



PROPERTY GUARDIANS' HANDBOOK

A Pocket Guide to Land Stewardship



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YOUR NAME



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Welcome to the Property Guardians Team! We are so grateful that you have committed to donating your time to help protect Nova Scotia's most special wild places. This Handbook is intended to help you on your stewardship journey, providing helpful tips to plan your trip, deal with stewardship issues and enable you to take action when visiting the conservation land(s) in your care.





Welcome Message

"Welcome to our new Property Guardians Handbook! On behalf of all of us at the Nature Trust, huge thanks to you for your volunteer efforts. We simply could not meet our promise of keeping all the treasured places entrusted to our care 'forever wild,' without you. We are grateful for the time and talent, energy and passion you contribute so generously to help in caring for our growing conservation lands network. You are helping to protect and preserve an irreplaceable conservation legacy—for nature, and for future generations, too."



Bonnie Sutherland, Executive Director

ABOUT THE NATURE TRUST

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust is a registered charity dedicated to preserving our province's irreplaceable natural treasures. Since 1994, we have worked tirelessly to protect ecologically significant habitat on private lands throughout Nova Scotia. With over 70% of our province held in private ownership, including many of our most unique natural areas, from the last remaining old growth forests, lakeshores and rivers, to critical habitats for nationally and globally endangered species, our work is more important than ever.

We protect and steward over 130 conservation lands across the province, from the northern tip of Cape Breton to Seal Island off the southern coast, and our network continues to grow. We protect these lands for nature, and for people, too, so future generations of Nova Scotians can access the wild beauty of our province.





Defining the Role of Property Guardian

WHAT DO YOU DO?

Property Guardians are essential to the Nature Trust's work – we couldn't do what we do without you! You are crucial in fulfilling our stewardship mandate and ensuring our conservation lands are thriving, while providing valuable insight that informs the long-term management of the property.

You will be assigned a property in consultation with the stewardship team and from there you will receive a set of documents about the conservation land you will be caring for. These documents include maps, background information about the property (such as the baseline report from the time of acquisition), a photo monitoring record, and the stewardship plan that has been developed for that specific site or area.

As a Property Guardian, you will visit your property (or properties) at least once annually and preferably seasonally. You will undertake stewardship actions, like those outlined in this handbook, and submit reports to the Nature Trust about what you saw, including exciting sightings like wildlife or rare plants, what actions you undertook, like trail maintenance or boundary marking, and what actions are still in need of attention. You can also host events on your conservation lands such as guided hikes or stewardship days (these are held to address larger issues, like the removal of invasive species or larger amounts of garbage).

WHY IS YOUR ROLE IMPORTANT?

Property Guardians are a big part of the Nature Trust team and are vital to our ability to conserve and steward our conservation lands. You are ambassadors for the organization on our conservation lands and are key to ensuring the conservation values of those lands are being upheld, in perpetuity. Nature Trust staff simply can't visit all of our properties annually and so volunteer Property Guardians become an extension of our staff team, helping us to ensure these lands are well cared for, planning for the future, and enabling us to secure more lands and protect more of Nova Scotia's most special places.







What is Stewardship?

We define stewardship as the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. It is a relationship, and a dynamic one at that. The relationship that you will build with the conservation land (or lands in the case of community hubs) entrusted to your care will be a fulfilling one. Nature is generous with her gifts – there is so much to learn, witness and love. Human activities have created stress on the landscape and one of our goals as Property Guardians is to ensure that this stress is minimal on our lands. These are places for Nature to thrive.

Stewardship requires us to hone our powers of observation – to look closely at the landscape and identify potential hazards and issues. It all starts with careful looking. When we look closely, we begin to see things that we previously would have ignored, or simply missed altogether. We begin to see the braids formed in the trail in wet and low-lying areas, causing the trail to widen and impact more of the surrounding area. We begin to see garbage hiding in dense shrubs. We see invasive species, out-competing the native vegetation. Sometimes things are large and obvious, like a dangerously sited fire pit, an old garbage dumping site in the woods, or a downed tree cutting off the trail.

After we've developed our ability to undertake careful looking, we can start to take thoughtful action. We can find rocks or logs to fill in wet areas on the trail and block off the alternate routes caused by trail braiding by filling them in with branches and other deadfall. We can remove the small garbage hiding in the dense and lush vegetation. We can remove invasive species. We can dismantle the firepit and erase it from the landscape.

