

Mowat to give land to Nova Scotia Nature Trust

By **JAMES KELLER**
The Canadian Press

Farley Mowat has a simple philosophy for environmental conservation: keep people as far away as possible.

"There's no active role for human beings in conservation; what you do is you find a piece of land and you just leave it alone," says the 86-year-old author and environmentalist, who is donating 80 hectares of coastal land in Cape Breton to a nature conservation group.

"I believe only nature can do it and that man, despite all his brains, just gets in the way. He's like a monkey wrench thrown into the smoothly oiled machinery of evolution. We screw things up."

Mowat, whose autobiographical writing has long focused on the environment and endangered wildlife, was set to donate the four-kilometre stretch of coastal land in southwestern Cape Breton to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust at a news conference today.

The donation will allow the group to protect the area from development, largely by simply letting nature take its course. The nature trust will ensure people can visit and enjoy the land, as long as they don't disturb the habitat by leaving garbage behind, disturbing the wildlife or using motorized vehicles, for example.

Mowat and his wife Claire bought the land three decades ago and spend their summers in a farmhouse there. They'll continue to own the house, which will likely be turned over to the nature trust



Farley Mowat

(CP)

in the future.

The area, known as Farley's Ark, runs along the coast of St. Peter's Bay, with a mix of rocky shores, wetlands and forest. Mowat says he has seen more than 200 types of birds and mammals.

When he first purchased the land, the area had degenerated after decades of farming and agriculture, parts of its lush forests reduced to a swampy mess.

"Thirty years ago, when we came

here, it was breathing hard and just barely clinging to existence," he says. "Nature has restored herself, now it looks a little bit like the old-time forests that were here before white man arrived, and it's full of life — full of birds, full of animals."

Mowat approached the Nova Scotia Nature Trust to ensure the land continues to thrive long after he's gone, a gesture he hopes will highlight to need to protect more of the province's wilderness and encourage other landowners to follow his lead.

The nature trust says as much as 95 per cent of Nova Scotia's coastline is privately owned, and more than 70 per cent of all land in the province is in private hands. In contrast, the group says governments in other parts of Canada control more than 90 per cent of the landscape.

The group's executive director, Bonnie Sutherland, says landowners are

free to develop the land and have few incentives to ensure ecologically sensitive areas are protected.

"I think many Nova Scotians don't realize it because so much of our coast is wild and beautiful and we just take it for granted that it's always going to be that way," says Sutherland.

"(Private ownership) is not necessarily a bad thing, it just means the solutions here are different. It's not going to be a government-based solution. It's finding creative ways to help landowners understand what's significant about their land and what they can do to help keep our natural landscapes intact."

Mowat's donation falls under a federal program that eliminates the capital gains tax on land donations to conservation groups and makes such donations tax deductible.

The Nova Scotia government has promised to protect 12 per cent of the province's land mass by the year 2015.

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