

# Lorincz on Environment

Outspoken, driven environmentalist leaves the Nova Scotia Environment Network. But she's got plenty more to say.

by [Chris Benjamin](#)



**I**'m a few minutes late to meet with Tamara Lorincz, but she's still standing when I arrive at the cafe. "It gave me a chance to put up some posters," she says.

Never a wasted moment.

After five years as executive director of the Nova Scotia Environment Network, Lorincz is moving on. The tragic death of her mother has handed her a mountain of emotional logistics to deal with, and sharpened her desire to be with her own children. "I'm going to be a stay-at-home mom for a year," she says. Later she hopes to complete a Ph.D. in corporate social responsibility.

But the British Columbia-raised Lorincz is not giving up the eco-fight in her adopted home. "I love it here," she says. "People have a sophisticated response to environmental and economic issues."

When she started at NSEN Lorincz, who has an MBA and an environmental law degree from Dalhousie, spent her first week reviewing the province's environmental legislation. "We have these rights under the Environment Act that environmentalists don't take advantage of."

For example, Nova Scotia mandated itself to have an environmental trust fund for research, management and conservation. Yet no such fund existed until NSEN and its member organizations demanded the government meet its commitment. The new trust fund is only about \$60,000 (New Brunswick's is about \$4 million), but it's a start.

Realizing that a little legal knowledge goes a long way, Lorincz went around the province with a group of lawyers giving workshops to any environmental group that would listen, no matter how small or remote. The tour led to the creation of the East Coast Environmental Law Association.

She has used legal issues to "unify, equip and expand" Nova Scotia's environmentalists. She stresses that NSEN's *raison d'être* is collaboration, that she has done nothing alone. But she has been a driving force behind the creation of a provincial natural resources strategy, the use of meaningful targets in the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act and an improved Environment Act. Lorincz has been a master mobilizer to these ends.

During her tenure, NSEN started polling political parties on their environmental platforms during elections. Now we have a tool to hold winning parties accountable to their environmental promises.

Lorincz also tackled specific issues such as uranium mining. "I asked the minister of Natural Resources every year to let environmentalists attend the Mining Matters conference," she says. "I went to the 2006 conference and there were uranium companies from around the world. Their plans for mining across-province included uranium mining. I put out a red alert that a category five hurricane of uranium mining was on the horizon, and there was no mention of environmental responsibility or sustainability."

Many of the issues she worked on, and sparked controversy over, have since become mainstream. In 2009, the theme of the Mining Matters conference was sustainability.

Lorincz has also taken a softer approach to building a stronger, more connected movement. NSEN holds an annual roundtable to discuss pertinent issues, and gives awards for successes like designating a new wilderness area. Because social connections are as important to a movement as professional connections, Lorincz started an environmental book club.

Through her tireless efforts Lorincz has gained a reputation for political outspokenness. It's what drew her to what she figured was the most progressive political party. She took a leave of absence and ran for the NDP in the 2008 federal election. Little did she realize how tongue-tied a good politician has to be when towing the party line.

"I left the party completely in the fall," she says. "I wanted complete liberty in speaking." She has taken full advantage of that freedom, writing op/eds in the *Herald* and railing on our NDP government for its failure to meet environmental expectations.

While other environmentalists have treated the NDP with kid gloves, Lorincz has made her disappointment clear.

"This government," she says, "hasn't made sustainability a big priority." But even as the face of NSEN, there is much she couldn't say. "It may not seem like I've been holding back but when you speak for an organization you have to."

Now she can tell us what she really feels. Nova Scotia's political leadership better brace itself.