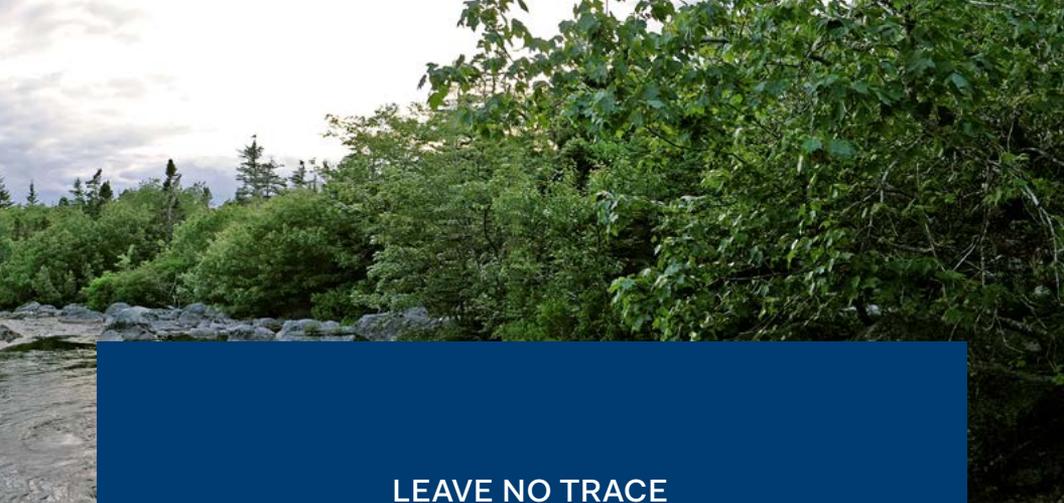


Some issues are larger than we can handle on our own, be it by size, complexity or a combination of the two. The Nature Trust Stewardship Team is here to support you. We can plan a stewardship day and call on our volunteer network to address the large garbage pile deep in the woods. We can have one of our skilled volunteers with chainsaw certification address the downed tree. In some cases, it may be an issue which requires the help of a contractor with specialized equipment.

The Nature Trust is committed to unlocking the power and potential of our volunteers and are happy to coordinate additional training as required, including GPS and navigation training.

A LOW TO NO INTERVENTION APPROACH

The Nature Trust employs a low to no intervention approach when it comes to managing our lands. This means that we let natural processes occur and actively avoid adding infrastructure whenever possible – we try to keep our conservation lands as wild as possible. We have a number of land use policies that help to guide the management of our lands and that adhere to the national standards and practices for land trusts. As such we do not typically install benches, garbage cans or outhouses, and encourage those from the public using these places for recreation to follow Leave No Trace principles. There are extenuating circumstances where infrastructure may be necessary and these decisions will be made by the Stewardship Team at the Nature Trust. Natural processes, like coastal erosion, are monitored, but we do not intervene and instead let nature take its course.



LEAVE NO TRACE

SEVEN PRINCIPLES

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

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Nature Trust Owned Lands vs. Conservation Easements

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Nature Trust owned lands are properties to which the organization holds the legal title. These lands may be purchased by the Nature Trust, or donated by landowners.

A conservation easement is a legally binding agreement between an eligible body (like the Nature Trust) and a landowner that acknowledges the conservation significance of the property and commits the landowner to steward the property in such a way as to ensure the conservation values of the property are maintained. The holder of the conservation easement (the Nature Trust) works with the landowner to ensure that the terms and conditions of the easement are met. This means that the landowner still holds the legal title and can use and enjoy their land, but the Nature Trust is responsible for ensuring that they and all future owners only use the land in the ways set out in the easement.

Legally, Nature Trust staff are required to visit these properties annually and submit a report to the landowner. Some easement properties permit volunteers on site, while others do not. This is meant to be a partnership between the Nature Trust and the owner, working together to care for the land. Every easement is different, though many contain similar restrictions (such as no commercial forestry, no new roads, no subdivisions, etc.). Some easement properties have a dwelling area, where the landowner may reside full time or seasonally, and this area will have a different set of allowable uses than the rest of the property. The Nature Trust will provide you with maps to determine if there is a dwelling area on your conservation land, or not.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT MONITORING?

