

Honourable Katrine Conroy
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development
Room 248 Parliament Buildings
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Dear Ms. Conroy,

I'm writing to ask for your support in preserving an important ecological jewel on the shores of Skaha Lake.



Sickle Point is the last remaining undeveloped piece of lakeshore on Skaha Lake. It is a beautiful 4.8-acre site that has significant environmental values.

“It has the **highest conservation ranking (Class 1)** by the Southern Okanagan Similkameen Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (*Keeping Nature in Our Future*).

Sickle Point's water birch and wild rose communities, which support endangered wildlife and aquatic species such as the Yellow-breasted Chat, Lewis's Woodpecker, Western Rattlesnake and Pallid Bat, are red-listed by the province. Sickle Point is also part of the migratory path for both resident and migrant wildlife, including the American White Pelican and Sandhill Crane.”

(copied from <https://www.kaledencommunity.com/sicklepoint>)

An ad hoc “Save Sickle Point” committee was formed to find ways to protect that area from development. It now operates as a sub-committee of the Kaleden Community Association.

Last year, residents of Kaleden were told that the property might be going into foreclosure. The committee contacted the Penticton Indian Band, government ministries, and environmental foundations in the hopes that they could raise the necessary support to protect the property and maybe even purchase it. An offer of \$2.5 million was made by the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) and accepted by the sellers.

There are several things to bear in mind, so here is some background material:

1. Sickle Point is situated beside the **Kettle Valley Railway** (KVR) Trail, which is a huge tourist attraction for the area, bringing in people from around the world to spend their money on food, accommodation, and wine-tasting in nearby municipalities. The addition of Sickle Point as an ecological reserve would only add to the attractiveness of the KVR experience.
2. Local residents have been trying to stop the development of Sickle Point for more than twenty years. However, it was the **permitting process** that allowed the developer to gain land access to the property along the KVR Trail that really kicked opposition into high gear. The necessary permits were issued without reference to the community’s wishes and without any communication with the community. The process seemed to involve only two private developers and the provincial government. Access was been approved for a single-family dwelling. However, once the road access was approved, the developer applied to subdivide the property into five building lots. This resulted in a petition and letter-writing campaign by the community and the subsequent formation of the Save Sickle Point (SSP) committee.
3. The members of the Save Sickle Point Committee have been **operating in a high stress environment** from the formation of the action committee and time has always been of the essence. The first issue was to try to stop the sale of the property by whatever means they could and that was the critical period during which the first letters were sent to government ministries. No replies were received, but fortunately the offer from the private buyer was deemed too low and the offer was rejected. Immediately following that was the development of a plan and the attempt to raise seed money to purchase the land which led to the present situation where the committee has worked with the RDOS to make the purchase on behalf of the community.
4. The RDOS determined that purchase price would not be spread across the entire regional district but would be paid for by taxes levied on the residents of the Kaleden Service Area (Kaleden and surrounding area). Because of the time-sensitive nature of the offer to purchase, the RDOS decided to use the Alternate Approval Process (ending February 8) rather than go to referendum. Already, local residents are concerned about being saddled with **increasing taxes** if the RDOS purchase goes through.
5. **Today we learned that the AAP was unsuccessful.** This was not unexpected but many of those opposing the AAP still support the public ownership of Sickle Point. They are just not willing to be responsible for paying the entire cost.
https://www.pentictonnow.com/watercooler/news/news/Penticton/Sickle_Point_borrowing_bylaw_resoundingly_defeated_by_taxpayers/

6. The community of **Kaleden is small** (about 550 homes) surrounded by a number of even smaller rural communities. It is too small to even have its own town council and cannot make decisions for itself. It is an unincorporated community, regulated by federal, provincial, and regional district governments, and consequently depends on those bodies to act in its best interest.
7. The increase in **taxes to finance the entire project would be too severe** for such a small community which has almost no commercial sector so the burden would fall on residential properties. I have been informed in conversations with committee members and with Roly Russell that the Environment Ministry does not finance the acquisition of properties that are not going to be provincial parks.
8. My own concern that the RDOS proposal to finance the purchase using the AAP would be turned down has come true. The community will not finance this project because it is simply too expensive for a small community. Now the AAP has been rejected, the seller has the option to put the property back on the market. Without government help, **the proposal may not even go to referendum**. That increases the likelihood that the property will once again be sold to private interests.
9. Right now, the SSP committee is in a Catch-22. Foundations that support environmental projects are holding back until the property is secured and local residents are unwilling to support the project **unless they know that funding is available** from outside sources.
10. The preservation of such an environmentally important area is the responsibility of provincial and federal governments and should not fall on the shoulders of such a small community. **Kaleden doesn't have the resources** that the provincial and federal governments have. What would be a major burden to a small community is an infinitesimal part of the budget of the BC government.
11. And this is the point of my letter. I am asking that you recognize the importance of this project and **give whatever moral and financial support you can**. *The SSP committee desperately needs seed money to help leverage funds in order to preserve this tract of land.*

I participated in the organizational meetings of the Save Sickie Point Committee but had to back away because of the impending provincial election. But I can tell you, as a long-time NDP supporter, that receiving no response until January 13, 2021 to letters sent to three different ministries on (August 31 and November 15) has been extremely frustrating to the committee members and to those of us who support them. These letters are available at <https://www.kaledencommunity.com/sicklepoint>

Even with these frustrations, the committee members have not been idle. In just a few months, they have raised \$286,000.00 in pledges with the hope of finding more donors to cover the entire purchase price, so it does not fall on the local taxpayer. They are devising many ways of raising money (besides asking for government assistance). They will continue to host webinars and are currently working with a digital marketing company who are donating their services, soliciting pledges from individuals, contacting local businesses requesting support, and working with WayBlaze, an innovative crowdfunding and community engagement company.

We need to identify support in order to get the environmental foundations on side. Now that we've found that the Ministry of the Environment cannot help with the project, I am turning to you. I am not asking your ministry to buy the property outright, but I am asking that you recognize its importance and give whatever support you can. If you can find some dollars as seed money to get this project started, that would be wonderful.

However, the response from your ministry (in the January 13 letter from Paul Rasmussen) has been to recognize the value of the property and to outline several processes for the SSP to follow. This was the most important paragraph:

"I understand that efforts are underway in the community to garner support for purchasing this property and that Penticton Indian Band has indicated their support to protect this piece of land. ***At this time, the province is unable to contribute financially to this endeavour.***"

Please give some consideration to providing some seed money so the committee can show the conservation/environmental groups that the project has your backing.

Making funds available in a new budget year would be greatly appreciated.

Sickle Point will not be saved without the support of government, conservations groups, and many small donors. With the failure of the AAP, we need your support more than ever. Without some concrete show of interest from this government, I'm afraid this initiative will die and Sickle Point will be lost forever.

Thank you,



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Cc:
Paul Rasmussen (FLNRORD)
Roly Russell (MLA Boundary-Similkameen)
Richard Cannings (MP South Okanagan-West Kootenay)
Subrina Monteith (Director Area I, RDOS)
Randy Cranston (Chair Kaleden Community Association)
Bruce Shepherd (Save Sickle Point Committee)