


WILDEAST

Newsletter of CPAWS Nova Scotia

ISSUE 22 | SPRING 2019

 **CPAWS**
CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY
NOVA SCOTIA CHAPTER



CONSERVATION IN NOVA SCOTIA

A FEW WORDS FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Nature is in trouble. And we are the problem.

A new United Nations report released earlier this year, entitled “Global Assessment Report of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services” warns that one million species are at risk of extinction. It concludes: “Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history – and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely.”

About three quarters of the land-based environment and about two thirds of the marine environment have been significantly altered by humans. This has resulted in huge declines in the abundance of wildlife. A separate report from the World Wildlife Fund has shown that 60% of the wildlife on the planet has been lost over just the past 40 years. Impacts from climate change will place even greater stress on these species, as they struggle to cope and adapt to collapsing ecosystems.

These trends are unsustainable. They will lead to massive extinction events and there will be huge implications for the planet, and our society. To people who are working in the field of conservation biology, the findings of these reports are alarming, but not at all surprising. We’ve been heading down this path for quite some time.

I’ve been working for the past two decades to establish protected areas in Canada. It is a frustratingly slow process, even when there is overwhelming public support for protecting nature. The system is very much set up to resist change. Facing such huge challenges, it’s easy for people to become overwhelmed, or even apathetic. “What could I possibly do to fix a problem that is so large and so all consuming?” they might say. But, if you give up, we are doomed.

Without caring people speaking up for the planet, it’s inevitable that we will continue to careen toward a less livable future. It will become near impossible to pull back from the dire situation where we are headed. So please, send a note to your federal, provincial, and municipal representatives. Tell them that conservation matters to you and that you are very concerned about the planet. Better yet, call them up. Even better, meet them in person. Talk to them directly, and frankly, about your concerns.

If you think too much of our forest is being clearcut and you want it to stop, tell them that. If you think that the ocean is in trouble and there’s not enough protection in place, tell them that too. They need to hear from people about these concerns. I’ve worked on lots of conservation campaigns over the years. Success is always dependent upon a handful of dedicated folks who are compelled to speak up – to roll-up their sleeves to do the tough work – before any meaningful change happens. I hope that you will get involved. And take it upon yourself to speak up for nature. We are quickly running out of time.

Wishing you all the best.

Chris

Chris Miller is the Executive Director of CPAWS Nova Scotia. He has a Ph.D. in ecology and has worked on numerous campaigns in Canada to conserve nature and establish protected areas.

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Photo: Nick Hawkins

IN THIS ISSUE

Nova Scotia's Protected Areas System Plan.....	4
Why is it taking so long?	
Eastern Shore Islands.....	8
Marine protected area proposal encounters local opposition	
Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes.....	10
New properties acquired for near-urban wilderness park	



Nova Scotia's Protected Areas System Plan

Photo: Irwin Barrett

The Nova Scotia government finalized the *Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* way back in 2013. It's a good plan with lots of new protected areas. But almost six years later, nearly 100 of the promised protected areas are still awaiting legal protection. What's the hold-up?

By: Chris Miller

The *Nova Scotia Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* is a good plan. It protects many of the best remaining natural areas in Nova Scotia.

It includes places in the Cape Breton Highlands and along the rugged coast of the Eastern Shore. It has proposed protected areas in the Cobequid Hills, the Halifax Greenbelt, and the interior forests of southwestern Nova Scotia.

It includes the last remaining large intact forests in the province, as well as the best remaining examples of old growth forests and species-at-risk habitat. It contains 700 kilometres of coastline and an estimated 2,600 lakes and rivers. When the plan was announced in 2013, it was widely celebrated.

Years of research, planning, and negotiation went into this work. Multiple rounds of public and stakeholder consultations were successfully completed.

Even the large forest companies were brought on side and began selling huge tracts of private freehold land to the Nova Scotia government for protection. Finally, Nova Scotia was taking real, tangible steps to safeguard our natural diversity.

CPAWS Nova Scotia was right in the thick of things. We worked collaboratively with the Nova Scotia government in selecting sites for protection. We negotiated with the forest companies. We raised public awareness about the need for increasing the amount of protected lands.

