

Thankfully the province realized this and in Nov. 2017 it **rightly refused to sell Abaco shoreline Crown land** (Parcels W and Z), which was also in the floodway and will be protected as an Environmental Reserve. The province held its ground in spite of backroom lobbying from Town Officials and Abaco. Freedom of Information (FOI) files confirm the attempt to have an Inside Deal when this Crown land was transferred to the province by the Harper government. A court challenge from Pasqua First Nation over the failure to follow Duty to Consult helped protect this marshland.

Now we must take action to permanently protect the marshland. An Interpretive Centre is a no-brainer. This will protect the marshland and ensure continued public access to this beautiful natural area. It will become a huge draw to Fort Qu'Appelle, bringing visitors and tourists here. It will make Fort Qu'Appelle a day-trip destination from Regina. It will bring students here for environmental education. It will strengthen the Farmers' Market. It will become a vibrant gathering point for residents and visitors alike.

Huge Successes Elsewhere

Marsh Interpretive Centres have been huge successes. The Oak Hammock Centre outside Winnipeg attracts thousands, including for hiking, biking and environmental education. The McKell housing sub-division adjacent to marshland in Regina shows what can be done with a little bit of environmentally-responsible imagination. A housing development with walkways into the Fort Qu'Appelle marshland will become possible when the land by the old Indian Hospital (Parcel V) gets into the hands of responsible developers. **This would have a profoundly positive impact on the local economy.**

Fort Qu'Appelle's future depends upon good environmental stewardship. Past councils have made huge mistakes. Giving all this marshland to Abaco and privatizing all access to this beautiful lakeshore habitat area was unconscionable. This was a huge assault on the public interest.

Now we must take action to make this right, to **take back the marsh**. We are working to create a collaborative project, with support from First Nations, the Trans-Canada Trail, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation and other groups that want the marsh to be returned into public hands. We trust that the Town will also step up and support this new, positive and responsible direction.

Let's make it happen! Will you help?



QU'APPELLE VALLEY
ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSOCIATION

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We meet every second Wednesday of the month at 7 pm at the QVCA.
Next meeting Oct. 10th.

Help Create

The Fort Qu'Appelle Marsh Interpretive Centre

The Qu'Appelle Watershed containing the Calling Lakes is the most ecologically stressed in all of Saskatchewan. The water quality and wildlife habitats are all in decline. Clear, clean water is becoming a memory of our elders. And almost everyone in the valley says they care about what is happening.

Deeds Not Just Words

But we need more than words. If we want to restore the health of the lakes we have to protect them from further assaults. This means stopping industrial and agricultural pollution and upstream water diversions, something we have been working on regarding Yancoal, Quill Lakes and the Line 3 bitumen pipeline that goes under the Qu'Appelle River.

But it also means taking care of the lakeshores, river banks and, most vital, the valley marshes that help to clean the water. We can no longer get away with pointing our fingers at others while we allow local interests and authorities to degrade the watershed right under our noses.

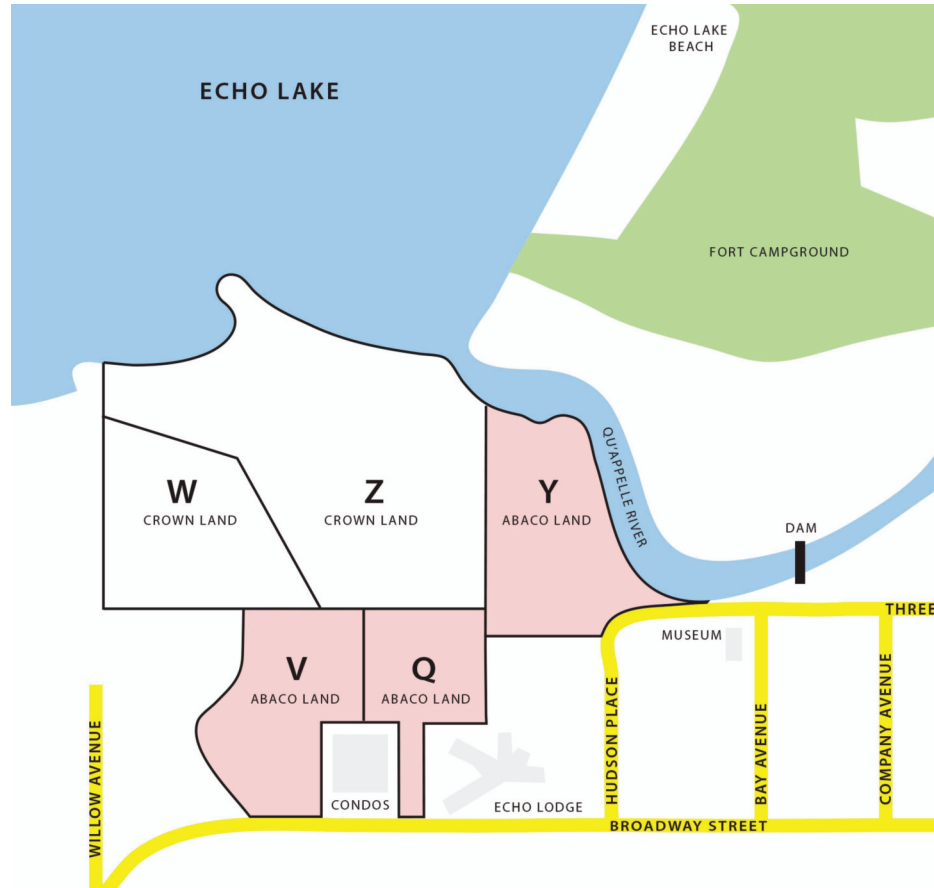
While the Town was displaying on its office door one of the Calling Lakes Ecomuseum (CLEM) posters about protecting wetlands, it was allowing contaminated soil to be dumped into the marshland by the old lagoon. As the valley's environmental watchdog, the QVEA documented and reported the contamination. The Environmental Protection Order (EPO) issued by the province in March 2018 stated: "*The Town of Fort Qu'Appelle is permitting the disposal of asphalt and other waste material that are generating leachate and contaminating the environment and potentially can make its way to the Qu'Appelle River and Mission Lake that will have a negative impact on the environment and human health.*" It took 42 truckloads to remove the contaminated soil.

