



# Conservation in Nova Scotia





CPAWS is Canada's voice for wilderness. For over 45 years, we've played a lead role in creating over two-thirds of Canada's protected areas.

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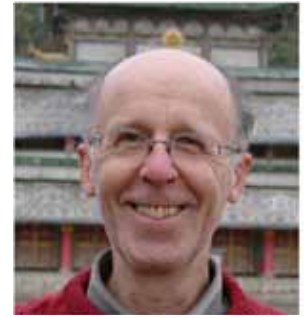
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## President's Message

We are delighted to bring the latest issue of WildEast to you! As usual, the Nova Scotia Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society has been busily promoting the protection of natural heritage, even in the thick of winter. We focus on all aspects of good stewardship, including the creation of parks and protected wildernesses, good management of these protected areas, conservation-oriented marine management, and maintaining public trust in the stewardship of regional natural heritage.



One of the strengths of our organization is that we stay on top of the work until the job is done, often over many years. The conservation progress that has been achieved over the past year is evidence of our tenacity and focus. We undertake work in both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. This issue of WildEast covers the whole gamut and brings news of some very successful ventures, notably the huge steps that have been taken in Nova Scotia (with CPAWS help) to achieve the goal of setting aside at least 12% of the province's lands and inland waters at the highest levels of internationally-recognized protection. We also express our delight about progress made towards the goal of a well-managed national park for Sable Island, while examining next steps to protect the ecological integrity of this special place. We bring news of the chapter's stance on greenbelting in Halifax, an urban area that is surrounded by outstanding natural areas that remain relatively undisturbed (a rare condition in the world). On the marine front, we renew our call for better protection of the Bay of Fundy and provide an update on progress towards the creation by the Government of Canada of a 'marine protected area' on St. Anne's Bank, to the east of Cape Breton Island.

The Nova Scotia Chapter of CPAWS is grateful for the assistance provided by several people who might properly be called 'staff-volunteers'. They switch seamlessly from one role to another. Jennifer Smith and Susan Murray were exemplary in this regard. The chapter remains indebted also to Judith Cabrita, who has long held the operation together with a good-humoured spirit of steely determination. My thanks also to Chris Miller, CPAWS' National Conservation Biologist, for his relentless conservation work, evidence of which you will find in this issue, and to Irwin Barrett, whose photographs make this issue a joy to behold. We hope you enjoy this newsletter and will continue to support the chapter's efforts. We welcome volunteers in every capacity. If you would like to help us financially (we do need it), please visit our website ([www.cpawsns.org](http://www.cpawsns.org)) and click on the "donate now" link.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Willison  
CPAWS Nova Scotia, President

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A big thank you to MEC, McCutcheon Foundation, and HRM community grants for their financial support for publishing *WildEast*.



### About the cover

A serene waterfall in the hardwood forests of the  
Wentworth Valley: a newly protected site.  
(Photo: Irwin Barrett)





*Irwin Barrett*

*Sandy Bay Beach at twilight, Port Joli, Nova Scotia*

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# Halifax needs a greenbelt



## The Nova Scotia government has started to build a greenbelt around Halifax. When will the City step up?

**By: Chris Miller**

*The following article was published in the Halifax weekly, The Coast, in August 2013.*

A greenbelt is starting to form around the edge of the city and that's a good thing. That near-urban wilderness, with its many lakes and vast forests, is something that makes Halifax such a great place to live.

Want to go for a hike in the woods? No problem. Want to go for a swim in a remote lake and be the only one there? Check. Want to venture out to the shore and sit on a rock and watch the waves without having to jump over a fence or skirt around a no trespassing sign? Consider it done.

In fact, I'm willing to bet that many of us have our own favourite little places to go to get away from the busy streets and sidewalks of the city, especially in summer.

For me, it's a place called the Birch Cove Lakes. It's only about 5km from downtown Halifax, or about two kilometres from Rockingham where I grew up, and I can go for a really great wilderness hike actually inside the old city limits of Halifax.