It was an exciting time for conservation. People outside the province started taking notice, as Nova Scotia began to emerge as a leader in Canada for conservation.

Landmark sites proposed for conservation

Overall, about a quarter million hectares of land were proposed for protection, including some really amazing sites. Kluscap Mountain, St. Mary's River, Mabou Highlands, Chignecto Isthmus, Eastern Shore Islands, Humes River, Medway Lakes, Cape Smokey, Sackville River, Rogues Roost, and Wentworth Valley all made the cut, as well as numerous sites within the biological hotspot of southwestern Nova Scotia well known for rare species.

Several existing protected areas were also proposed for expansion, including Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area in Halifax, Margaree River Wilderness Area in Cape Breton, Ship Harbour Long Lake Wilderness Area along the Eastern Shore, and the Tobetic Wilderness Area in the interior of the southwest.

Implementation Challenges

Implementation of the *Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* is being done in “batches”. The first designations started in 2014, with four new protected wilderness areas and sixteen new nature reserves being created.

Implementation ramped up considerably in 2015 with the completion of the second “batch”, which included four new protected wilderness areas, eleven new nature reserves, and the expansion of eight existing protected areas. The third batch was the biggest of all, involving the creation of sixty-five new or expanded protected areas. At the time, this was the largest expansion to the protected area system in nearly twenty years.

Significant progress was achieved and Nova Scotia successfully climbed to third in Canada for the total overall percentage of land dedicated toward protection. By the end of 2015, about half of the sites from the *Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* had been successfully designated.

But then, things started to stall. It would take fifteen additional months before the next batch of protected areas was announced, with only a handful of sites being included.

That delay was bad, but it got worse. Another twenty months would pass before the next batch was finalized, and that batch was the smallest yet, containing the fewest number of sites and the least amount of hectares. Implementation pretty much ground to a halt.

As it stands now, about 100 pending protected areas are stuck in government purgatory somewhere. These places are promised for protection but are lacking the legal designations to make their protections official.

Nova Scotia's status as a leader in Canada has been tarnished. Other jurisdictions have surpassed Nova Scotia, and many are preparing to achieve the national target of 17% land protection by the year 2020, while we are struggling to implement a plan approved six years ago. Alberta, Quebec, Manitoba, and Yukon have all made very large protected area announcements in recent years.

Why the delay? Well, there's clearly a lack of political will to fully implement the *Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan*. Internally, the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (Now: Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forestry) continue to bicker about which sites should go forward and when.

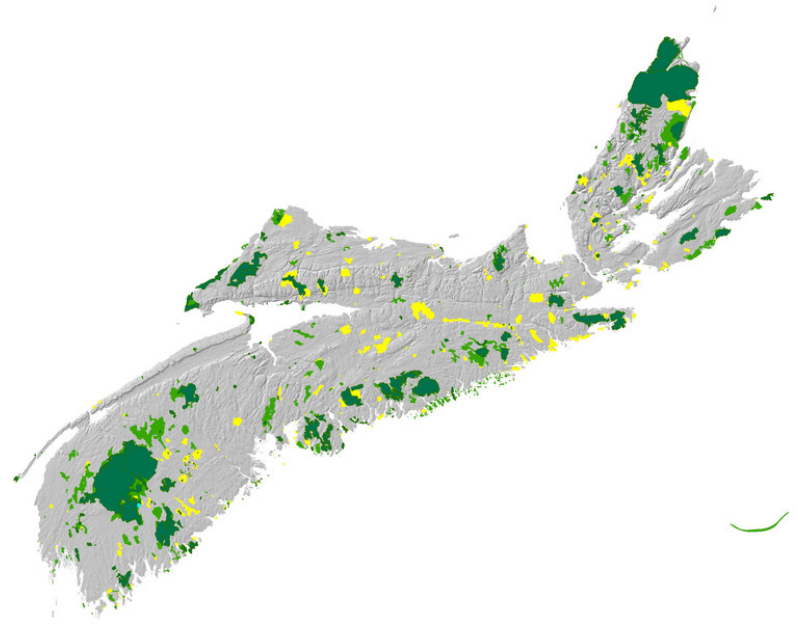


Photo: Irwin Barrett

Although the Ministers for both of these departments have clear marching orders in their Ministerial Mandate Letters to expand the amount of protected lands in the province, the delays continue. It hasn't helped that the position of Minister of Environment has changed several times over the past few years, including most recently this spring.

