

St. Croix Courier - April 26, 2011

EDITORIAL: Alewives deserve more attention - Apr. 26, 2011

It's interesting to note how little attention the issue of the alewife migration has received in the current federal election. One of the reasons our newsroom asked each candidate about their views on the current impasse in our election question features is because we cannot think of a single more important environmental and international issue. Oh, true, each of the candidates voiced the expected anti-LNG perspectives during the ongoing campaign. It would, of course, be political suicide to consider any other view.

We're not sure why the alewife issue – one where Maine-based regulations prevent the natural spawning of these vital feeder fish through blocks on fish ladders – hasn't gained more attention. It clearly wasn't an issue familiar to most of the candidates – only one was aware of it.

At issue is the very survival of a prime part of the entire Bay of Fundy ecosystem. Alewives are a vital part of the food chain for a variety of species, and in essence, could well be called one of the foundations for marine life in the bay.

It is important to note that this is more than just an obscure environmental issue: it's an economic issue. Candidates can talk all they want about job creation or tax cuts that may assist large industries like Connors Brothers, Limited, to remain competitive. They can talk all they wish about strengthening welfare or employment insurance, but without healthy returns from the Bay of Fundy, Charlotte County does not, as we know it, exist.

Be it lobster fishing, sardine packing or any other of a myriad marine-based resources, this area's health and welfare is intimately tied to the bounty of the ocean.

Time and again, studies demonstrate that the little alewife is a vital part of the ecosystem. It is worth noting that even as Maine legislators locked down the St. Croix River, Maine lobster fishers expressed concern about the issue.

We cannot put it bluntly enough: if we allow the foundations of the Bay of Fundy to be destroyed, our county – already pressed by economic forces – will, as we know it, die. Without fishing, Charlotte County is nothing.

For that reason, alewife health ought to be a considerable concern, and by extension, a vital election issue for every candidate in this riding.

Yet it isn't.

Part of that, we suspect, is that the average local citizen remains unaware of this issue. That's saddening, for we are at a point where the fate of bass fishing in the U.S. (bass, we note, are rightly considered an invasive species in many northern waters) has been elevated to the point that a key factor in the healthy functioning of the Bay of Fundy has been put at risk. This must change. It requires international diplomacy, and a wise approach to rectify.

But first, people have to notice and become alarmed – before it's too late.