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*Above: Canoeists enjoying the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness near Halifax. (Photo: Irwin Barrett)*

*Right: A greenbelt is starting to emerge around Halifax with the creation of new protected areas by the Nova Scotia government. (Map generated from NSE website)*



Nine of the lakes in this area are arranged in a big loop, so it's possible to take a canoe from one lake to another, and through a few meandering streams, and end up right back where you started without ever having to backtrack.

But here's the bit that might, or might not, come as a surprise. The City – and by that I mean the Halifax Regional Municipality government – has done nary a thing to protect this incredible natural asset we have. Sure, baby steps here and there, a new map maybe and a promise to do something down the road, but nothing substantive to actually protect the wilderness near the city or to control the expensive problem of suburban sprawl.

By contrast, it's actually the Nova Scotia government that's stepping up. Earlier this month, the province added an additional 7,000 hectares of land to the system of parks and protected areas near the city. That's equivalent in size to roughly one hundred new Point Pleasant Parks. Yup, that's right, one hundred new Point Pleasant Parks.

It included a 465 hectare expansion to the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness so that the protected area now reaches all the way from Clayton Park to Tantallon and crosses the headwaters of two watersheds. The province also created a 1,177 hectare protected area at Pockwock Lake that conserves some really great old forest, but also helps protect the city's drinking water supply.

The Nova Scotia government created the Rogues Roost protected wilderness area, conserving over 18km of

public coastline on the Chebucto Peninsula. At 1,193 hectares in size, the new park contains ample opportunities for coastal hiking and sea kayaking, and is kind of like Peggy's Cove, but without all the tourists.

They also established a 631 hectare nature reserve in the Sackville River watershed that will help protect the river. And, this follows the creation of the 283 hectare Sackville Lakes Provincial Park earlier this year. The biggest expansion was to the existing Waverley-Salmon River Long Lake protected wilderness area where 3,228 hectares were added to the park, including the shorelines of over 20 lakes.

If you look at a map of the city now showing the new parks, you can actually start to see a greenbelt forming around the urban core of the city. This, thanks to the many community groups and volunteers who have pushed for the protection of these important places over so many years, and to the Nova Scotia government who actually listened to their concerns.

Meanwhile, the Halifax Regional Municipality continues to twiddle its thumbs and do practically nothing to contribute to the provincial and community efforts to protect wilderness near the city, even though the municipality has everything to gain by reigning in the problem of suburban sprawl.

They've largely dismissed the call to add greenbelting to the HRM regional plan. Sure, there is some window-dressing in there in the 5-year review, but it's mostly about renaming the status quo and calling green strips between houses and businesses a greenbelt. That's hardly a plan.

