

Nature Trust News: December Update

SCOTT LESLIE



Celebrating 25 Years of Conservation Action

2019 marked our 25th year protecting Nova Scotia's unique natural legacy. We invite you to enjoy the story of this conservation journey, by watching our 25th Anniversary Video. Join our host, long-time friend of nature and professor Emeritus at Acadia University, Dr. Tom Herman, in celebrating all that you have helped to achieve.

With the global biodiversity and climate crises mounting, land

conservation action has never been more urgent. Last year we celebrated historic conservation wins through our Lasting Landscapes campaign. Thanks to generous support from friends like you, we're continuing to make exciting gains for nature, all across Nova Scotia this year. We hope you enjoy these highlights. See the full stories at nsnt.ca/news and nsnt.ca/blog.

Land Conservation Highlights



North Mountain Ridge

Just in time for the holidays, we're celebrating the protection of two new properties (92 acres) along the North Mountain Ridge in Cape Breton. Between Lime Hill and Malagawatch, the sites add to a growing conservation land assemblage along the Bras d'Or Lake, including the Nature Trust's Mackenzie Cove, Marble Mountain, [McCrae's Island, and Lime Hill Conservation Lands](#), Nature Conservancy lands, and the provincial North Mountain Wilderness Area and Little Beaver Lakes Nature Reserve. Another soon-to-be-donated parcel will bring our protected areas to over

600 acres in what we're collectively calling the North Mountain Ridge Conservation Lands, preserving old forests, important bird habitats, rare plants, wetlands and brooks, and providing critical landscape and habitat connectivity between the coast, the south-facing slopes of the North Mountain Ridge and the protected areas on the plateau above.

A second land assemblage is growing in another coastal area near Baddeck, with land purchases, donations and easements that will protect rare gypsum habitat (known as 'karst' topography).



ALIX D'ENTREMONT

Peases Island

Adding to Bon Portage Island and the recently secured Seal Island, we are set to acquire Peases Island, part of a chain of drumlin islands known as the Tusquets, south of Wedgeport, Yarmouth County. Its diverse habitats, coastal barrens, beaches, coastal headlands, salt marshes and lagoon support many migratory and nesting bird species, including species at-risk such as Roseate Tern and Harlequin Duck.

Land Conservation Highlights



Endangered Species

Nova Scotia is home to many species at-risk that are not found anywhere else in Canada. Southwest Nova in particular hosts a disproportionate number of rare and at-risk plants and wildlife, including 13 federally-listed at-risk plants that fall within the 'Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora' group and are found ONLY in a few lakes and wetlands in the region. There are also unique populations of at-risk reptiles like Blanding's Turtle and Eastern Ribbonsnake, listed nationally as endangered and threatened respectively. We have been actively protecting habitat, creating sanctuaries for these rare and at-risk species, for decades. Our ongoing outreach program for priority landowners has resulted in another land deal which will build on a growing sanctuary for endangered Blanding's Turtles and donation of a lakeshore property protecting critical habitat for rare plants and Eastern Ribbon Snake.



More Good News for Mabou

With over 2000 acres of coastal wilderness now protected by the Nature Trust in the Mabou Highlands, we were thrilled with news of Wilderness Area designation for the adjacent 3600 acres on the plateau. And that's not all – more landowners have been inspired to add their lands to the growing protected area. We've just acquired another 130 acres, with two more properties set to be donated in the new year. Over 800 acres of nearby coastal lands are also confirmed as conservation gifts to come in 2020.

Urban Wildlands

We've been busy in the Halifax Backlands, working with two families keen to add their lands to our Purcells Cove Conservation Lands assemblage, reaching out to other priority landowners and exploring options to work with other conservation and recreation groups active in the backlands on collaborative conservation, stewardship and trails.



Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector

As we launch in to 2020, we're hitting the ground running with an exciting [Wild Blue](#) campaign to protect a critical gap in a much-loved Halifax wilderness. The Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector will bridge two disjunct sections of the provincially-protected Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area and secure a 12 kilometer wildlife corridor encompassing over 5400 acres of diverse forests, wetlands and pristine headwater lakes, only minutes from Halifax. Learn more at nsnt.ca/wildblue

On the Horizon

Jessica, Fiona and Allison, our Conservation Project Coordinators, continue building partnerships, undertaking community outreach and engagement, as well as targeted education efforts with priority landowners across the province, from urban wildlands, the St. Mary's River and Cobequid Hills to a new gypsum and rare plant site in Hants County. In keeping with the urgent need to advance significant biodiversity and climate mitigation action, Ross, our Director of Conservation, and his team are working hard to secure at least seven more conservation sites by the end of March.

Stewardship Highlights



Stewardship in High Gear

With the huge success from the Lasting Landscapes Campaign, we started this field season with 3200 more acres to care for. The stewardship team (David and Joanna) kicked into high gear, and with the help of our wonderful volunteers, completed field surveys for 16 baseline studies. This is more than we've ever done in a single year, and it included the 650 acres of Seal Island (a two-hour boat ride offshore), crawling through very tangled coastal forests on Gerard Island and sliding down steep slopes in the Mabou Highlands. While we enjoy the fieldwork, we take the idea of stewardship in perpetuity very seriously (because forever is a long time!). These baselines provide a detailed record of the property's condition, ecological values, threats, liabilities and stewardship issues, and are crucial for developing stewardship plans, and guiding property monitoring and conservation defence.

Our stewardship team was also active in monitoring and caring for our growing network of conservation lands, and dealing with stewardship issues, from massive post-hurricane trail clearing to illegal dumping and vandalism.



Bon Portage Island

In June, we were on Bon Portage Island for a stewardship excursion with 16 volunteers and researchers from Acadia University. The group undertook important stewardship work on the island's trail system (used by researchers and visitors), to minimize disturbance to burrowing nesting Leach's Storm-Petrel. The group stayed at the Acadia-run field station, experienced and learned about petrels from the researchers, and enjoyed campfire talks and nature walks. CBC's Colleen Jones joined the crew and shared her island experience and stories of the stewardship efforts with her CBC audience.



Barren Meadow Stewardship Day

Sometimes stewardship is pretty tough work like removing heaps of garbage and an old bus from deep in the woods! Thanks to a devoted team of volunteers, just such a clean-up was completed at our new Barren Meadow Conservation Lands in Southwest Nova. Stay tuned for more volunteer stewardship opportunities in 2020.

Conservation Planning and Collaboration

Provincial Biodiversity Collaboration

The Nature Trust, Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Province and Indigenous partners are undertaking an unprecedented collaborative land conservation initiative. Part of a national “Canada Target 1” commitment to significantly advance biodiversity conservation, including protecting 17% of Canada by 2020, we are working together on strategic protected areas planning for Nova Scotia, and securing priority places on both public and private lands, including Nova Scotia’s first Indigenous protected areas.



Coastal Islands & Birds

Seabirds, shorebirds and migratory bird populations are declining at an alarming rate globally, and habitat loss is a key driver in these declines. Coastal islands play an irreplaceable ecological role, including providing critical habitat for a diversity of birds and many species at risk. We are co-leading a new island conservation and stewardship initiative alongside the Canadian Wildlife Service and Nova Scotia Environment. We are working together to inventory and prioritize coastal islands, to secure critical habitat, and to bring together diverse partners, including Indigenous and community organizations, researchers and academics, pooling our resources and expertise to advance island research, restoration, conservation, monitoring and stewardship.



An exciting pilot project is evolving on Seal Island, a critical refuge for migratory and nesting birds. We recently acquired 650 acres on the island, but acquisition is only the first step—the bigger challenge lies in its long-term care and management. We are exploring multi-partner collaborative stewardship for the island, a model we hope can be used to restore and manage coastal islands throughout the province. As a first step, staff and volunteers travelled to the island this summer, gathering field data, meeting with and gathering insights from the seasonal residents who are also important partners in island management. We were met with gracious hospitality and stories which made the history and significance of Seal Island come to life.



