

Groups fighting to keep rail land public

By **BOBBIE-LYNN HALL**
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Volunteer groups are banding together in hopes of securing an abandoned rail line for public use.

At a recent Halifax Regional Trails Assc. board meeting, it was agreed that a working group with representatives from the three volunteer trail groups in Sackville — The Friends of First Lake Society, the Second Lake Regional Park Assc. and The Sackville Rivers Assc. — would send a letter to regional council asking the city and the province to purchase the abandoned Hantsport Windsor junction railway.

Well-known trail advocate Walter Regan of the Sackville Rivers Association said it's imperative that the 15.5 km portion of the rail line starting at Windsor Junction to the Municipality of East Hants/Mount Uniacke line, stay in public hands.

"We are lobbying the province and we are actively chasing our councillors," he said. "Once this corridor is gone from public ownership it is gone forever. We can't let that happen."

The line is currently owned by CN Rail and is up for sale. The deadline for proposals is April 8.

Volunteers are committed to ensuring the abandoned rail line stays in the public hands. They have dreams of building more trails, connecting more communities, getting people outside to enjoy nature, but for now they have to put those dreams on the back burner and deal with today.



Sackville Rivers Assc. president Walter Regan represents one of three groups that make up the Halifax Regional Trails Association (HRTA). The HRTA is spearheading a movement for a cooperative effort between HRM and the province to purchase the Hantsport rail line. Regan is pictured here on February 24 at the Beaverbank crossing where the last train to Windsor passed in 2010. BOBBIE-LYNN HALL

In an email to The Weekly News Shane O'Neil with the Second Lake Park Association said the active transportation trail at Second Lake starts at the shore of First Lake and goes in a northwesterly direction toward Beaver Bank.

"That piece of trail is half finished. In order to reach Beaver Bank we will have to use a portion of the railway that is now for sale. It's a key step in our greenway link of Cobeguid Road to Beaver Bank Road and ultimately access to Mount Uniacke," O'Neil said.

In keeping with the other active trail designs in Sackville, the 15.5 km

of line would be transformed into a multi-use active trail perfect for getting outside and hooking up with other communities along the way.

Regan said he knows it will take years to complete these trails, but if the line is purchased privately the dream will be gone forever.

"There's been talk of a dayliner," he said.

"If years down the road someone wants that it'll be there, or a natural gas line. It will be there. It will be ours to decide. If it goes private it will be out of our hands."