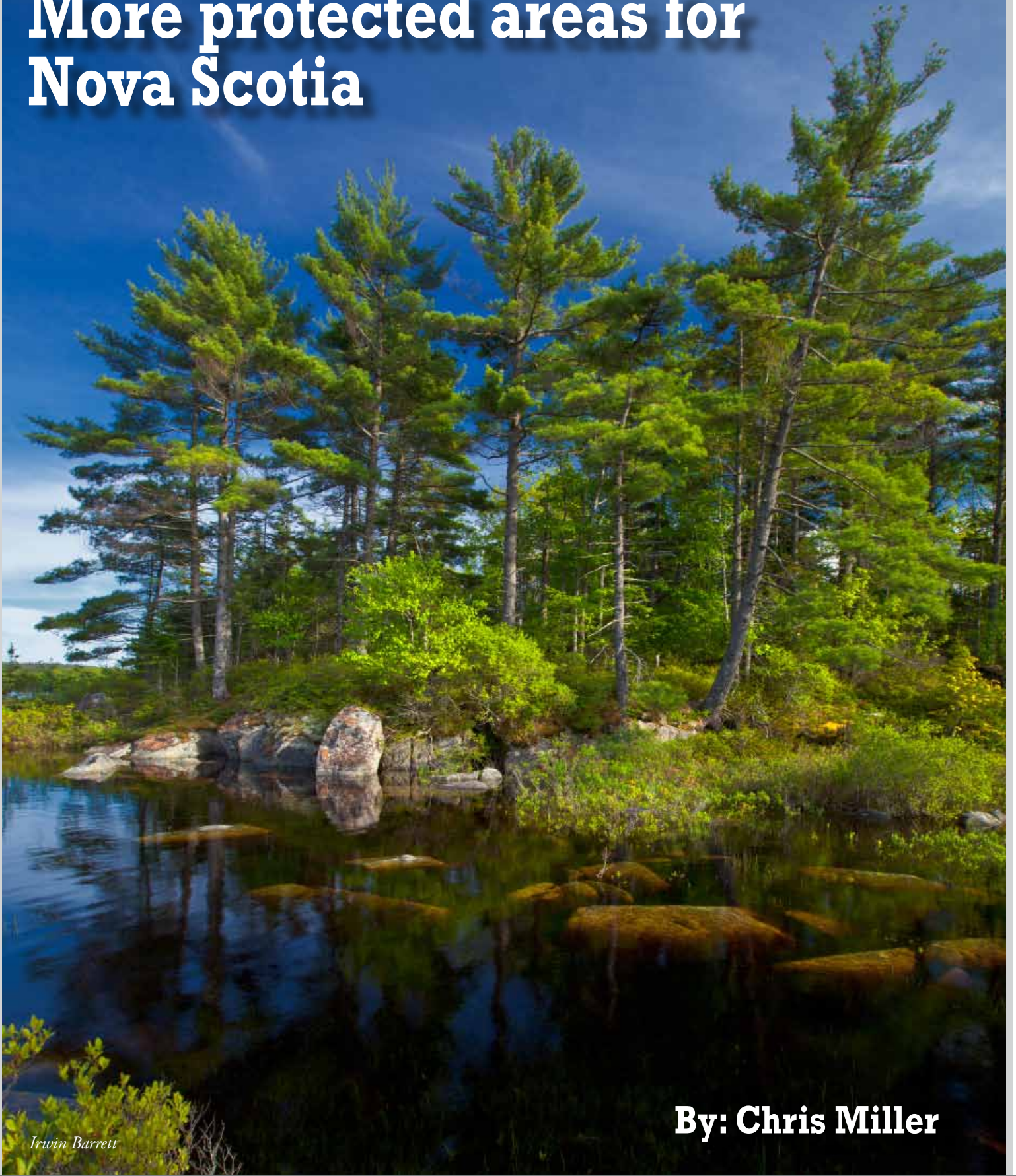
The greenbelt that was established around Toronto several years ago was created by provincial legislation and has been a success on multiple fronts. Perhaps it's time for a similar approach to be taken in Halifax because leaving it up to the municipality just ain't working out.

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# More protected areas for Nova Scotia



**By: Chris Miller**

*Irwin Barrett*



The Nova Scotia government has followed through on its commitment to establish many new protected areas in the province. In total, approximately a quarter million hectares of conservation lands have been added to the system of protected areas, including some of the best remaining wilderness sites in the province.

The final protected areas plan was released in August 2013, after several rounds of public and stakeholder consultations, and many years of planning and scientific assessment to identify the most ecologically-significant areas in the province.

When fully implemented, Nova Scotia will rise to second in Canada for the total percentage of land protected, behind only British Columbia. With the release of the final protected areas plan, Nova Scotia increases from roughly 9.5% protection to 13% immediately, with additional sites identified to achieve 14% protection in the coming years. By comparison, our neighbours in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island are at 4.5%, 3%, and 2.5% respectively.

Included in the final protected areas plan are some truly impressive sites, including the old growth forests and rich floodplains of the West Branch of the St. Mary's River in Guysborough County; long stretches of wilderness coastline in southeastern Cape Breton; rolling hardwood hills in the Cobequid Mountains; near-urban wilderness sites near Halifax including an expansion to the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area; and important provincial landmarks such as Kelly's Mountain and Cape Smokey in Cape Breton.

