

For Immediate Release

Nature Trust's Latest Big Win For Biodiversity Welcome News Amid Global Biodiversity Crisis

May 23, 2019 (Halifax)—Thanks to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, there is more good news for nature in Nova Scotia today. Four new protected areas on the St. Mary's River were announced by the Nature Trust, extending the ecologically rich corridor of protected lands to over 1300 acres and 21 kilometres of river shoreline. The protected areas are home to unique old growth forests, intact floodplains and endangered wildlife.

The good news is timely in light of devastating global scientific reports in recent weeks highlighting massive global biodiversity loss, increasing threats and impending species extinctions. The crisis is worse than previously forecast, and accelerating at an unprecedented pace. Humans are entirely to blame. Habitat loss is flagged as one of the worst culprits. Such loss is not just happening in faraway places and impacting exotic species like tigers and pandas. Habitat loss is an issue right here in our own backyard in Nova Scotia.

The Nature Trust is actively working to stem the tide, to reverse habitat loss and to keep Nova Scotia's wild species from extinction. The organization recently seized an historic land conservation opportunity presented by the Government of Canada's Nature Fund Quick Start program, launching and successfully achieving an ambitious and inspiring conservation campaign. Through their "Lasting Landscapes" campaign, the Nature Trust protected 17 new conservation sites, encompassing 3,200 acres of biologically rich conservation lands across the province, in just a few months.

Formal protection of four new protected areas was announced today, in honour of both the International Day for Biological Diversity and World Turtle Day. The new sites are all located on the St. Mary's River, north of Sherbrooke, Guysborough County. Together the new conservation lands add 540 acres to almost 800 acres already protected by the Nature Trust as part of a long-term land assemblage initiative on the river.

The project exemplifies what can and must be done to reverse the biodiversity crisis: permanent, legal securement of important habitat; focus on biodiversity hotspots and species at greatest risk of extinction; and preserving landscape connectivity and corridors. Such connectivity ensures that wildlife can move safely among and between habitats and that the ecosystems structure, services and functions can be sustained long-term.

"Recent scientific reports on the alarming and worsening global biodiversity crisis are devastating, so it's especially inspiring to be sharing news of a major biodiversity win for Nova Scotia today," noted Nature Trust Executive Director Bonnie Sutherland. She added, "Over 21 kilometers of shoreline and 1300 acres of old growth forests, rich floodplains, wetlands and a diversity of endangered species are now protected, as part of an interconnected wild corridor along the river—an incredible richness of biological diversity."

The Nature Trust initiated conservation efforts on the river in 2006, with a goal of protecting the rare ecological gems of the river, and connecting them to preserve a corridor of intact riparian habitat that will restore and sustain the long-term ecological health of this unique river and the species that depend on it for their survival.

In all the Nature Trust has secured 13 conservation lands, encompassing over 21 kilometers of pristine river shoreline to date. This land assemblage effort is complemented by 7,600 acres of adjacent and nearby Crown-owned lands, identified for protection as part of the Province's Parks and Protected Areas Plan, although formal designation of the lands is still pending for these "Corridor Lands." Together, the Nature Trust and provincially protected lands encompass almost 9,000 acres and 50 kilometers of shoreline.

One of the new conservation sites announced today is a 230 acre property generously donated by Paul and Marsha Sobey, adding to an inspiring, long-standing legacy of conservation support by the Sobey family on the river. The anticipated donation was highlighted at the Nature Trust's fall fundraising dinner, but the donation has now been finalized, along with the purchase of three additional properties.

"The Nature Trust has done a remarkable job protecting the St. Mary's river and so many other special places across Nova Scotia. Like my parents before us, Marsha and I are proud to add our lands to the Nature Trust's growing network of protected wild spaces," noted Paul Sobey.

The other new conservation sites include 145 acres at Hardwood Hill and 75 acres by Harrisons Pool, both on the West branch, and 85 acres at Crows Nest, at the confluence of the West and Main branch of the river, near Glenelg.

The river is home to some of the largest and least disturbed examples of mature, intact, Acadian floodplain forest left in Nova Scotia. Several are now protected by the Nature Trust. These forests, which once lined most of our rivers before large-scale clearing for forestry and agriculture, are a critical element of river health. They help to keep rivers cool, clear and fast-flowing for the river's wildlife including Atlantic Salmon. They harbour vernal pools, streams and stillwaters that create a rich home for diversity of birds, amphibians and other wildlife.

With less than 0.1% of Nova Scotia's forest being old growth forests, protection of the St. Mary's towering stands of hemlock and spruce, and also hardwood, is significant. Many species depend on these forests and their unique habitats, from woodpeckers and owls to fishers and flying squirrels.

The new sites protect habitat for rare plants and some of Canada's most endangered wildlife including Wood Turtles, which are listed as Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk Act and are on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List. The sites are also home to a rich diversity of birds, including endangered species such as Canada Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Rusty Blackbird, Common Nighthawk, Barn Swallow, and Bobolink.

The Nature Trust's conservation achievements on the river were funded generously by the Government of Canada, as part of Canada's commitment to protect 17% of land and inland waters for biodiversity by

2020. Matching funds were provided by the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust, the Nova Scotia Species at Risk Fund, and generous support from Nature Trust members and donors to the Lasting Landscapes Campaign. The Nature Trust acknowledged the very special contribution by Paul and Marsha Sobey through their generous gift of land, and the Nature Trust's volunteers and conservation partners who also play an essential role in conservation success on the river.

The St. Mary's River received another major boost recently, with a Federal announcement of \$1.2 million for the St. Mary's River Association and the Nova Scotia Salmon Association and their efforts to restore watersheds and coastal habitats. The Nature Trust's ongoing efforts to safeguard the essential riparian habitats, and complementary in-stream salmon conservation, water quality and shoreline restoration efforts are together working to reverse biodiversity loss and environmental degradation to bring the St. Mary's River back to its former ecological glory.

Saving land is just the beginning for the Nature Trust. The organization commits to ensuring the nature values found on their conservation lands thrive, through an active, ongoing land stewardship program. New volunteer 'property guardians' helping with on-the-ground monitoring and stewardship of Nature Trust protected areas, are being trained this weekend on the river. The public is invited to visit one of the Nature Trust's conservation sites this weekend, by joining a special guided educational hike.

There is inspiring, positive on-the-ground action happening to save biodiversity right here in Nova Scotia but it will only succeed with public support.

"So many people are devastated by news of the global biodiversity crisis and by what they see happening to our landscapes. But there is plenty they can do to help. Volunteer, get involved with hands-on nature conservation efforts, and donate to charities protecting habitats and wildlife."

People keen to take action for biodiversity can start this weekend on the St. Mary's River. The Nature Trust hike and volunteer training are open to the public. Information on volunteering as a property guardian, joining the Nature Trust hike, or donating to help protect and conserve the natural legacy of the St. Mary's River can be found online at www.nsnt.ca or by calling the Nature Trust at (902) 425-5263.

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Map, photos and drone video available. www.nsnt.ca/media

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