

Local Scouters to appeal Apple Hill camp closing

By STEVEN WARBURTON
News Editor

Local scouting leaders are appealing a Scouts Canada decision to shut down a 300-acre scout camp near Apple Hill.

"Camp Apple Hill Scout Reserve... has been serving the youth of Eastern Ontario since 1961," said Stormont-Glengarry's Area Commissioner, David Desmarais, at the Apple Hill campground on Friday afternoon. "Disposal of this property will have a negative effect on the youth of our community. Scouting groups will be faced with a 2.5 to three hour drive each way to go camping. The closest Scout Camps will be those located south of Perth or in the Quebec Laurentians."

Mr. Desmarais learned of the decision by way of a July 21 letter. In the letter, the Voyageur Council Commissioner, John Boyce, and Executive Director, Warren McMeekin, informed him that the Apple Hill facility, located on Kenyon Conc. 2, is one of 20 in the province that will be sold "in order to ensure the long-term financial health of our properties and better use of our limited resources."

They added that funds generated from the sale of the Apple Hill and other reserves would be used to enhance remaining facilities and to recruit more scouts in this era of declining membership.

But Mr. Desmarais says that unlike the rest of the province, Stormont-Glengarry has seen an increase in scouting members. He added that the Stormont-Glengarry membership also elected to close its Cornwall-area facility, Camp Tsotahoteh, last year in order to concentrate its resources on Apple Hill.

But while local membership may be up, local Scout leader Wade Bates confesses that the Apple Hill facility is still under-used. He says it's because of special circumstances, not a trend.

"The ice storm damaged a lot of our trees and our main cabin was burned down in a suspicious fire in 2003," he says. He added that the camp only served about 360 campers after the fire. Before that, it served about 500.

Mr. Desmarais added that the Stormont-Glengarry Scouts have operated the Apple Hill camp without any financial assistance from Scouts Canada. As such, he is not asking for financial support. Rather, he is asking the public to send him letters of support asking Scouts Canada to reconsider its decision.

Letters can be e-mailed to either dave@groupe Renaissance.com or wade.bates@sympatico.ca or mailed to D. Desmarais, PO Box 58, Dalkeith, Ontario, K0B-1E0. They should be sent as soon as possible as Mr. Desmarais must file his appeal by Aug. 6.

Neither Mr. McMeekin or Mr. Boyce could be reached for comment.