A recent study by Global Forest Watch Canada shows that the protected area system in Nova Scotia now conserves almost half of all remaining large intact forests in the province.<sup>1</sup> This has also caught the attention of the World Resources Institute, based in Washington D.C., which flagged Nova Scotia as making significant progress in protecting natural areas and intact forest.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the protection of an additional quarter million hectares of land in Nova Scotia is a major step forward for conservation in the province. Once again, Nova Scotians are taking a lead role in Canada to protect biodiversity, with strong support from First Nations, community groups, local businesses, academics, and the tourism sector.

CPAWS would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took the time to stand up for Nova Scotia's wilderness and supported the creation of the new protected areas. We would also like to thank the many hard working staff in government who have championed the protection of these high conservation value areas and who have worked so diligently over the years to achieve this landmark conservation outcome.

*Cont'd next page...*

1. Global Forest Watch Canada. 2013. *Nova Scotia's proposed protected areas: How well do they capture intact forests?*

2. World Resources Institute. August 2013. *New Mapping Technology: Nova Scotia's powerful ally in protecting valuable forests*



*Irwin Barrett*



CPAWS played a very important role in the creation of these new protected areas. We were part of the multi-year negotiation with industry and government to identify high-priority areas for conservation and to raise broad-based support for their successful implementation.

We have also undertaken considerable on-the-ground assessments of the new protected areas to verify the presence of ecologically-significant features and worked with a variety of stakeholders to promote their protection.

As a trustworthy, science-based organization with local knowledge and grassroots support, we were uniquely positioned to advance the protected area proposal and work collaboratively with Departments of Environment and Natural Resources, as well as the Premier's Office.

These frequent communications helped advance the protected areas proposal and ensure that conservation matters were top-of-mind with key decision-makers.

We would like to recognize that the government-led process to establish the new protected areas was top-notch, including many rounds of public consultations and sessions in many communities around the province. The interactive mapping used for the consultations was also quite impressive and helped generate important feedback on specific conservation sites. To view the new protected areas and learn more about each new conservation site, check out <http://novascotia.ca/parksandprotectedareas/>. Links are also available from the [cpawsns.org](http://cpawsns.org) website.



