

Joint effort will help preserve *spectacular* piece of land

A generous senior citizen, Curtis Chipman, has contributed to a new

Regional FEATURE

WENDY ELLIOTT

nature preservation project being spearheaded by the town of Wolfville. The \$25,000 that Chipman is donating will become a stewardship fund for the maintenance of about 605 acres on the South Mountain. It is not the first time he has contributed.

Agreements on the protection of what was the old municipal reservoir are well underway thanks to discussions between Wolfville and the Nova Scotia Nature Trust.

Trust board member Michael de la Ronde said last week that together Chipman and the town are doing something spectacular. The town-owned lands

include a section of old-growth hemlock forest, which is crossed by what was once the old Post Road from Halifax.

Situated above town on the South Mountain, the treed parcel overlooks the Gaspereau Valley, Blomidon and the Minas Basin.

Originally Wolfville's watershed, a man-made lake on the site still feeds the two reservoirs at Reservoir Park.

So the watershed continues to function as a backup to Wolfville's water system.

"It is truly an incredible location," says Mayor Bob Stead, who has led the effort to preserve the lands. The showpiece is what is growing on them -- an old-growth forest of mostly hemlock, estimated to be more than 300-years-old.

"My interest is in seeing that piece of property protected in perpetuity," says Stead.

Acadia University biologist Soren Bondrup-Nielsen already has a graduate student keen to work on documenting the site. Old-growth forests are some of the most ecologically precious lands in Nova Scotia. Only 0.1 per cent of them remain.

Some 300-years-old, they have very large trees and large quantities of standing and lying deadwood, which is a "critical habitat for a

large number of species of birds, insects, mosses and lichens," the professor says.

At one time, the province was covered in old-growth forest, but human activity has modified the terrain to an extreme. The sheer size of the South Mountain lands adds to their ecological and scientific value. The area is almost three times the size of the 250-acre Acadia University campus.

De la Ronde says Wolfville's action is "an amazing move for a town toward conservation given the size of the parcel and where it is." He cites the town as the first municipality in the province to take such action.

The Nature Trust has approximately 4,000 acres under conservation

agreement in 15 or 16 different parcels, he noted. About 75 per cent of land in Nova Scotia is held privately, but 95 per cent

of coastline.

"We want to ensure that Nova Scotians have access to these valuable tracts of land," de la Ronde suggested.

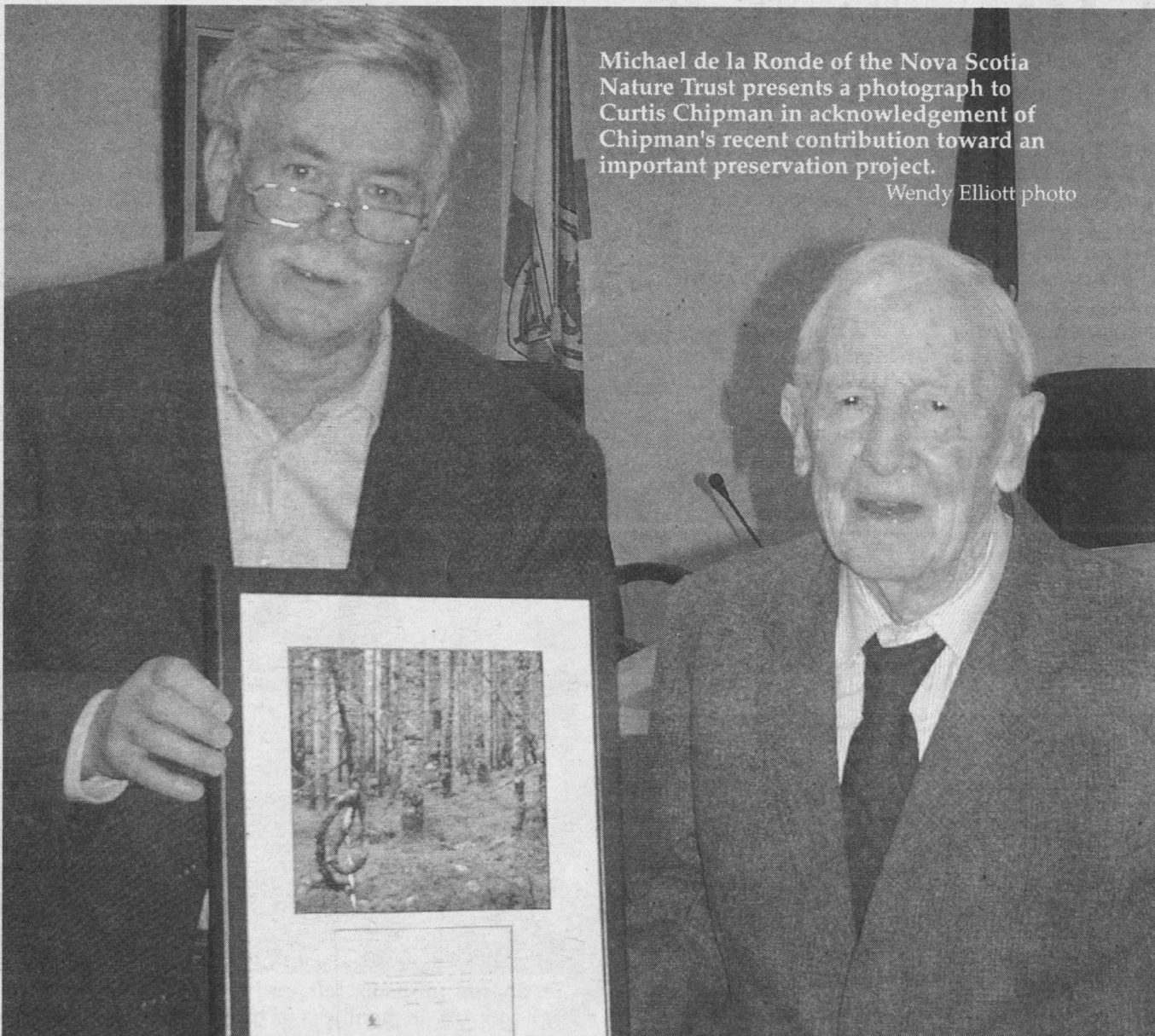
Council has established a committee called the South Mountain Watershed Area Preservation Working Group to oversee the project. Part of the committee's responsibility will be to establish permitted uses for the property, which will be set out in the Conservation Easement. It has already been decided, for example, that motorized vehicles will be prohibited.

Stead said it will likely be set aside for hiking, snowshoeing and skiing. "We want to protect it for eternity."

Although owned by the Town of Wolfville, the land lies within Kings County jurisdiction, so county councillor John Fuller is joining the working group.

Approvals are all expected to be in place early in February and formal changeover is anticipated for this coming fall. "We have to clear any impediments and talk to 22 adjacent landowners," noted Stead.

For further information check the trust website: www.nsnt.ca



Michael de la Ronde of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust presents a photograph to Curtis Chipman in acknowledgement of Chipman's recent contribution toward an important preservation project.

Wendy Elliott photo