Monitoring an easement differs slightly from monitoring a Nature Trust owned property. Easements are owned by the landowner, not the Nature Trust, so there are a few considerations that need to be made.

Property Guardians of easement properties should:

1. Inform the landowner and the Nature Trust of your plan to visit ahead of time by phone or by email.
2. Familiarize yourself with the terms of the easement prior to your visit so that you know specifically what you are looking for.
3. Inform the Nature Trust if there are any issues on the property, especially those that go against the terms of the easement.







Planning Your Trip

The key to a great day in the field is to plan accordingly and make sure you're prepared. Below you will find tips to make packing a breeze.

PACK LIST

- First Aid Kit
- GPS/Maps/Compass
- Photo monitoring report from the year before, if doing the annual photo monitoring
- Sun Protection
- Water (always pack extra)
- Knife or Multi-tool
- Waterproof Jacket
- Food (always pack extra)
- Insect Repellent
- Recycling Bag
- Garbage Bag
- Seasonal Considerations (see the following pages)
- This Handbook!



Seasonal Considerations

WINTER

Winter can be a wonderful time to get outside and enjoy the tranquility of nature, but it can also be dangerous if you're not properly dressed for the weather. It may be freezing, but after tromping along on the trail, you will generate heat and start to sweat. Make sure you stay comfortable and dry by “s’habiller comme un oignon” (meaning, to “dress like an onion”) - in other words, **LAYERS!** Start with a base layer of moisture-wicking fabric like merino wool or a synthetic fabric (your gym clothes are often a great base layer). Avoid cotton, which will hold water, dry slowly and leave you feeling cold and damp. The next layer should be warm and insulating—think fleece, goose down, and other cozy fabrics. Your outer layer should help repel water and cut wind. Keep those extremities toasty by wearing thick socks, water resistant footwear, and warm, waterproof gloves.

When in doubt, pack extra hats, mittens and socks! Stay warm and stay safe out there!

SPRING

Spring is excellent for enjoying the warmer weather, birding during spring migration and enjoying the spring ephemerals, but there are a few considerations to be made. Black fly season in Nova Scotia is typically from late May until late June – so make sure you pack your bug spray, or better yet, a bug jacket and/or hat. It also tends to be wet, so even if the forecast calls for sun all day, it is always advised to wear waterproof hiking boots and pack a raincoat.



SUMMER

Summer is the season we likely spend the most time outdoors. Sun protection and adequate hydration are key to an enjoyable day in the field. Make sure to pack sunscreen, a light long-sleeved cover up, a hat and extra water or a way of treating more water (such as a water bottle with a filter, or purification tablets).

Buddy system / communication of your plan

There is safety in numbers and we always recommend that you bring a friend or family member along when you head out to remote locations. Some people enjoy the solitude of the woods, so if you do plan to head out alone, make sure someone knows where you're going and what time you plan to return. Always communicate your plan – where you're going, when you plan to be back, and where you've parked your vehicle. If you're conducting a monitoring visit for the Nature Trust and need a buddy to bring along, let us know! We have a number of volunteers with minimal access to transportation who would be happy to spend a day in the wild with you.

Nearest medical centre

Prior to heading out in the field please ensure you know the location of the nearest emergency medical centre. This is particularly important when traveling to an area you are not very familiar with. Please note that some rural hospitals do not have emergency rooms that operate 24/7.





General Safety

Hunting Season

Hunting may occur on some Nature Trust conservation lands, except where it has been specifically prohibited – this information will be available in your property information packet prior to your visit.

It is advisable that you exercise caution while traveling in the woods during hunting season and wear brightly coloured clothing (hunter's orange is preferable) to make yourself more visible. If you have a canine companion who travels with you, you should also outfit them with some hunter's orange. This is particularly important once deer hunting season opens late in September. Be safe out there, folks!

Ice Safety

Though we would rather you avoid walking across frozen lakes and ponds when performing Nature Trust volunteer work, we want to make sure you are well informed about ice safety. We are blessed in Nova Scotia with an abundance of lakes and ponds - wonderful for swimming in the summer months, and for skating, snowshoeing, ice fishing, snowmobiling and skiing in the winter months. Trudging out on a frozen lake can be an exhilarating experience, offering a unique perspective on the landscape that only the frigid winter can provide, but it's important to make sure it's safe for you to do so.