Andrew Chow



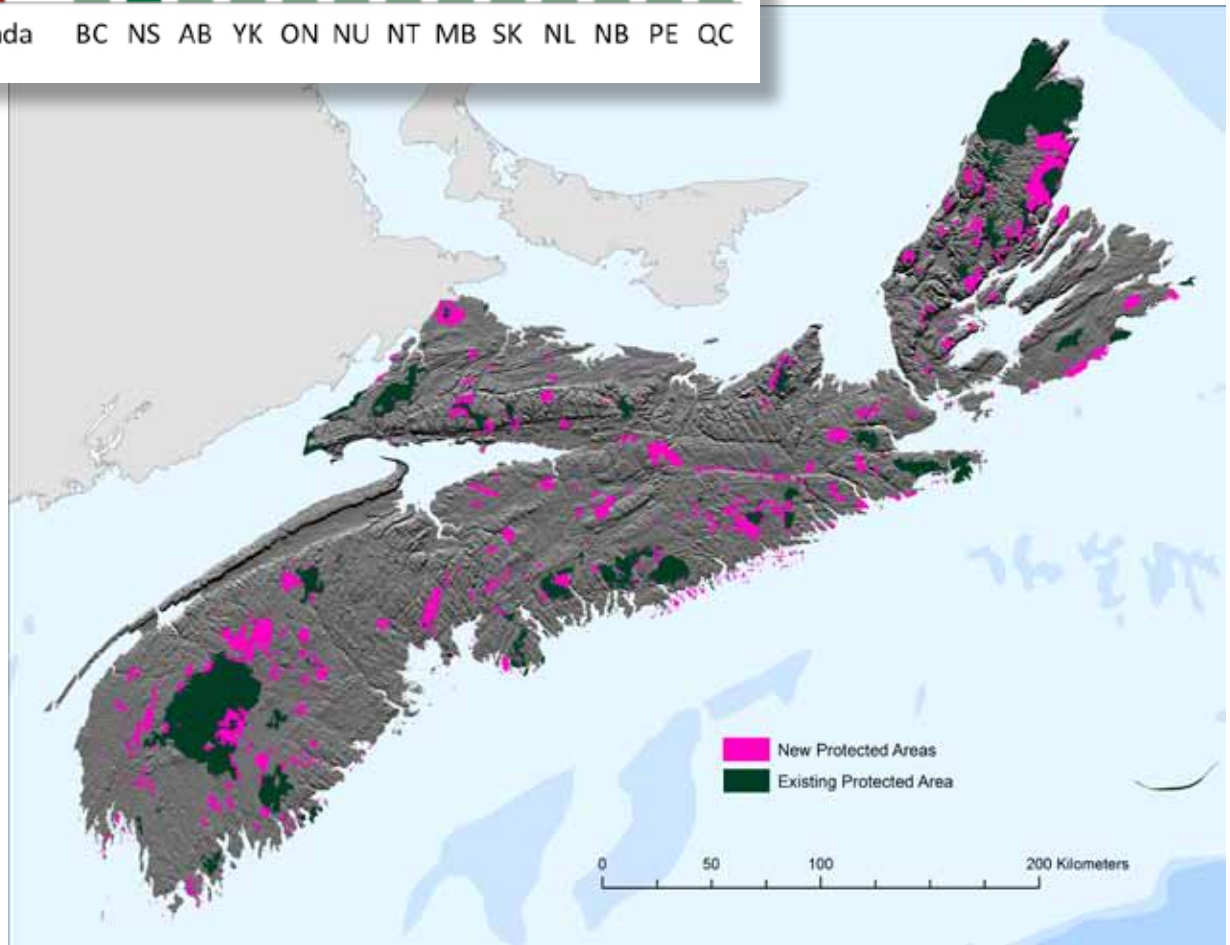
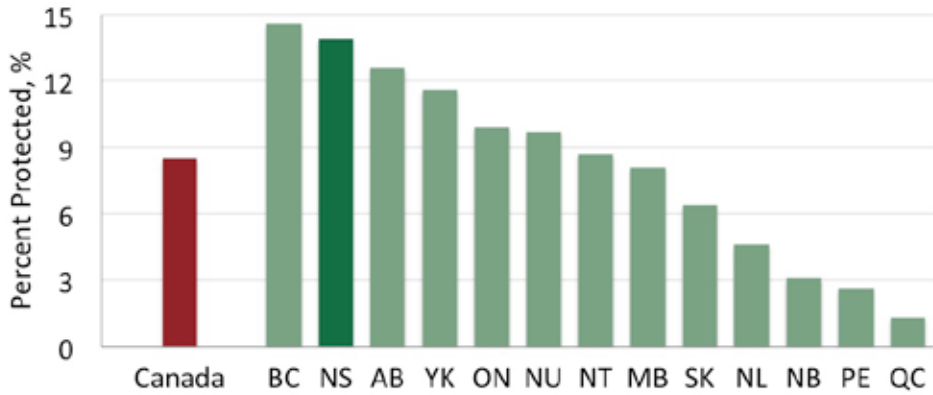
Moving forward, more work will be required to remove conditions attached to certain sites and achieve protection on 14% of the landscape. This will require undertaking additional research and field assessments, as well as ensuring timelines are kept for official designations. A number of sites located in highly-fragmented areas of the province, with long

histories of human use and settlement, will also need considerable restoration work as well. This will likely include removing old logging roads, ensuring previous cut-overs are re-vegetated with the proper mix of Acadian forest species, and ensuring that connectivity prevents certain protected areas in highly disturbed landscapes from becoming “islands”.

