



MEDIA RELEASE

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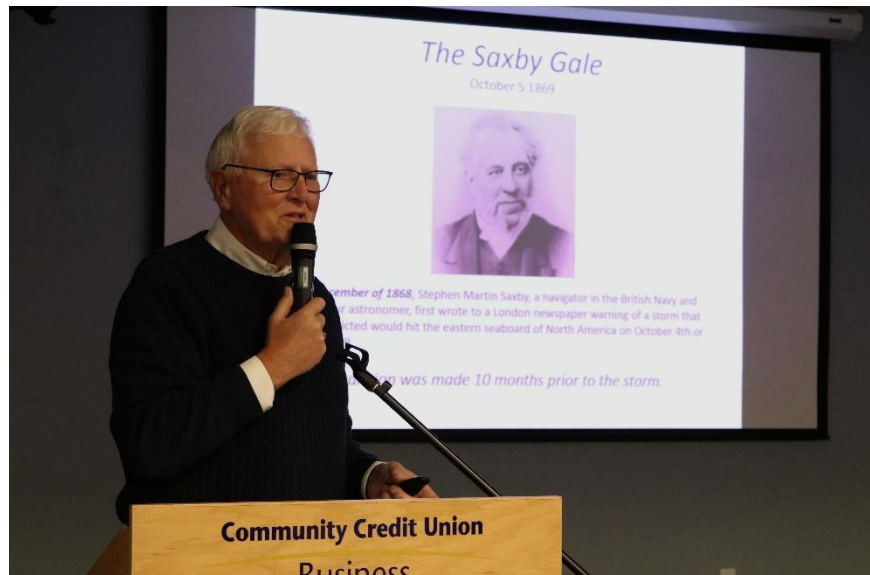
DATE: 13 October 2022

RE: **Saxby Gale a reminder of the impact extreme weather could have on the Isthmus of Chignecto**

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – It happened more than 150 years ago, but is still talked about today.

It is the Saxby Gale, a storm that barreled over the Isthmus of Chignecto overnight on Oct. 4, 1869, breaching the dikes and causing death and widespread destruction to communities in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

And a local historian continues to warn that a similar gale could devastate the vital transportation links that connect Nova Scotia to the rest of the North American continent.



LOCAL HISTORIAN BILL CASEY WARNED A STORM SIMILAR TO THE SAXBY GALE COULD DEVASTATE THE VITAL TRANSPORTATION LINKS THAT CONNECT NOVA SCOTIA TO THE REST OF NORTH AMERICA. (TOM McCOAG / TOWN OF AMHERST)

“If a similar storm happened today, the railway and highway would be totally inundated. So would the wind farm. It would be a catastrophe,” Bill Casey said, as he spoke at a symposium held in Amherst recently that examined the impacts of the Saxby Gale.



TOWN OF Amherst NOVA SCOTIA

Ironically, Casey's comments came just days after post tropical storm Fiona slammed into the province causing trees to topple and widespread power outages.

Had Fiona hit the province at a high tide, similar to the one experienced during the Saxby Gale, the devastation to the province would have been much worse than it was, Casey said.

Right now, only the CN rail line that crosses the isthmus is protecting the Tantramar region from being flooded by the Bay of Fundy.

"The CN line wasn't made to do that. It was made to hold choo-choo trains, not hold back the ocean, but that is what it is doing," Casey said. "If that railway broke, the water would be endless. It would hardly settle. It would just keep coming and coming."

It is a warning Casey has been issuing since 2009. Since he first broached the subject, the Canadian, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick governments have conducted some studies, one of which indicated \$50 million worth of commercial goods cross the isthmus on a daily basis.



LOCAL HISTORIAN BILL CASEY POINTS OUT THE FLOODING THAT COULD OCCUR IF THE DIKES PROTECTING THE TANTRAMAR MARSH WERE BREACHED DURING A STORM.
(TOM McCOAG / TOWN OF AMHERST)



TOWN OF Amherst NOVA SCOTIA

The studies have also recommended three solutions: raise the existing dikes at an estimated cost of just over \$200 million, build new dikes at just over \$189 million or raise the existing dikes and install steel sheet pile walls at select locations at a cost just over \$300 million.

“We haven’t got a decision on which (solution) the governments agree upon and as far as I can tell there seems to be no discussion of moving ahead,” Casey said.



GREG JONES, AMHERST'S DIRECTOR OF FIRE SERVICES, OUTLINED HOW TODAY'S POPULATION RECEIVE ADVANCED WARNINGS OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS, SOMETHING FOLKS WHO FACED THE SAXBY GALE DIDN'T GET 153 YEARS AGO. (TOM McCOAG / TOWN OF AMHERST)

That is unfortunate because the loss of the transportation links due to a storm would mean the Port of Halifax would be unable to deliver containers to the rest of North America, he said.

“Halifax can get containers to Chicago one day quicker than any other port on the North American seaboard,” Casey said. “That’s because of the CN rail line. If it was wiped out, it would cost the economy \$50 million a day. Halifax’s reputation would be hurt.”

Pointing to the cost of the proposed solutions versus the impact it would have on the economy, Casey said the federal government should realize when it comes to their budget, even the \$300-million proposed mitigation project is just a “rounding error.”

Greg Jones, Amherst director of fire services, noted water has crested over the rail line during some recent storms.

“Think back to COVID when the border was shut down,” Jones said. “Nothing was going through. That will be the effect if the link is cut. That’s huge. It’s amazing that at the federal government level, they don’t seem to realize how huge it is.”



The possibility of being cut off from the rest of the continent is something folks should be aware of when it comes to their emergency planning, Jones said, adding, “Knowing the hazards you may face, planning for those emergencies, including how you are going to contact family and friends, and having a 72-hour emergency kit is important.”

Those impacted by the Saxby Gale really didn’t have any advanced warning, unlike today’s people who start receiving warnings several days ahead of an extreme weather event, warnings they should heed, Jones said.

Mayor David Kogon said the threat to the isthmus as a result of climate change, rising sea levels and more extreme weather events is significant.

“It’s ironic given that we just went through hurricane Fiona,” Kogon said. “By the grace of God, it did not coincide with a very high tide. We dodged a bullet. The Saxby Gale is an example of what could have happened. The threats are real.”

While he has had some assurances the federal government will fund their share of any flood mitigation solution, Kogon said it is time the higher levels of government made a decision so the mitigation project could proceed.

Casey agreed.



AMHERST MAYOR DAVID KOGON ADDRESSES A RECENT SYMPOSIUM ON THE SAXBY GALE. (TOM McCOAG / TOWN OF AMHERST)





“Seems to me it’s time we had a decision because if the rail line breaks it will be really hard to fix,” he said. “But I’m afraid they are going to sit on it until something happens. To me, it would be a lot easier to do something now before it breaks.”

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