

# MNR should have kept nets out of the bays

**W**hen it comes to being negotiators, officials at the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) make good game wardens.

That's the only conclusion that can be drawn from the new commercial fishing agreement between the MNR and the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) announced this week.

The MNR comes across as weak and ineffective in part because we don't know what happened at the table. The talks were held in secret.

So we're left to assume what happened and as humans we are inclined to assume the worst.

Granted MNR hands were tied to a large extent by court rulings known as the Sparrow Decision and the Fairgrieve ruling.

Among other things these rulings recognize the SON have the right to fish in bays at both Colpoys and Owen Sound.

So it would seem to outsiders — and all of us who pay MNR salaries are outsiders in this one — that negotiations should have been aimed at getting the commercial netters to agree not to exercise their rights in those two areas.

To achieve this, perhaps a cash incentive could have to be paid. But wait, a cash incentive in the amount of \$850,000 is

being paid over the term of the agreement that ends in March 2017.

An MNR spokesman told a reporter that the payment in part will ensure compliance with the agreement. Huh?

Surely even in the rarefied world where the provincial government operates an agreement is an agreement. Paying one party to ensure it is kept is an insult to that party, to every angler in the province and to the taxpayers of Ontario.

Since money was available it could have been used as an incentive for commercial fishermen to leave the bays for sports fishing only.

The economy of the entire region, including the SON, is positively impacted by tourism. And current levels of tourism exist in part because of the success of the sports fishery in the area.

That success in turn is a credit to the fish and game clubs that operate in the region and spend their earnings on stocking and conservation.

During Owen Sound's annual Salmon Spectacular Owen Sound bay has been said to look like the 401 in rush hour.

Adding commercial fishing nets to that traffic is a recipe for disaster. MNR negotiators should have done their jobs and stopped such disaster before it happens.

*- Jim Merriam*