Also, the national and international targets for protected areas have risen to 17%, so there is additional work required to identify new protected areas, increase the resiliency of the conservation sites against human-impacts and climate change, and to ensure proper management of the wilderness areas, nature reserves, and provincial parks. Nova Scotia has become a leader in Canada for the protection of natural areas, so being the first province in the country to achieve this 17% national target would be an important achievement. Let’s get to work and make it happen.

Once again, thank you to everyone who helped establish all these new protected areas. We are making very good progress.

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# Sable Island National Park Reserve

**By: Chris Miller**

*The following article was published in the Chronicle-Herald on July 3, 2013.*

Sable Island is often described as existing somewhere between the realm of fantasy and reality. And, why not? It's truly a magical place. A thin crescent of sand in the deep North Atlantic covered with dunes and wild horses and surrounded by countless shipwrecks.

No wonder most Nova Scotians hold a special place in their heart for Sable Island. This place survives despite the harshness of the ocean and despite the fleeting sands that should just wash away, but don't.

For the most part, Sable Island has been very well managed over the years, looked after by a handful of incredibly dedicated researchers, government employees, and individuals. Nova Scotians are lucky to have a defender like Zoe Lucas, who has lived on Sable Island for over forty years, to look after the place with watchful eyes and undertake important research to understand this unique and ever-changing place.

And, of course, Nova Scotians are always quick to run to the defense of Sable Island against too many visitors, intrusions by oil and gas interests, more than one ill-conceived tourist adventure, and even plans long ago to remove the horses from the island.

Yet, despite this, Sable Island has always somehow kind of fallen through the cracks in terms of environmental protection and receiving the necessary funds to look after the island properly. A few years ago there was an attempt to shut down the research station on the island that Nova Scotians fought against and won. We value the island, yet funding to support its protection has always had to be scrapped together from the bottom of the budgets of several departments and various levels of government and is never secure or consistent.



Fortunately, the outlook for Sable Island is improving, especially with the designation of the island as a national park reserve last week. As a national park, Parks Canada has the tools at its disposal to manage the island for conservation and to limit visitation to the island if the public demands this. The Agency is also required by law to manage national parks for ecological integrity as a first priority and is a well-respected Agency internationally for its conservation work.

Although the park is now official, the work to protect Sable Island is only just beginning. Here are a few things that must be done soon.

### **Strong management plan**

Parks Canada needs to move quickly to develop a strong and effective management plan that puts nature conservation first. This plan must be developed in the next few years and should layout the priorities for managing the island, including setting limits on the number of visitors each year, establishing research priorities, and providing better protections for species-at-risk on the island, as a few examples. It's imperative that the development of this plan be open and transparent, and involve the public every step of the way.

### **Oil and gas concerns**

Sable Island should be entirely off limits to oil and gas exploration and development, but unfortunately it's not. That's in part due to the Offshore Accord Implementation Acts taking precedence over all other pieces of legislation pertaining to the offshore, including the National Parks Act. This means that where normally oil and gas activities would not be allowed to occur in national parks, in this special circumstance Parks Canada does not have the final say.

Environmental groups proposed several amendments to the bill that created Sable Island National Park Reserve to prevent any oil and gas activity occurring in the national park, and those amendments were brought forward, but ultimately voted down at committee. The legislation that was passed does include an outright ban on surface drilling on the island, and out to one nautical mile, and attempts to limit impacts of surface exploration to only those activities deemed "low impact".

The public will need to remain vigilant to protect Sable Island from the threat of oil and gas activities. Seismic activity was undertaken on the island in the 1990's, involving driving thumper trucks onto the beach and stringing listening devices across the island. The Nova Scotia government and the Canadian government need to establish strong directives to the Offshore Petroleum Board to limit any incursions onto, or beneath, Sable Island for drilling or seismic.

### **Limits to visitation**

Sable Island cannot, and should not, accommodate large amounts of visitors and many Nova Scotians simply want Sable Island left alone as much as possible.

