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From rails to trails? Beebe subdivision divides groups

By Scott Verity Stevenson

LENNOXVILLE TO BEEBE AND BACK — If 1990 was the year to battle over the Beebe Sub, 1991

may be the year to actually use the abandoned railway, either as private property, a recreational trail or with a steam train.

Since the Beebe Subdivision of the Canadian Pacific Railway was abandoned, a variety of groups has sprung forth over the last year to propose new uses for the 46-kilometre corridor.

The land has first been offered by CP to the provincial government. If the province refuses it, CP officials say they will offer it to municipal level governments, followed by private interests.

Last year the provincial government asked CP not to dismantle the railway tracks and bridges until this spring, while it made up its mind. CP agreed not to do anything with the railway until April 1.

Euclid Harel, who is overseeing the issue for the provincial transport ministry, said last fall that the government should decide during the winter.

NO SALE BEFORE APRIL

"There will be no sale before the first of April," he said, adding that usually municipalities would buy the land.

Most vocal in pressuring the government has been the *Sentier Massawippi* group, which wants to convert the railway into a recreational trail for walking, bicycling, skiing and so on.

The group wants Quebec to study the feasibility and costs of such a trail, with a view to the gover-

nement buying the land as a linear park.

The government accepted the idea of a joint comparative study with *Sentier Massawippi* and *Nostalgie de la Vapeur*, a group that wants to run a steam train for tourists along the abandoned railway.

The Quebec planning and development office (OPDQ) offered to fund half of a \$60,000 study, if the two groups could come up with the other half.

Georges Des Lauriers of *Nostalgie* said his group has the funds, but *Sentier Massawippi* is still digging for its share of about \$18,000.

NICKELS AND DIMES

"We're raising money in nickels and dimes," said group member Keith Baxter last winter. "We've got to change our strategy."

Several municipalities along the railway have endorsed the recreational trail project, including Sherbrooke, Lennoxville and Ascot and the Sherbrooke and Coaticook regional municipalities.

Others have been harder to convince, according to *Sentier Massawippi* members.

Many property owners along Lake Massawippi want neither steam train nor trail. For many, the railway runs between their property and the lake. Others actually live on CP land, between the

railway and the lake.

Many of these property owners have been paying rent to CP for as long as they can remember; now they have a chance to own uninterrupted access to the lake, and the privacy that goes with it.

A recreational trail, and to a lesser extent a steam train, would mean the public would be constantly passing between their property and the lake, where they have docks and boathouses, if not some sort of a beach.

PRIVACY THREATENED

These property owners argue their privacy would be threatened if public access were given.

One lakeside resident, Avrum Malus, who leases land between the tracks and the lake from CP said he would normally support the idea of a linear park, but in this case he would lose too much privacy. He said his bedroom window is only several feet away from the actual railway.

Sentier Massawippi members say they only want a corridor of about 15 feet wide from the existing 30-metre wide CP right of way. Surveillance and specific resting spots are solutions they offer to maintain privacy rights of lakeside residents.

Opposition between property owners and trail advocates has

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