

Sunday Herald

# The Nova Scotian

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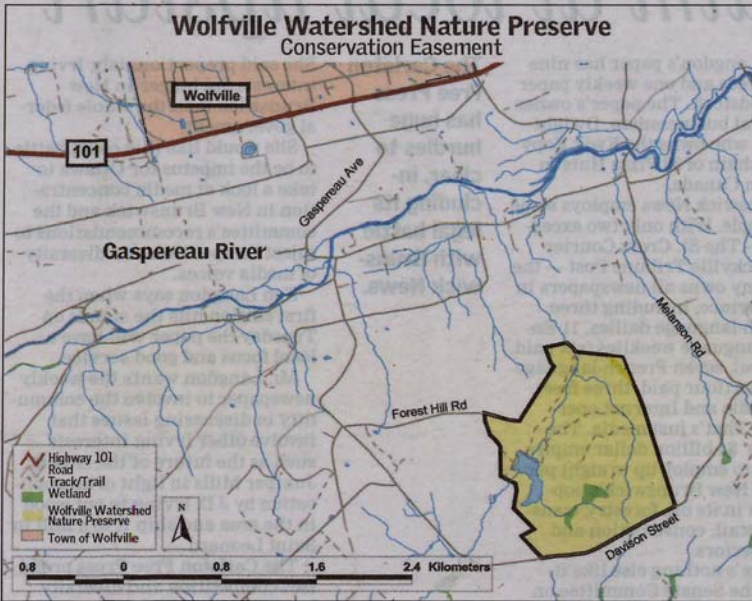
## TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

Wolfville pioneers a new way to  
conserve land for future generations

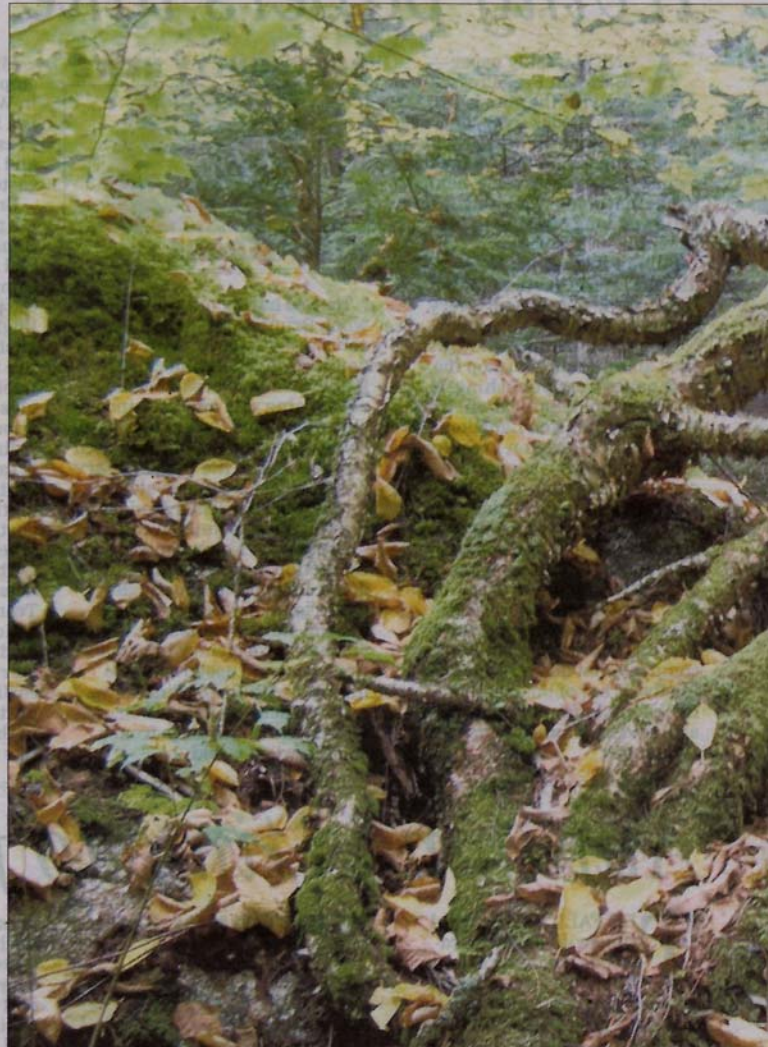
Also: Silver Donald Cameron  
wonders where all the apples went

SILVER DONALD CAMERON 2 / HARRY BRUCE 4 / MAUREEN DOWD 5 / BOOKS 11-16

COVERSTORY



(NOVA SCOTIA NATURE TRUST)



Moss covers the roots of a tree clinging to a rock in the Wolfville Watershed Nature Preserve.

# Trust goes to town

## Preserving Wolfville's old watershed could be example for other communities

By IAN FAIRCLOUGH  
Valley Bureau

FOREST HILL

**T**HE RAVENS are saying a lot more than "nevermore" on this day in the newly-designated Wolfville Watershed Nature Preserve in Kings County.

