



Friends of the Morden Mine*

www.mordenmine.com

April 30, 2014

P. O. Box 60029
Mount Benson
Nanaimo, B. C.
V9S 0A5

The Honourable Mary Polak
Minister of Environment,
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B. C.
V8V 1X4

*Via e-mail attachment
(signed copy to follow)*

Re: Morden Colliery Historic Provincial Park

Dear Minister Polak:

We write with respect to the above-named provincial park and the need for the engineering study prescribed in the Herold Engineering “update” study commissioned by the Honourable Terry Lake, your predecessor in office, in 2012. This study is required urgently to determine the cost of repairing Morden’s structures.

The letter is in three parts: First, we briefly highlight the current situation and state our request; second, we provide a synopsis of the most essential background information underscoring the importance of our request; and third, we describe a new community development that will, with the assistance of the government, significantly advance Morden’s profile and appeal on a larger stage and help secure donations and grants to rehabilitate the structures and develop the park site.

(i) The current situation and our request:

In the fall of 2013 the BC Parks liaison representative to our board of directors submitted an internal request to fund the urgently needed engineering study. That request was denied on the grounds that funds were not available in the budget.

Taking into account the ministry's position, we took stock and looked for other partners to support the study. We were successful. In March of this year the City of Nanaimo and the RDN voted generously – and unanimously – to contribute a total of \$22,500 towards the study and our society pledged another \$1,000 for a total of \$23,500. The exact cost of the study will not be known until bids are assessed after an RFP process that BC Parks has authorized us to undertake. One of the two professional engineers who serve on our board and who has had many years of experience dealing with such matters, thinks bids will range between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

However, all local commitments are conditional upon the Province making an unspecified financial contribution. If the best bid were to come in at the low end of the range, the provincial contribution would be purely nominal; towards the high end of the range, it could be upwards of \$6,500.

On the basis of these commitments our BC Parks liaison representative submitted another internal request to provide funding for the study. The request was denied even though ministry officials had been advised of the extent of local contributions and the condition attached to those prospective contributions.

We urge you to reconsider this decision as we have now been able to secure in excess of 80 percent of the funds necessary to conduct this study. Should the best bid be at the lower end of the range, your contribution would be much less than 20 percent. Time is of the essence as this structure has a limited life if not repaired.

(ii) Synopsis of important background information supporting our request:

Morden Mine has been a Class 'A' provincial park since 1972. At the time the park was established it was recognized that this mine site contained the last significant remaining surface evidence of the historic Vancouver Island coal mine industry – the industry that drove the island's economy for the better part of its first one-hundred years and the industry that created several Vancouver Island communities, including Cumberland, Ladysmith and Nanaimo. It was also recognized that Morden could become a valuable tourist attraction as well as a fitting memorial for the many thousands who worked in the coal mining industry.

However, even though Morden has been a provincial park for more than 40 years, and even though it has tremendous heritage value due to its age (101 years), its rarity (one of only two such structures that remain in North America), and type of construction (a very

early example of the use of reinforced concrete in coal mine construction), nothing has been done to maintain the integrity of the structures (known as a headframe and tippel). Those structures, however, are the sole reason Morden became a provincial park. They will soon be lost if significant maintenance work is not performed.

In May of 2012 a delegation consisting of two professional engineers (John Hofman and John Knappett), then MLA Ron Cantelon, and the first of the two undersigned parties met with Minister Terry Lake to explain the maintenance problem as well as to discuss Morden's potential as a tourist attraction. John Knappett, principal of Knappett Projects and general contractor for the highly regarded and popular Kinsol Trestle restoration project, advised Minister Lake that emergency repairs to the headframe and tippel would cost in the range of \$250,000 to \$500,000.

Minister Lake commissioned two studies as a direct result of this meeting. The first, a safety study, was conducted in the autumn of 2012; and the second, Herold Engineering's "update" study (cited above) was completed in February of 2013. The first study recommended some modest safety-related improvements, which were undertaken, and a more expensive fence realignment project, which was not. The second study recommended a more detailed engineering study if the Province wished to repair and rehabilitate the park's main structures – in other words, if it wished to commit to the park's future.