Fortunately, the Federal government has begun to place pressure on provincial and territorial governments to increase the amount of land being protected, including Nova Scotia, so that Canada does not miss our international obligations to protect biodiversity. They have created a pot of funding in the amount of \$1.3 Billion dollars to help incentivize the creation of new protected areas across the country.

Until then, however, we are still very much in a hurry-up-and-wait pattern. It's frustrating because the seriousness of the biodiversity decline has not abated since the protected areas plan was finalized. It has become worse. We urgently need to establish these protected areas before more species and ecosystems are lost.



Nova Scotia's protected areas system. (green= designated; yellow= not yet designated).



Photo: NS Environment

Conservation Notes

Wentworth Valley Wilderness Area



Photo: Irwin Barrett

It's official. The Nova Scotia government officially established the Wentworth Valley protected wilderness area back in November. This new protected area is nearly two thousand hectares in size and includes extensive large intact hardwood forests. It also contains the highest point of land on mainland Nova Scotia. Congrats to Ski Wentworth, and to the local community, who have been pushing for the protection of these lands for many years. We are glad to see this iconic wilderness area receive the protection it deserves. It wasn't that long ago that much of these lands were owned directly by a forest company.

At the end of April, the federal government announced minimum standards for marine protected areas in Canada. This is great news! From now on, heavy industrial activities will be prohibited within any new marine protected area established in Canada. More specifically, it bans oil and gas activities, mining, dumping, and bottom-trawling.

These are all ecologically harmful activities that are not compatible with marine conservation. It is hard to believe that such activities were previously even considered to occur within MPAs! This is an important milestone for marine conservation in Canada.

Better marine protected areas



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Close call for Sable Island



Photo: Sable Island Green Horse Society

Back in December, the Canada – Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board (CNSOPB) put a huge swath of the ocean off the coast of Nova Scotia on the auction block for oil and gas exploration, including Sable Island. More than three thousand letters were submitted during the public consultation phase opposing this reckless move to open up a national park to oil and gas exploration. The “Call for Bids” closed on May 8th, and it was announced shortly thereafter that not a single company submitted a proposal. That's welcome news. It would have been an absolute tragedy if seismic testing were to occur on Sable Island. The legislation that gives more power to the Petroleum Board than Parks Canada, over what happens inside the national park, is absurd and needs to change.



Photo: Nick Hawkins

Eastern Shore Islands

By: Meghan Borland

Just over a year ago, the Eastern Shore Islands were proposed by the federal government as a future marine protected area.

This initiative builds upon previous efforts to protect the islands. Publicly-owned islands were declared a protected wilderness area by the Nova Scotia government in 2015, and the Nova Scotia Nature Trust has made good progress purchasing and protecting numerous private islands.

Protection of the marine ecosystem, however, is lacking. In order for the Eastern Shore Islands to remain healthy and ecologically intact, both the terrestrial and ocean component of the environment need to be properly protected. Many species that occur here are tied to both the land and the sea.

Fortunately, the federal government recognized this and took action, but it has not been easy. Communities along the Eastern Shore have been confronted with challenging discussions about the marine protected area. Understandably, there are concerns, and at times it has become quite heated.

In an effort to better understand the various perspectives, to learn from local residents, and to get to know this beautiful area better, I have spent a considerable amount of time along the Eastern Shore.

For example, I have gone on hikes with people who are caretakers of these places that mean the most to them, shared lunch with community leaders, gone for a kayak with nature enthusiasts, visited an island by boat, talked to fishermen, brought touch tanks to bright-eyed children, and visited classrooms of students eager to take care of the ocean.

While some individuals and groups along the Eastern Shore are opposed to a marine protected area, there are also individuals and organizations who are supportive, or at least interested in exploring how a marine protected area on the Eastern Shore could benefit both the communities that have depended on this coast for generations, and the environment.

These differing perspectives are apparent at the Advisory Committee table, where the official government-led process takes place. There are two main issues that need to be addressed at the forefront of these discussions.