A half dozen or more of the birds are squawking and flying over a ravine in the preserve, using their vast array of calls. Occasionally, looking up through the canopy of trees over the path that runs along the top of the ravine, it's possible to catch a glimpse of the large black birds swooping overhead, quite possibly upset at the bald eagle sitting on a limb across the ravine.

But if the noise of ravens is not your idea of the sound of nature, there are plenty of other birds in this 605-acre parcel of land south of Wolfville. Various warblers can be found on the ground, at the top of the canopy and in between. Barred owls can be heard at times, and the scattering of blue jay feathers on a trail is an indication that one of the big-eyed hunters may have been nearby. The many birds, coupled with the tran-



NOVA SCOTIA NATURE TRUST

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Last in a series of stories profiling parcels of land protected by the Nova Scotia Nature Trust. Visit their website at [www.nsntr.ca](http://www.nsntr.ca)

quil sound of the water running along Duncanson Brook, makes it easy to forget that this area is only a few kilometres from Wolfville.

The new preserve is the latest jewel in the Nova Scotia Nature Trust's crown of unspoiled land in Nova Scotia, and the latest in innovative ways to keep natural.

The land is the town of Wolfville's watershed, and its stewardship has been turned over to the nature trust through a conservation easement to ensure it remains in its natural state forever.

The town last used the reservoir on the land in 1994, and now uses a well system. Under the terms of the conservation easement, signed earlier this month, the

town has the right to use the reservoir in the event of an emergency with the existing water supply. But beyond that, the land can be used only for hiking and enjoying nature in all its splendour.

The easement permanently restricts any kind of development on the site and ensures that any activities there are in keeping with preserving the site's natural state. That means that future town councils or any other owners must always abide by the restrictions and cannot undertake any kind of development.

The project has been "very exciting for us," says Wolfville Mayor Bob Stead.

"This is important because it allows us to set aside a piece of land that can be protected," Mr. Stead said. "We needed a vehicle so a future council couldn't change (current council's decision)."

He sees the watershed as a place of natural beauty as well as an ecological gem that needed protection.

"There aren't very many places left on earth as pristine as that area, especially with the ocean view," he said, mentioning the view of Cape Blomidon and the Minas Basin that would be available if the land was opened up to housing.



A stream trickles through a ravine in the preserve.

He said developers would likely pay a high price for land there because of the potential vista.

He said council was interested in the idea from the first time the nature trust contacted them around five years ago. But with no template for having the trust protect municipal land, "it was a hard

COVERSTORY



The preserve is protected from development through a conservation easement.

(Contributed)



The rare purple-fringed orchid grows in the preserve.

(JANICE FLYNN)



The preserve contains old-growth forest, where there are 250-300 year-old trees.

(Contributed)



erve.

(Contributed)

government a new tool for keeping land in its natural state "when, like the town of Wolfville, they are saying they need a level of protection beyond what they can do."

Now that the framework for protecting municipal land under easements is in place, Ms. Sutherland hopes more projects will come forward in Nova Scotia and across the country as they see it is possible.

"The response we've always had from government is that they couldn't do it. I think what they thought was that the laws were an impediment, but it was just a way of thinking," she said. "We discovered there are no barriers."

The land was attractive to the nature trust in part because it has old-growth forest consisting of 250 to 300-year-old hemlock trees climbing into the sky along the steep ravines. Many of the properties the trust protects and is interested in protecting contain old-growth forests, which are extremely rare in the province.

The nature trust says that only .01 per cent of Nova Scotia's current forests are old-growth, with similar stands being

lost over the years to agricultural or residential use. The Wolfville property is one of the last such stands in the province, it says.

Ms. Sutherland says the land would surely have been lost years ago if not for its use as the town water supply. She said watersheds are often still pristine areas because of their use, and as they are abandoned or relegated to backup sources there are opportunities to protect them.

She said the trust approached several municipalities five years ago about protecting land, but Wolfville was the only one to respond.

She said the land, beyond being ecologically important, provides an "irreplaceable resource" for the local community as a hiking area and an ecological and educational research site. It is already being used by Acadia University for that purpose.

Wolfville naturalist Bernard Forsythe is one of the volunteer "property guardians" for the preserve.

Some volunteers look after the preserve and report damage, others may give guided walks and others compile

sightings of plants and wildlife.

Mr. Forsythe, who said he remembers going into one area of the preserve 50 years ago with classmates to plant a stand of red spruce trees to replace others that were logged, recently found a rare purple-fringed orchid on the property.

Other plants on the site include pitcher plants, Rose Pogonia and spotted coral-root orchids.

He has also seen plenty of owls and eagles, turtles, signs of beavers and, one morning in the dew along a bog, bear tracks.

The trust has launched a fundraising campaign for an endowment to support the property guardians' work and other property monitoring, management and enforcement.

The \$150,000 fund is already two-thirds of the way to its goal after donations from internationally renowned artist Alex Colville, of Wolfville, nature trust members Curtis Chipman and Fred and Elizabeth Fountain, Marjorie Fountain, Jean Marsh and Scotia Investments.

slog developing the legal agreement" because lawyers had to make sure there was nothing that would prevent it. "This agreement has broken new ground by going beyond what has been done before," nature trust executive director Bonnie Sutherland says. She said it gives municipalities and