

*For immediate release*

## **City Support Boosts Nature Trust's Efforts to Save 'Missing Link' in Beloved Urban Wilderness**

Halifax, NS (July 22, 2020) – The Nova Scotia Nature Trust is celebrating major funding support from the City of Halifax today, bringing the *Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector* a step closer to being protected forever. The 560 acre property connects the two separate parts of the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes wilderness, a treasured urban wildland and outdoor recreation destination. With the City's \$750,000 support, and \$1.9 million in other funds raised, the Nature Trust is reaching out to the community to bring in the final \$135,000. Mayor Mike Savage noted, "The protection of wilderness space is a priority for Council. I am proud to work with strong stakeholders like the Nova Scotia Nature Trust and others to ensure these spaces are protected in perpetuity."

The 227 hectare property is part of a vast expanse of undeveloped wilderness between Hammonds Plains, Timberlea, and Halifax. It encompasses a beautiful mosaic of forests, wetlands, bogs and barrens, rivers and lakes and supports a rich diversity of wildlife. The area provides exceptional recreation opportunities just minutes from downtown Halifax and is popular with hikers, paddlers, birdwatchers and anglers.

The vision of protecting the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes began decades ago. The first big step was the Province's designation of two large Crown land blocks as Wilderness Area in 2009 and 2015, protecting 1767 hectares. Then in 2018 and 2019, the Municipality purchased and added 210 hectares (519 acres) of private lands.

Between those two protected Wilderness Areas is the Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector property, an essential bridge to create a 12 kilometer wildlife and wilderness recreation corridor and keep one of the City's last, large, unbroken urban wildlands intact. Like many of the private lands surrounding the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, it is highly sought after for urban development. Neither the Province nor the Municipality was actively pursuing the Connector, and citizens were growing increasingly concerned about threats to this highly strategic and significant property. So, the Nature Trust stepped in to help.

The property owners, Robin Wilber and Bill Fenton, recognized that while forestry and urban development are important, some places are just so unique and so strategic for conservation that they are truly irreplaceable. They agreed to forgo potential development, instead selling their land to the Nature Trust and generously agreeing to donate a sizable part of the land's value as a charitable gift.

To secure the property and ensure its long-term stewardship, the Nature Trust launched a \$2.8 million campaign last fall. The City's \$750,000 commitment from its Park Reserve Fund moves the campaign within sight of the finish line, with just \$135,000 left to raise from the public.

"We are thrilled Halifax Council has stepped up to help the Nature Trust save the Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector. Their unanimous support speaks to the growing awareness and urgency of protecting the City's wild spaces," said Bonnie Sutherland, the Nature Trust's Executive Director.

“We thank all the Councillors for their vision, with particular thanks to Councillor Zurawski for his leadership on this matter, and to Mayor Savage for being an enthusiastic champion of protecting and celebrating the City’s natural areas.”

Mayor Mike Savage noted, “The protection of wilderness space is a priority for Council. I am proud to work with strong stakeholders like the Nova Scotia Nature Trust and others to ensure these spaces are protected in perpetuity.”

The Nature Trust also expressed its appreciation to the Ecology Action Centre, the Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the many other organizations and individuals who have been working for decades to protect the area, and who worked tirelessly encouraging Councillors to support the Nature Trust’s funding request.

With the completion of this purchase, a total of 2209 hectares (5460 acres) will have been protected by the Nature Trust, the Province and the Municipality in the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area. This vast greenspace will contribute important ecological benefits to the City, from biodiversity, important wildlife corridors and landscape connectivity, to clean air and water, flood prevention, carbon sequestration, and climate change mitigation. Its protection also supports Municipal economic development strategies focused on promoting Halifax as a green and inspiring place to live, work and do business.

Protecting these beloved wildlands, just minutes from downtown and accessible by public transit, is particularly timely news.

Sutherland noted, “The isolation and restrictions of Covid-19 have made us realize just how much we value parks and natural spaces, and how much we need access to nature not just for having fun and staying active, but for mental health and well-being too. Donating to “Save the Wild Blue” is a fantastic way to take action to save nature, to show nature our love, right here in our own backyard.”

To make a charitable donation to help save the Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector Campaign, visit [www.nsnt.ca/wildblue](http://www.nsnt.ca/wildblue) or call (902) 425-5263.

#### **For Broadcast use**

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

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