Parks Canada should move quickly to limit the number of visitors allowed on the island each year to current levels, which is approximately a few hundred people, and should be very concerned about the prospect of cruise ships dropping anchor just off the island and turning Sable Island into a tourist destination.

### **Implementation**

National parks require adequate funding to ensure a strong conservation plan is properly implemented and visitation experiences developed that do not impact ecological integrity. Developing a visitors centre in downtown Halifax worthy of Sable Island will also require capital investments. When an urban national park was announced for the Rouge Valley just outside Toronto recently, it came with a substantial investment from the federal government. Similarly, Sable Island will require such funding and Parks Canada cannot be expected to simply absorb a new national park without a corresponding increase in funding to manage it properly.

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## Bay of Fundy needs your help

**T**he Bay of Fundy is a national treasure, famous for its high tides, abundance of whales and seabirds, and spectacular shoreline. It holds a special place in the hearts and minds of Canadians right across the country. And, anyone who has hiked to the point at Cape Split, witnessed the dory rips at Cape D'Or, or walked the trail around Cape Chignecto, knows the power of this place and its sheer raw beauty.

With all of the tourism ads in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick showing the Bay of Fundy coastline, whale-watching tours, and sea-kayaking adventures, one might assume that the Bay of Fundy is well protected, that its ecological riches are conserved for future generations, and the necessary steps have been taken to look after this special little corner of the planet. Well, guess again.

Despite the conservation significance of the Bay of Fundy, this impressive marine ecosystem still lacks protection. No real marine protected areas have been established in the outer Bay of Fundy to protect the important areas where whales congregate each year. There are a handful of coastal protected areas in place, but the vast majority of the tidal salt marshes and rich mudflats of the Bay lack protection and are vulnerable to impacts from coastal development.

CPAWS is calling on the federal and provincial governments to establish a network of marine protected areas in the Bay of Fundy, and for Parks Canada to make good on its commitment to establish a National Marine Conservation Area here. This needs to be done quickly, since there is increasing industrial development pressure on the Bay of Fundy.

A relatively new development proposal has come forward that would essentially turn the magnificent Scots Bay into an industrial lagoon for tidal energy production, through the construction of a man-made structure that would run the 10km distance from Cape Split to Baxters Harbour.

The proposal for Scots Bay is only in the early stages and the Nova Scotia government has yet to grant the necessary permits and licenses for this project to proceed further at this time. It's important that the government hear from you about the importance of protecting the Bay of Fundy.

Conservation planning must come BEFORE industrial development, and the long overdue network of marine protected areas is urgently needed.



# Conservation notes

## MV Miner to be removed from Scatarie Island

It's been several years now since the bulk carrier, MV Miner, broke its tow-line and washed ashore on Scatarie Island. The ship is now badly rusted and is breaking apart by strong North Atlantic storms.

After several failed attempts to have the ship removed, there appears to be renewed effort to rid the island of the MV Miner. It looks like the Nova Scotia government will soon be placing a public tender to have the ship cut up and removed, and then seek repayment from the Federal government.

The rugged coastline of Nova Scotia can't be allowed to become a dumping ground for lost ships being tugged overseas for disposal. Legislation needs to be updated so that proper insurance is a prerequisite for any companies doing the towing.

Scatarie Island is a protected wilderness area located off the coast of eastern Cape Breton, containing important coastal ecosystems and bird populations.

## Birch Cove Lakes land negotiations underway

In a unanimous decision by Regional Council in September, the Halifax Regional Municipality has decided to proceed with land negotiations for the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness park.

The Birch Cove Lakes are one of Halifax's best-kept secrets, containing over a dozen wilderness lakes and large tracts of intact forests less than 10km from downtown. The Nova Scotia government has protected most of the public lands within the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness, but the privately-owned lands remain vulnerable to development.

