming community. On that note, I understand that one item that has been of long-standing concern to our agriculture community is the practice of Conservation Officers carrying firearms when visiting farm property.

Our conservation officers have an important role to play in the protection of our environment and will continue to do so. At the same time, we want to continue to work collaboratively with our farmers.

A Liberal Government will make changes to the way Government interacts with our farming community on matters of compliance, using plainclothes and unarmed environmental officers.

Ladies and gentlemen ... environmental issues are important to all Islanders.

The Liberal Party is committed to taking positive steps to improve and protect our environment for the benefit of current and future generations of Islanders.

I look forward to discussing these and other important issues further at the environmental forum scheduled for this evening.

Thank you for coming.

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