

Customs official says D.U.I. issue is really a non-issue

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By Ken Johnston
Editor

Members of the Rainy River District Municipal Association (RRDMA) passed a resolution at their annual meeting in Rainy River Saturday asking that U.S. visitors with impaired driving convictions be allowed to cross into Canada “without penalty or unwarranted delay, provided that the penalty imposed on conviction has been satisfied and any probation period related to the same has expired.” Canada Border Services Agency Superintendent Doug Cuthbertson was a guest speaker at their meeting and informed those present that the actual number of people turned back at area border crossings is very miniscule. “At Fort Frances we process about 800,000 travellers each year. Of those roughly about 400,000 are Americans. Last year we had 925 inadmissible people. 319 of those were allowed in on temporary permits. 606 were refused entry.”

Cuthbertson also stated, “We will not refuse anyone entry who had a D.W.I. older than ten years old.” With that in mind, he elaborated that in most cases where a traveller has been turned back there is more to the story.

He spoke about an instance last summer where he and his wife went to a friend’s cottage and they had some U.S. visitors there. “The guy told everyone, not knowing I worked that day at customs, that he was harassed and had his fillet knife seized and had to pay \$640 to get in.” The truth was that he actually had more than 15 grams of marijuana and a prohibited weapon. “If anyone gets caught at the border with over 15 grams we seize the drugs and your car. You can’t get the drugs back but you can get your car for \$440.” Cuthbertson also clarified that they do not seize fillet knives, only prohibited weapons such as butterfly knives or similar such weapons. Again a \$200 fine can be paid to get one’s vehicle back; hence the two fines added up to \$640.

“I submit to you that on this D.U.I. issue you are not getting the entire story from people. Not one of the complaints against us last year changed anything. With it being such a small percentage I do not think it is a large enough issue to worry about.”

Lake of the Woods Councillor Tony Sepers spoke and voted against the RRDMA resolution saying, “They should know our laws here.”

Estimation of the loss to NW Ontario

	High	Low
Those refused entry	606	303
Average paid by visitor	\$1,000	\$800
Total Loss	\$606,000	\$242,400
Average people/party*	4.5	4.5
Estimated loss to NW Ontario	\$2,727,000	\$1,090,800

* The number of people in the group that returns with those rejected. Based on a Study SSCTA/NWOTA/KDCA/PAT Region.