Kespukwitk Conservation Collaborative

Southwest Nova is a hotspot for wildlife including many rare and ‘at-risk’ species. Its significance was recognized with recent designation by the federal government as a ‘Priority Place’ for conservation in Canada. The region also aligns with the Mi’kmaq district of Kespukwitk, meaning lands’ end. The Kespukwitk Conservation Collaborative, including non-government organizations, Indigenous partners, community groups, researchers, and varying levels of government, is working on conservation and stewardship projects to preserve and protect what makes this region so ecologically and culturally significant. The group is guided by the Open Standards approach and adaptive management, as well as an Indigenous world view through ‘two-eyed seeing’, which encourages practitioners to examine topics and issues using both Indigenous and Western knowledge and values. We are an active partner in the collaboration and are leading the collaborative coastal islands initiative. Wela’liq (thank you) to our Kespukwitk partners.

Conservation Planning

Strategic conservation planning is a process that produces tools to aid decision-makers in identifying, prioritizing, pursuing and protecting those specific tracts of land that will most effectively and efficiently achieve the land trust’s mission. Such planning is fundamental to our work here at the Nature Trust, and has been throughout our 25 year history. Based on the best available data, we have built a broad knowledge base of the ecological topography of Nova Scotia, conservation priorities, threats and opportunities. Using this information, coupled with up-to-date conservation science and input from our conservation partners, we identify priority areas for our conservation efforts and continue to evaluate the best properties to secure for permanent protection, as well as how to effectively steward them. As we continue to ramp up land conservation efforts, we are developing a comprehensive, updated Conservation Plan to guide our work into the future, and to help communicate priorities to our partners and supporters.

Volunteers in Action



Our Growing Volunteer Program

It's been another amazing year for our volunteer program. 2019 saw 75 new volunteers added to the roster, with more awaiting training in 2020. Our Property Guardians Program saw tremendous growth, with 54 new Property Guardians trained. This growth means a stronger stewardship presence and practice on our lands across the province.

A New Path Forward: Engagement Organizing

Over the last year our volunteer coordinator, Ryan, has been hard at work researching new models for our volunteer program as it grows. We are advancing an Engagement Organizing model, which marries the fundamentals of organizing with technology and a culture of developing leadership in others. This model is particularly beneficial for our Property Guardians program, as it is a distributed leadership model that fits well with a community-based stewardship approach (often referred to as a "snowflake model"). We are in the process of developing the framework for this model so that we can roll it out in communities across Nova Scotia over the coming years.



Special Events



Seal Island Celebration

In August, we celebrated good news for birds and bird lovers with the conservation of over 650 acres on Seal Island.

Located off the southwestern tip of Nova Scotia, the island is one of the region's most important sites for migratory birds. We shared the news at a community event in Clark's Harbour on Cape Sable Island – a traditional jumping-off point for reaching the remote island. We had 30 folks join us for the celebration & informational event—many of whom had family connections to Seal Island that go back generations.



Mabou Celebration

In July we invited friends of nature to experience the magic of the Mabou Highlands and help us celebrate success in protecting over 2000 acres of this unique and spectacular landscape. Over 60 participants joined us for a Connecting with Nature hike with the Cape Mabou Trail Club and were rewarded with spectacular coastal views and a surprise clifftop bagpipe performance! Later, a packed house celebrated the largest conservation land assemblage success in our 25 year history.. We were delighted to have many of the families join us who were the pioneers who began this exciting, multi-generational conservation campaign decades ago and made its protection possible.



Connecting with Nature Events

Another popular and much-enjoyed series of 8 nature excursions gave Nova Scotians unique opportunities to experience, explore and learn about nature and Nature Trust conservation lands, from our guided paddle and hike to the Shelter Cove Wilderness Sanctuary in the 100 Wild Islands, to a fantastic day on the St. Mary's River learning about floodplain forests and endangered wood turtles.

Special Events



Conservation Showcase

The spring Conservation Showcase is a celebration of nature and of nature conservation achievements with our friends and supporters who make it all possible. This year, we were pleased to have a large crowd of enthusiastic supporters join us for an extra special celebration of our 25th Anniversary milestone!



