

*For immediate release*

## **Nature Trust campaigns to save major ‘missing link’ in beloved Halifax urban wilderness**

Halifax, NS (October 17, 2019) – The Nova Scotia Nature Trust announced a 2.1 million dollar campaign today, to save an ecologically rich 232 hectare urban wildland. Securing the “Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector” will fill a critical gap in the wilderness and protect the heart of the beloved Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes from development. The land deal will help to preserve an important wildlife corridor, and treasured hiking and canoeing paradise, just minutes from downtown Halifax.

The 232 hectare (575 acre) property is located within an area known as the Blue Mountain - Birch Coves Lakes, a vast expanse of undeveloped wildlands between Hammonds Plains, Timberlea, and Halifax. It is one of the last, large, intact areas of urban wildlands in Halifax. The lands encompass a mosaic of extensive forests, bogs and wetlands rich in biodiversity, rocky barrens and hills, sparkling rivers and 3 pristine headwater lakes. The diverse habitats support over 150 species of birds including loons, osprey and woodpeckers, and many sensitive and at-risk species like Canada Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Common Nighthawk. The area is popular for hikers, paddlers, birdwatchers and anglers.

Bonnie Sutherland, the Nature Trust’s Executive Director, noted, “This amazing Halifax wildland was being considered for dense urban development, the fate of many of the private lands surrounding the Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes. That would not only have destroyed important biodiversity, but also any hope of keeping one of our last, large, unbroken urban wildlands intact.”

The Nature Trust has now secured a deal to acquire the property. They announced the good news to an enthusiastic crowd of over 500 people tonight in Halifax, including many individuals and organizations like the Ecology Action Centre and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, who have been fighting for decades to see the Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes area set aside as protected wilderness. More recently, the Friends of Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes, now with 400 members, has taken up the cause and is an active advocate for a regional wilderness park, with the apt slogan of “Hear the quiet!”

While final boundaries and type of protected area are still to be determined for the broader Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes area, the Nature Trust, community groups, the Municipality and the Province all share a common vision of a large protected urban wildland, bringing together multiple parcels of government-owned and private lands in some form of protection. Many of these parcels are not yet protected, and face the increasing threat of urban development.

The first big step towards fulfilling the urban wildland vision was the Province’s designation of two large Crown land blocks as Wilderness Area in 2009 and 2015, protecting 1767 hectares (4366 acres). Then in 2018 and 2019, the Municipality purchased and added 210 hectares (519 acres) of private lands. Neither the Province nor the Municipality was actively pursuing the Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector property, and citizens and community groups were growing increasingly concerned about threats to this central and highly strategic property. So, the Nature Trust stepped in to help.

The land purchase will fill the worrisome large gap between the existing protected sections of the wildlands, creating a contiguous 12 kilometer corridor important for wildlife, including the endangered Mainland moose. This corridor was identified as a priority greenspace to provide landscape

'connectivity' in the City's Green Network Plan. In all, 2209 hectares (5460 acres) will have been protected by the Nature Trust, the Province and the Municipality once this latest addition is complete.

The owners of the property, Robin Wilber and Bill Fenton, responded favourably to the Nature Trust's encouragement to add their lands to the Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes wilderness. They recognized that while forestry and urban development are important, some places, like their lands, are just so unique and so strategic for conservation, that they are truly irreplaceable.

Mr. Wilber, an active outdoorsman, liked the idea that protecting this near urban wildland would give more people the chance to explore and connect with nature, right in their own backyard.

Mr. Wilber noted, "As third generation president and owner of Elmsdale Lumber Company, I take the responsibility of managing our forest resource very seriously. Many years ago, my father coined the phrase, *"Wise use of woodlands means sustained multiple use."* Every piece of letterhead and every envelope leaving Elmsdale Lumber is embossed with this statement. Not only is this a way to honour his legacy but also a way to continue spreading this timeless message. In my opinion, the wisest use of this particular piece of land is to preserve it for public enjoyment and a protected piece of land for wildlife habit. Its proximity to urban living is icing on the cake. My dad would be proud."

The landowners agreed to forgo potential development, instead selling their land to the Nature Trust, to add to the growing protected area. They generously agreed to donate a sizable part of the land's value as a charitable gift. The remainder will be purchased by the Nature Trust.

Sutherland noted, "We hope their land conservation action, and generous donation, will inspire other major landowners in the city to follow their lead, helping to protect other areas of urban wildland—for nature and for people too."

The announcement was welcome news to the Friends of Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes, who see the land acquisition as another exciting step towards realizing their urban wilderness park vision. The group's Chair, Diana Whalen, "Seeing that this important link is going to be protected from development is an enormous boost to the future of a regional wilderness park, and an initiative by the Nature Trust that deserves a huge round of applause and our total support."

While the 2.1 million dollar fundraising goal is large, the Nature Trust is hopeful Nova Scotians, governments and the business community will step up generously, especially where the Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes is such a well-known and loved area. Sutherland noted growing public awareness and concern for environmental protection as well. Such a large protected greenspace is important in protecting biodiversity, and also providing important ecological benefits to the city, like clean air and water, carbon sequestration, and refuge from the busy city life.

"In the face of a growing biodiversity crisis, people are increasingly aware of the urgency of protecting habitat. And also more aware of how important getting out in nature is for our mental health and well-being," Sutherland noted. "This campaign gives people a great opportunity to take action to save nature, right here in the City."

For more information or to make a charitable donation to support the Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector Campaign, visit [www.nsnt.ca](http://www.nsnt.ca) or call (902) 425-5263. Volunteers keen to help raise funds and build awareness for the campaign and to help save nature right here in the city, are encouraged to reach out to the Nature Trust.

**For Broadcast use**

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust announced a 2.1 million dollar campaign today, to save an ecologically rich 230 hectare urban wildland. Securing the “Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector” will fill a critical gap in the wilderness and protect the heart of the beloved Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes from development. The land deal will help to preserve an important wildlife corridor, and treasured hiking and canoeing paradise, just minutes from downtown Halifax.

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***Backgrounder, photos and maps available at <http://nsnt.ca/media>***

***Interviews available:***

- Bonnie Sutherland, Nature Trust Executive Director
- Robin Wilber, Landowner
- Richard Vinson, Friends of Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes, Chair of Communications

**Media Contact:**

Jessica Bradford  
(902) 233-4224  
Cell (902) 440-5503  
[Jessica@nsnt.ca](mailto:Jessica@nsnt.ca)