

The Outdoor Facility

Every hunt camp has one. Any self-respecting hunter wouldn't stay too long around a camp without one. It's the outhouse. Oh, it has other names the hunters use, but it's an absolute 'must have' for any hunter before he heads out for a day in the bush.

For years our family has hunted the hills on the north side of the Madawaska River near Quadeville, Ontario, and, over the years, we have replaced or upgraded a couple of shabby outhouses. A few years ago we engaged the services of one of the camp members, an excellent carpenter, to build one of the best to be found at any hunt camp in the district. The result was one of which we could all be proud. It is solidly built with a sturdy spruce frame and plywood sheeting. A good, two-metre-deep hole was painstakingly dug between a few young balsams, chopping away at the tree roots and removing stubborn rocks until there was little leverage left with the shovel handle to lift another scoop of soil. The outhouse was firmly centered over the hole making sure it was level and secured to keep out curious critters that may nest there in the off season. A fresh coat of paint was applied and a, vertical, three-inch ABS pipe installed the length of the nether regions, ostensibly to assist with the escape of noxious gases. The inside decor consists of such items as photos of trophy bucks, a large image of a certain Hockey-Night-In-Canada personality, and team photos of the Montreal Canadiens and Toronto Maple Leafs. There used to be one of the Ottawa Senators, but, out of respect, a nephew, who is an ardent Senators fan, removed it. In a ceiling corner, someone has hung one of those pine-scented auto air fresheners; it seems to be the same one he

had in his '64 Impala years ago. When the women come to visit the camp we place scented candles out there and refer to it as the "outdoor facility".

One year, when we arrived the weekend before hunting season to set up camp, we found [an official looking document](#) securely tacked to the camp door. It informed us that our "outdoor facility" was not up to Environmental Standards. It noted that bacteria from the said facility can travel underground, into lakes and streams, and rivers, and since our 'facility' was located close to the Madawaska Highlands Park it would have to be "properly cleaned up and permanently closed." It stated that a sewage pump truck would have to be brought in to help with the clean-up process and, afterwards the hole would need to be filled in and, either a composting toilet installed, or correct plumbing and sewage facilities. Furthermore, we would have 30 days to complete the work, under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act, or our lease would be terminated. Of course, this was followed by a proper excerpt from the Act, inserted in italics within the body of the letter. We were respectfully invited to contact our local Ministry office if we had any questions or concerns, or, to obtain a copy of the legal requirements for our new facility. The Ministry thanked us in advance for our understanding and cooperation "in this sensitive environmental matter."

When we first read it, some chuckled, then, read it again. Frowning, we got out our reading glasses, examined it more closely, lips moving as we read, then passed it around. With the arrival of each camp member the whole process was repeated. We looked at the front; we looked at the back, and then, read it again. It seemed like a

hoax but the letterhead looked very official. It was well written, no 'typos', no grammar or spelling mistakes as far as a group of hunters could tell, at least none as obvious as those scam emails from Nigeria. And it was properly signed from the Coordinator, Protection Program, in Peterborough.

Talk about being incensed! "All these years we've followed all the rules, paid our fees, kept the grounds impeccable, and this is the thanks we get!" Who could we blame? Surely it was the lobbying efforts of those tree-hugger canoeists travelling down the river. What about the loo in the woods the Ministry had provided for them at each camping site? We began making up our minds about what the Coordinator could do with his letter.

Then Bernard arrived. He's from a neighbouring hunt camp and the same letter was nailed to his camp door. Surely it was real! After an appropriate amount of cursing and name calling we began to plan a strategy. By now it was early November and freezing nights had set in. The sewage "honey wagons" would be stored away for the winter and the operators wouldn't have them out again until spring. Snow could arrive any day making it virtually impossible to get a backhoe or dump truck into these backwoods. Surely the Ministry would know this. The letter was probably written by some deadhead at a desk in downtown Toronto. There was nothing to do but to ask for a stay, at least until May or June and then who would come here in the middle of black fly season? More strategic planning was necessary.

By this time it was Saturday afternoon and the Ministry office would be closed.

Someone mentioned this as a good thing as it would not advance our cause if some of the more agitated hunters began addressing government officials at this time. We would have to wait until Monday when a couple of the hunters who could be more 'politically correct' would have to miss the first day of the hunt and arrange to meet with the Coordinator. They were given lots of advice about what to tell him!

The evening was spent in further discussion; many questions and few answers. What contractor would take this on? How much would it cost? How would we pay for it? Could there be some kind of grant such as municipalities get to upgrade their sewage treatment plant? Perhaps we should get our Member of Parliament involved. What other jurisdiction of government might deal with outhouse issues? Maybe the Federal Department of Oceans and Fisheries should be contacted. One guy suggested the Senate might know how to raise a stink. Would they have any experience in dealing with matters such as this? Should we get legal counsel involved? What law firm might specialize in outhouses? The chatter continued over breakfast.

Then Donnie dropped in. He's Bernard's nephew and had got wind of our strategic planning. He thought he should level with us before it went too far. It was all a prank! He and Trena thought it up – well mostly Trena. "I could never write such a perfect letter." It was just meant to be all in fun and he didn't want us phoning some Ministry guy.

Imagine our collective relief! We didn't know whether to throw an egg at Donnie or offer him breakfast. He's a likeable lad though and, in the end, the guys took it in good stride and had to admit he sure had us fooled. One fellow said he knew it was a hoax all along. We warned Donnie and Trena, though, to watch their backs. Although we still have our precious outdoor facility, there is a whole camp full of fellows dreaming up some way to even the score.