(iii) The future of Morden Colliery Historic Provincial Park – a very promising development:

In recent months a new community task force in support of Morden Mine's rehabilitation as well as the further development of the park site has been assembled under the leadership of Hugh Nicholson, publisher of the Nanaimo *Daily News* and Division Manager of the Vancouver Island Newspaper Group of Glacier Publications. This task force wants to see Morden's full potential realized as a memorial and as an "iconic" tourist attraction. Members are identified on the copy list below along with prominent community leaders who submitted letters of support to Minister Lake in 2012.

The task force has already been active on a number of fronts. Glacier Media has pledged \$50,000 worth of advertising for a campaign to raise funds for Morden; Community Futures has offered a bridging loan; the president of Vancouver Island University has offered to engage the university community in appropriate ways; the Nanaimo Economic Development Corporation has offered to assist with tourism promotion and the pursuit of funding opportunities; the Nanaimo *Daily News* has offered full coverage for a fund-raising campaign and, to help build public support, a series of articles on Vancouver Island's coal mining heritage.

In conclusion:

Over the years local businesses as well as members of our society have contributed generously to a range of activities at the park, and in the community, including maintenance work, tours, public outreach, school visits, centenary celebrations, a site plan study, a web site, and a newsletter – as well as contributing substantially to some modest park improvements, most notably, the construction of a new trail and the design and installation of interpretive signage. However, as we pointed out to Minister Lake when we met with him in 2012, *all parties who have expressed interest in extending further assistance want assurances that the Province is significantly committed to its own park.*

A contribution to the required engineering study would demonstrate that commitment, just as previous donations to the site plan study and two earlier engineering studies demonstrated the Province's support and commitment.

On behalf of our society and all those listed below – as well as on behalf of the scores of volunteers who have contributed to our society's efforts over the years and the thousands of miners' families whose collective memory Morden was meant to honour – we ask that the Province continue to partner with us financially and that it provide the necessary funds to render operative the local resolutions recently passed in support of the much needed engineering study.

Yours truly,

Eric W. Ricker, Ph.D
John Hofman, P.Eng.
Co-presidents

Copies to:

Members of the Community Task Force on Morden Mine:

Hugh Nicholson, Publisher, Nanaimo *Daily News* and Division Manager,
Vancouver Island Newspaper Group, Glacier Media
Jolynn Green, Executive Director, Community Futures Central Vancouver Island
Ralph Nilson, President, Vancouver Island University
Mark MacDonald, Managing Editor, Nanaimo *Daily News*
Andrea Rosato-Taylor, Sales Manager, Nanaimo *Daily News*
Kim Smythe, CEO, Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce
Sasha Angus, CEO, Nanaimo Economic Development Corporation
John Hofman, P. Eng., Read Jones Christoffersen Consulting Engineers, (retired)
Eric W. Ricker, professor of public administration and educational policy,
Dalhousie University, (retired)

Bill Bestwick, Nanaimo city councilor and well-known hockey coach and manager.

Contributors to the Presentation Book (2012) for Minister Terry Lake:

MLAs and local government: representatives:

Ron Cantelon, (now former) MLA, Parksville - Qualicum
Leonard Krog, MLA, Nanaimo
Doug Routley, MLA, Nanaimo - North Cowichan
Rob Hutchins, Mayor of Ladysmith
John Ruttan, Mayor of Nanaimo
Joe Stanhope, Chairman, Regional District of Nanaimo
Alec McPherson, Director, Area 'A,' Regional District of Nanaimo

Community organizations:

Debbie Trueman, General Manager, Nanaimo Museum
Colane Dane, Chair, Cumberland Museum and Archives
Christine Meutzner, Manager, Nanaimo Community Archives
Diane Brennan, Chair, Nanaimo Community Heritage Commission

Media:

Jim Hume, columnist, *Victoria Times Colonist*
Nanaimo News Bulletin
Nanaimo Daily News
Victoria Times Colonist

Pro bono consultants

John Knappett, P.Eng., President, Knappett Projects
Jack Peake

Board of Directors of the Friends of Morden Mine society

Eric Ricker, co-president
John Hofman, co-president
Tom Paterson, vice-president
Louise Shuker, treasurer
Dave Shillabeer, secretary
Jennifer Goodbrand, director
David Gogo, director
Andrea Rosato-Taylor, director

*Friends of the Morden Mine, a registered society and a registered charity, operates under a Partnership Agreement with BC Parks. Additional information, including the *Morden Colliery Site Plan Report* (2010) and the *Presentation Book to Minister Terry Lake* (2012) are on file in the office of the Minister of Environment.