Firstly, it's important to remember that ice is never 100% safe and can be

unpredictable - what looks smooth and uniform on top is not always that way below the surface and gauging its strength can be very difficult. Never venture out onto ice alone and if you do decide to cross a frozen lake or pond, be sure to check that the ice is thick enough for your planned activity. It is always smart to take a large stick or pole in the event that you do end up falling through the ice – this will help you to pull yourself out. Ice that has a cloudy appearance is considered unsafe to walk or drive on - so be sure that the ice is clear and thick before you venture out. If you do venture out on cloudy ice, you can double the recommended thicknesses mentioned next. The recommended thickness for ice that you can walk safely on is 10 cm (or 4 inches), while snowmobiles and ATVs require a thickness of at least 12 cm (or 5 inches). NEVER go out on spring ice and make sure you know where the inflow and outflow of lakes are, as the ice there will be thinner. Stay away from ice formed over moving water, as it is far less stable than ice formed over standing water.

Ticks

Ticks are a common occurrence in Nova Scotia – particularly in Lunenburg, Queens, Kings, Annapolis and Hants counties.

Ticks like moist and humid environments and can be found in or near woods, shrubs, leaf litter, long grass, urban parks and gardens. They are very small, which makes them hard to spot and their bites don't hurt, which makes it difficult to know when you've been bitten.



Black-legged ticks: (From L to R) larval tick, nymph tick, adult male, adult female

Tick-borne illnesses are preventable by taking some simple precautions to reduce your risk:

- Wear long pants and long sleeves in areas likely to have ticks
- Wear light coloured clothing – its easier to see ticks
- Wear enclosed shoes and tuck your pants into your socks
- Walk on well-travelled paths, avoiding long grass and vegetation
- Apply insect repellents containing DEET or Icaridin to exposed skin and clothes. Follow directions on the package carefully.

When you come in from time outdoors, check yourself and your family for ticks (see image above!). The following are suggestions for helping with finding and removing ticks:

- Having a bath or shower within two hours of coming inside makes it easier to spot ticks and wash off unattached ticks
- If you see a tick that has attached, remove it safely by carefully grasping the tick with tweezers – the pointier, the better - as close to the skin as possible. Gently and slowly pull the tick straight out of the skin. Do not jerk, twist or squeeze it. Once the tick is removed, clean the area of the bite with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitizer. Make a note of the date and where on the body the bite occurred. This will be important if you, or a loved one, begin to feel unwell.
- If you have pets that spend time outside, make tick-checks part of your daily routine. Dogs can't transmit tick-borne illnesses to people, but ticks are hitchhikers. They can enter your home on your pet and move to you or another family member.

Put clean and dry outdoor clothes in a dryer on high heat for at least 10 minutes to kill any remaining ticks.

If you begin to feel unwell with flu like symptoms and suspect that you have been bitten by a tick, see your doctor as soon as possible.

Poison Ivy / Umbelliferous Plants



Giant Hogweed



Poison Ivy

Certain plants can cause various forms of contact dermatitis (rashes and/or blisters), ranging from mild to severe. Watch for poison ivy - it grows on sandy, stony, or rocky shores, and sprouts in thickets, in clearings, along rich shorelines and along the borders of woods and roadsides.

Members of the umbelliferae/carrot family of plants (think "umbrella" shaped flowers) can also cause contact dermatitis. A good rule of thumb with these plants is to remember that the larger the plant, the more dangerous it can be. Giant Hogweed, the largest of these plants, can grow up to 10 feet tall and can cause serious blistering of the skin.

Please document these sightings on your monitoring forms and record the location.



Bear / Coyotes

Encounters with wildlife like black bear and coyote are rare. In the event that you should encounter one, do not run away. More often than not, the animal in question will run away, as they are quite fearful of humans. In the event that they do not run, remember the acronym BAM (back away, act big and make noise). Some folks like to carry a walking stick and/or a noisemaker (like a whistle) with them in the woods.

Fear of bear and coyote encounters is relatively common, but these encounters are very rare and should not stop you from exploring nature.

Dogs

Most folks like to bring their canine companions with them on monitoring visits. This is fine in most cases, so long as your dog is under your control (for some this requires a leash). We ask that folks monitoring beach properties with nesting and breeding shorebirds please avoid bringing your dogs on these outings. Dogs can unwittingly flush birds from their nests, leaving eggs and chicks vulnerable to predation. This is particularly important for beaches where there are records of nesting Piping Plovers and other species at risk.

