

# Your dream home here?

## Shocking examples of bad coastal development

### The problem...

Every day, Nova Scotia's beaches and coastal wetlands are being damaged or destroyed by piecemeal, inappropriate coastal development. This happens because provincial regulatory agencies and municipalities keep issuing permits for new construction in some truly unsuitable locations.

We all know that climate change will increase the intensity and frequency of storm surges and coastal flooding. Yet provincial and municipal governments keep approving new developments that cause ongoing damage to the coastal systems, which help buffer storms and reduce our vulnerability to climate change impacts.

Building houses and roads on tiny oceanfront lots prone to flooding and storm surges is bad coastal development, and does not provide any economic, environmental, or community benefits.

### Does anybody benefit from this pattern of development?

The photos below show a road, which cuts through a large coastal wetland system located behind a cobble barrier beach. This road was approved by Nova Scotia Environment in 2007, to access a building lot for which the Department also provided a septic permit. The municipality has recently zoned this area as "Coastal Residential". Parts of the wetland system flood during and after weather events (the photo on the right shows the storm surge after Hurricane Bill on August 23, 2009).

Coastal wetlands absorb and release floodwater like sponges. This makes them great for buffering flood impacts, but unsuitable for building. It is possible

to build a road or a house on a wetland by infilling it, but below and around the infill is a wet sponge.

### Why is this still happening?

Coastal development in Nova Scotia certainly gives new force to the precept of "buyers beware". Potential buyers in Nova Scotia have to find out for themselves what their 'dream lot' is like after a seasonal storm.

On the next page, the photo on the left shows a fully-permitted oceanfront building lot. The lot is at sea level; most, or all of it, is sand. The lot has been approved for development by Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Nova Scotia Environment, and the municipality. The dunes that once protected the beach have been breached, and the entire system is experiencing intense erosion. The photo on the right shows the effect of hurricane Bill storm surge on the lot.

Coastal lots at or below sea level are not suitable for development (they are like tiny versions of New Orleans). Attempts to protect property from erosion often leads to even more erosion on other parts of the lot or on nearby properties.



### Who is responsible?

- Nova Scotia Environment, which approves wetland alteration and permits septic systems in low-lying regularly flooded lots
- Nova Scotia Natural Resources, which allows destruction of beach systems
- Municipalities that claim they can do nothing to prevent environmental damage, if provincial departments have issued permits.
- Land speculators who bought coastal wetlands, and ocean-front property cheaply from sellers who believed the land couldn't be developed.
- Buyers who do not realize their dream of ocean-front living will have huge financial and environmental implications.

## Your Dream Home ... Underwater?



Before the storm...

After the storm...

### What can be done?

Nova Scotia is developing a Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy. In the meantime, here are actions that can happen now to prevent further harm to our coast, and to those who dream of building a home there:

- Do not issue development permits (on-site septic or building) on lots not approved for development
- Eliminate “grandfathering” of development rights on unsuitable ocean-front or wetland properties
- Remove liability protection from permitting decisions. Government should be accountable for permitting decisions
- Require developers to submit written evidence about potential impacts of storms and other weather events as part of permitting process
- Provide buyers and developers with information about climate change, coastal erosion, and the likely impact of storms on their property
- Require hard data on economic and ecological benefits from potential coastal development projects

### Where is the political will to safeguard the coast?

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High resolution photos available upon request  
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