No matter who they are, valley polluters must be held accountable. Unfortunately, CLEM has never raised any questions about its partner, the Town, allowing the watershed to be treated with such disdain. Actions that are consistent with words are urgently needed.

Threat to Local Marshland

We are blessed with the incredible marshland on the southeast shore of Echo Lake. This is where the Pelicans rest and feed, where the endangered Buffalo fish spawns. Where you'll find the Ruddy Duck, the Leopard Frog and Wilson's Phalarope and other creatures that increasingly depend upon protected marshland habitats.

This marshland is presently under grave threat. And we are asking you to join with us to get this vast area, from the old PFRA dam all the way to B-Say-Tah, protected as a Marsh Interpretive Centre. This will be a challenge but it is a challenge we must now face.



Some valley residents haven't yet realized what has happened to this marsh area. Between 2013 and 2015 marshland zoned as floodway was given to Abaco, a U.S. energy company in North Dakota, on the pretense that they would build a big-boat marina. Parcel Q, which is **mostly floodway**, was thrown into the land sale of Parcel V, where the old Indian Hospital was, for \$1.00. Later, Parcel Y, which is **all floodway**, was also given to Abaco for another \$1.00.

The marina was a sham. Floodway land should not be commercially developed; it should be protected as green space. The past Town council knew this, as Parcel Y was already zoned "green space" under its own *Official Community Plan*. But they gave it away anyway. And Parcel Q, which is mostly floodway, was never to be sold, according to the Town's own records, because it was needed for drainage and for Echo Lodge. But they gave it away anyway. What an environmental mess.

Privatization of Public Access

This local floodway is now not only owned by a U.S. energy company but all access to the marsh is also controlled by Abaco. Residents who must use the roads that were privatized must have Abaco's approval. If Abaco decides to block access, as it did with Willow Court residents, it can do so. The Trans-Canada Trail that goes through the marsh is now on Abaco land. So is the Lions' Club public observation deck. This giveaway is outrageous.

The road that has existed since the 1930s, between where the old Indian Hospital and Nurses Residence existed, where Blue Bill Bay Estates now is, **which goes down to the marshland and shoreline**, has been totally privatized. For centuries this has been a traditional Indigenous route to the marsh and lakeshore.

Privatizing this public access is likely the most irresponsible action ever taken by a local council. What would we think if we heard that another Town had sold out its marshland and all access to it to a U.S. company?

What will others think about Fort Qu'Appelle when they find out what has happened here? How do you pretend that you care about the valley environment when you allow this to happen? Will people want to relocate to an area with such apparent disregard for its local environment?

This is nothing short of feudal. Remember that popular democratic movements fought long and hard to gain access to lakes and rivers that were controlled by feudal landlords. We can't allow the clock to be turned back and to lose public access to such natural splendour.

And all this was done without any development proposals from Abaco. After five years there is still no marina proposal in the Town office. This whole thing has been a sham from the start. It is time for people in the community who care about the lakes and water to clean up this mess.

A Marsh Interpretive Centre

Floodway is not to be commercially developed. A marina is totally impractical in this environment, with the unpredictability of the water level and so much of the marshland far away from open water. A marina here would be ecologically destructive.