25th Anniversary Dinner

A big thank you to all those who supported our Silver Anniversary Dinner & Auction in October. The night was a huge success – more than 530 guests helped to raise over \$120,000 in support of the Nature Trust! Even more than the money raised was the spirit of connection, commitment and inspiration enjoyed by all. The night was an opportunity for old friends and colleagues to reconnect, and for new connections to be seeded in the mutual love of nature. If you weren't able to make it this year, we hope to see you there next year – October 22, 2020 – save the date!



Guardians of the Land Field Trip

Each year we organize a special field trip for our donors who have pledged a gift of unrestricted funds over several years. This year we visited a property in the Halifax Backlands (Purcells Cove) area, which we hope to add to our urban conservation lands network in the coming months. Rich LaPaix, our Conservation Biologist, showed the group how we use “map-based technology (GIS) to make strategic decisions about which lands to prioritize for conservation efforts. Read our [Guardian's stories](#) on our website or contact Barbara@nsnt.ca for more information.

Celebrating our Donors



Legacy Circle

We honoured our Legacy Circle members at an afternoon tea this fall, at which new members received their special recognition pins and plaques. Legacy Circle members have provided foundational support for our work by leaving a bequest in their will, making

a gift of insurance (or other planned gift) or donating land or a conservation easement. You can leave a lasting legacy for nature too—by adding the Nature Trust to your will, or making a gift of life insurance today! To discover more about these and other legacy gift opportunities contact Barbara@nsnt.ca or [visit us online](#).

Monthly Giving

Over the past year, our monthly donors increased by 25%. Many current monthly donors also increased their monthly gift amounts. Thanks to these donors, we are able to strategically plan our upcoming work, as we know how much to expect in donations for the next few months—this is a huge benefit for the land protection work we do, and we are very grateful to these critical supporters.

What a great resolution for the new year—giving every month to save Nova Scotia's threatened biodiversity! [Read more about monthly giving on our website](#). Or contact Barbara@nsnt.ca to sign up today.

We greatly appreciate every donation, large and small. Our conservation success depends on community support!



Nature's House—Bringing Wild to the City

We have been transforming our office property (Nature's House) into a model of sustainable, environmentally-friendly green urban design. Recent efforts have focused on removing all the hardscaping (pavement and patio stones) and non-native, water-hungry grass, and creating gardens of low-water, low-maintenance native biodiversity, and low-cost solutions for on-site storm water management and water conservation. Our generous supporters and volunteers stepped once again, donating many of the native plants and joining us for the September planting party. On the green energy front, we replaced several windows with triple-pane energy efficient models, added insulation and addressed energy leaks throughout the building.

Please drop in for a visit or see the before and after photos and story of [Nature's House](#) on our website.

2019 Conservation Award

Our audience at the Annual Dinner was clearly as touched and inspired by the [story of David Rumsey](#), recipient of the Nature Trust's 2019 conservation award, as the staff and board have been. David took a long-held conservation dream of protecting over 2000 acres of coastal highland wilderness on Cape Breton's coast and turned it into a reality. From volunteering countless hours--serving as project lead, landowner outreach coordinator, negotiator and land securement coordinator (as a volunteer!), to leading by example by placing a conservation easement with his wife Abby on their own 280 acres at MacKinnon's brook, to generously donating over \$600,000 to unlock significant matching funds and to ensure the long-term stewardship of the spectacular Mabou Highlands, David's contributions are truly incredible. (new paragraph) His passion for the Mabou Highlands, his contagious enthusiasm, his generosity, and perseverance and unwavering faith in the conservation vision for this very special place, are all truly unparalleled. We are all very lucky to have David Rumsey as a champion for Nova Scotia's natural legacy..





Thank You!

Heartfelt thanks to all our supporters, volunteers, conservation partners and friends for all you do in helping to protect Nova Scotia's natural legacy.

Staying Current—Nature Trust News Updates

Does inspiring news for nature in your inbox every month sound appealing? To keep on top of conservation news, activities and events, please be sure to [sign up for our e-news](#) and please be sure we have your current email address.

We're very active on social media too. You can follow us, or even if you're not an active social media user you can see everything we post on

[Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) by visiting our sites.