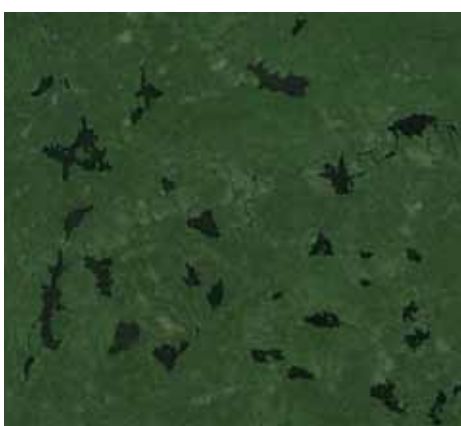
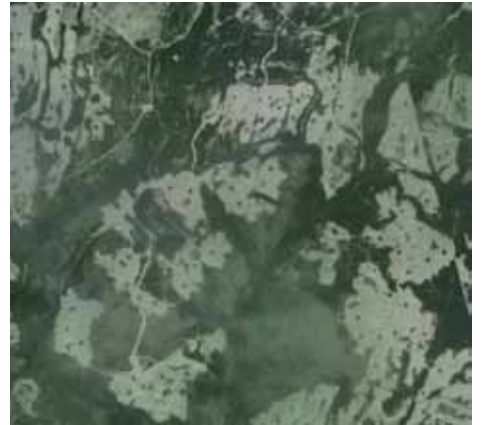
The City promised in 2006 to acquire privately-owned lands for the regional park, but since that time has made very little progress to fulfill this commitment. The decision by Regional Council to proceed with formal land negotiations is welcome news and will hopefully lead to progress in acquiring important conservation lands on Susies, Quarry, and Fox Lakes. Stay tuned.

## St. Ann's Bank marine area inches toward protection

A proposal to establish a large marine protected area off the eastern coast of Cape Breton Island is moving forward at St. Ann's Bank, albeit slowly. The latest round of public and stakeholder sessions has wrapped up and the Federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans must now sign off on the proposal to make the conservation area official.

The St. Ann's Bank Marine Protected Area will conserve an important expanse of shelf, slope, and channel habitat off the coast of Cape Breton, near Scatarie Island. The area provides important habitat for leatherback sea turtles, as well as deep-sea corals and a high diversity of fish species at the edge of the shelf.

The St. Ann's Bank site was first identified as a candidate marine protected area way back in 2009 and has been proceeding slowly toward official protection ever since. CPAWS is pushing for the establishment of this conservation site and is supportive of comprehensive marine network planning taking place off the coast of Nova Scotia.







*Jill Sturdy*

*CPAWS storms the Hill. Conservation experts from across Canada gather on Parliament Hill to put pressure on the government to protect more wilderness.*

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## Get involved

CPAWS Nova Scotia is always looking for volunteers to help out with our conservation work. Several volunteer positions are available. If you're interested, please drop us a line or send us an email. We'd love to hear from you. (cmiller@cpaws.org; 902-446-4155)

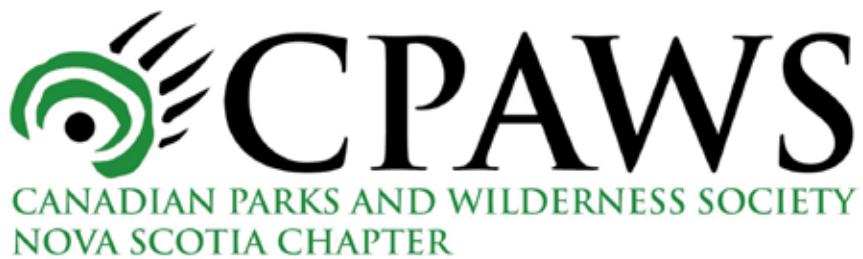
## Make a donation

We rely on the generous donations from our supporters to undertake important conservation work. Please help us protect nature. By making a donation, or becoming a monthly donor, you will help leave an important wilderness legacy for future generations. Please visit [www.cpawsns.org](http://www.cpawsns.org) to donate.



## Your CPAWS team in Nova Scotia

Chris, Susan, and Jennifer



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