The first is the issue of potential impacts on the local inshore lobster fishery. CPAWS Nova Scotia is much more concerned about industrial impacts and habitat destruction from bottom trawling, than we are about impacts from inshore lobster pots. The issue of “no-take” has consumed much energy and attention, with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) rightly concluding that the MPA will not impact the inshore lobster fishery.

The second issue deals with open net-pen finfish farms along the Eastern Shore. These industrial scale fish-farms would be hugely damaging to the environment and the inshore fishery. There should be no place for such activities within a coastal marine protected area along the Eastern Shore, but DFO has yet to take this threat off-the-table.

Communities on the Eastern Shore fought tirelessly to keep finfish aquaculture out of their coastal waters in the past, but recent announcements suggest that this threat could easily come back. Assurances must be provided that a future marine protected area would prohibit this ecologically harmful activity.

A year of discussions have taken place. Although some progress has been made, and some key sore-points have been addressed, there is still much work to do. Many more discussions will need to take place, many more arguments will ensue, and much more time will be required. CPAWS Nova Scotia we will be there every step of the way.



© Nick Hawkins



Photo: Nick Hawkins

Map of the proposed Eastern Shore Islands marine protected area.



Photo: Irwin Barrett

Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes

By: Chris Miller

If you have ever been to the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes wilderness, you know that it is a really special place. Despite being located less than 10km from downtown Halifax, this natural treasure contains abundant forests, lakes, waterways, rolling hills, and look-offs.

It's also a fun place for people to explore and enjoy. As you hike across this landscape, or paddle across the surface of one of the lakes, it's easy to forget that you are only a stone's throw away from the largest urban area in Atlantic Canada. That contrast between the closeness of the city and that feeling of remote wilderness, defines the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes experience.

Good news came for Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes in April. That's when the Halifax Regional Municipality announced that it had successfully purchased several new properties for the wilderness park.

In total, about 135 hectares of land will be added to existing protected areas. These land purchases establish key access points to the wilderness from the communities of Timberlea and Kingswood.

When combined with land purchases accomplished last year, the Halifax Regional Municipality has now acquired 215 hectares of land at Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes. That's nearly three times the size of Point Pleasant Park.

For the very first time, the federal government is now contributing funds directly for the land purchases. This is something that CPAWS Nova Scotia has been working towards for several years.

Highways and bridges and other infrastructure are often funded jointly between various levels of government, so why not land purchases for a wilderness park as well?

For the most recent land purchases, the federal government contributed \$860,000 in funding. This is a very good start. It also means that the federal, provincial, and municipal governments are now all moving in the same direction to protect Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes. Or, rather, they are all paddling in the same direction, which is refreshing to see.

CPAWS Nova Scotia was the first to approach the federal government about federal funding for the wilderness park. We presented to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development on Parliament Hill in 2016, and pitched the idea of federal investment for Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes.

We hope that the federal government will continue to stay involved until all of the properties needed for the wilderness park have been acquired. Key parcels of land, particularly on the eastern edge of the wilderness near Susies, Quarry, and Fox Lakes, still must be purchased.

A big thank you to the many folks who have worked hard to protect this wilderness over the years. I first started working on this campaign way back in the 1990's, so it's impressive to see the overall level of support continue to rise and to look back on the important progress that has been made over the years protecting this near-urban wilderness.

There's still much work left to do. But for now, please take a moment to celebrate this important conservation victory!

Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Timeline

- 2019 Halifax Regional Municipality acquires 135 hectares for the regional park.
- 2019 Federal government provides funding for land acquisitions for the first time.
- 2018 Halifax Regional Municipality acquires Hobsons Lake property for the regional park (80 hectares).
- 2016 Halifax Regional Municipality turns down development proposal for lands within the conceptual park boundary of the regional park.
- 2015 Nova Scotia government expands protection on public lands by adding 451 hectares to the existing provincial protected wilderness area.
- 2009 Nova Scotia government officially protects 1,317 hectares of public lands for protected wilderness area.
- 2007 Nova Scotia government commits to protecting public lands within Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes.
- 2006 Halifax Regional Municipality approves regional plan, which includes a regional park for Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes.



Photo: Irwin Barrett



Your CPAWS Nova Scotia team

Photo: Mark Santos



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