

THE NORTH

CANCER FURRIER SAYS HIS DRIVE TO SUCCEED HELPED HIM BEAT DISEASE > N5

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How blue is the valley?

Politics From Fredericton to Edmundston, Tories control Upper St. John River Valley

JIM DUNVILLE
BUGLE-OBSERVER

The New Brunswick Tories' already strong hold on ridings in the heart of the Upper St. John River Valley rolled both north and south during last month's provincial election.

Not only did premier-designate David Alward and his team easily retain their seats in the York, York North, Woodstock and Carleton ridings, they knocked off Liberal heavyweights with surprise wins in Victoria-Tobique and Grand Falls-Drummond-Saint-André, along with a clean sweep in Fredericton.

The result saw the entire Upper St. John River Valley – in fact, all of Northwestern N.B. from the capital city of Fredericton to Edmundston – become Tory blue. The election rout, which saw Alward's team take 42 of the 55 provincial seats, included a sweep of the area where four sitting Liberal cabinet ministers, one former cabinet minister and the Grits' and legislature's longest-serving member went down to defeat.

Incumbent Tories faced little challenge as they held their Upper Valley seats.

Perhaps the most shocking turn of events occurred in the Upper St. John River Valley riding of Victoria-Tobique, where Dr. Larry Kennedy – who has represented the riding continuously since being part of the Frank McKenna sweep of 1987 – fell to young PC challenger Wes McLean.

Kennedy, who swept to victory in 2006 with 72 per cent support – one of the biggest majorities in the province – saw almost half his support disappear in 2010. Much of the almost 2,000 fewer Liberal votes ended up with McLean, who increased Tory support by more than 1,200 votes over the 2006 results, earning more than 52 per cent of the votes cast. Liberal support meanwhile fell to 40 per cent.

Victoria-Tobique remained primarily a two-party race, with Independent Carter Edgar, Green Party candidate Wayne Sabine and NDP representative David Burns garnering 140, 119 and 109 votes, respectively.

Like Woodstock, the Liberals, as they have in the past, tried to make hospital closure a key issue in Victoria-Tobique. This time, however, the riding's vote appeared to believe McLean's and Alward's commitment to protect the hospital in Perth-Andover.

Another Liberal giant fell in Grand Falls-Drummond-Saint-André, where sitting Agriculture Minister Ron Ouellette fell to Tory challenger Danny Soucy.



MADELEINE LECLERK/THE VICTORIA S

Tobique-Mactaquac Conservative MP Mike Allen enjoys the Zig Zag's official opening last Saturday in Grand Falls. Allen zipped along the cable above the falls alongside Danny Soucy, the newly-elected Progressive Conservative for the riding of Grand Falls, St. André and Drummond. The entire Upper St. John River Valley went Tory in the provincial election.

Sugarloaf snow-making a 'no go'?

TIM JAQUES
THE TRIBUNE

ATHOLVILLE – The long-awaited snow-making equipment for Sugarloaf Provincial Park may have hit a snag.

At the end of August, then-Minister of Tourism and Parks Brian Kenny announced \$50,000 had been budgeted and approved for an engineering study for park snow-making equipment.

"Once the design and planning work is completed, Phase 1 of the project will provide snow-making capabilities for the Sunshine Trail, Bunny Hill and the Snow Park Trail," the official release stated. "Phase 2, to be done next spring, will provide snow-making capabilities for three additional trails; the Nelson, Fraser and Alaska Trails."

The project was to cost \$1.6 million for Phase 1 and \$800,000 for Phase 2.

At the time, Roy Boudreau, who was then the Campbellton-Restigouche Centre MLA, said the first phase snow-making was to be in place by late autumn, weather permitting. When interviewed during the election campaign, Boudreau described the project as a "go."

But Ryan Donaghy, a spokesman for the Department of Tourism and Parks, said that the actual building stage of the project had never been formally approved.

"What was approved was \$50,000 which funded the design and engineering of the snow equipment. My understanding is that is ongoing currently. The rest of it has never been approved. If you read the press release, it says 'The provincial government will seek the necessary approval to move forward with phase one.'"

He didn't know what might happen. "Certainly the incoming government would look at that study and will decide if it is going to move forward with it. I certainly can't speak for the new government and what decision will be made. Perhaps that [going ahead with construction] had been the intention had the previous government been re-elected...but certainly that is not what was approved at a government level."

Boudreau lost his seat in the Sept. 27 election to Tory Greg Davis.