If you are out with your dog in the fall, please ensure they have some form of high-visibility clothing on (a vest or harness) during hunting season.

Understanding Topography/Habitat Type and the Associated Risks

Before heading out on your monitoring visit, especially if you are visiting a site for the first time, please review the documents and maps provided by the Nature Trust. It is important to understand the risks associated with certain types of landscapes. We are always willing to answer questions about the properties.

LIMESTONE/KARST TOPOGRAPHY

Some of our properties are located on limestone and gypsum rock formations which are highly susceptible to erosion, particularly by water. These landscapes, called karst, are characterized by rocky, barren ground, caves, underground waterways and sinkholes – making them more hazardous than other terrain and requiring extra caution when monitoring.

They are also home to many rare plant species, many of which are endangered (such as the Ram's-Head Lady's-Slipper), and due to the presence of caves, are often home to bat hibernacula. Bat numbers have rapidly declined in recent years and these landscapes are a high priority for conservation.

WETLANDS

Bogs, swamps, marshes and fens are highly productive parts of the landscape that provide a host of ecosystem services. Please avoid walking in these areas when possible, as they are very sensitive habitats and can present hazards (anyone who's ever taken a misstep in a bog and gone in up to their thighs can attest). Walking sticks/poles can be helpful when monitoring areas with wetlands as they can help to determine if your next step is a safe one.

COASTAL BARRENS

Some of our coastal conservation lands have large areas of coastal barrens. These ecosystems are primarily made up of low, shrubby vegetation like crowberry and juniper. Many people do not realize how sensitive these habitats actually are and unknowingly crush rare and slow growing species as they walk. It is advised to stay on barren rock when possible and avoid stepping on vegetation whenever possible.





Common Stewardship Issues

Garbage

Garbage is the most common stewardship issue you will encounter as a Property Guardian. You will likely encounter litter along trails, in parking areas and along road boundaries. Occasionally, you may find old dumping sites, many dating back decades. Please remove garbage from the property on your visit (within reason). If you find a larger dump site or larger items (like old vehicles), please document it (location and photographs) and alert the stewardship team. We can organize a group stewardship day to address larger issues, or hire independent contractors to remove larger items.

We recommend you bring both a garbage and a recycling bag with you, as it will save you sorting the garbage later.

If you clear a large amount of garbage from one of our conservation lands, local garbage disposal facilities will often waive the tipping fee. If they do not waive the fee, you can submit your receipt to the Nature Trust for reimbursement.

Trail Issues

TRAIL BRAIDING

Aside from garbage, trail braiding is a common stewardship issue you may encounter. Trail braiding occurs when a new footpath is created, often to avoid wet areas, creating a “braid” effect on the trail. There are two steps to addressing trail



braiding. First, address the wet area of the trail. This can be done by adding nearby rocks or logs to create a “corduroy” path. The second step is to address the newly formed footpath. Collect nearby branches and brush and block the newly formed path, camouflaging it and allowing the vegetation to regrow around it.

If a wet section of the trail is consistently submerged, a different approach may be required. Either re-routing the trail or installing a small boardwalk. We ask that you consult with Nature Trust staff if this is the case. We will work out a solution with you and create a plan of action.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Conservation lands with trails require regular maintenance. As a Property Guardian, we ask that you undertake light trail maintenance work, such as trimming back vegetation along trails to ensure they are kept safe. Try to think of the various trail users (varying heights, sizes and abilities) and aim to create a safe trail experience. The Nature Trust can lend out loppers, bow saws, pole saws or hand trimmers if you need them.

After major weather events we often encounter windfalls on our conservation lands. Small trees can be addressed using a bow saw (if you are comfortable doing so). These small trees are great for sawing into smaller logs to create corduroy paths over wet areas.

Larger trees and “hung up trees” are a different story and require certain expertise to address. These are complex stewardship issues, as fallen and hung up trees can be very unpredictable. We ask that you do not attempt to address these issues unless you are trained to do so (hold valid chainsaw certification and proper safety equipment) and have received permission from the Nature Trust. This work should never be done alone. The Nature Trust has trained arborists who can deal with these issues.

ATV Use

ATVs are a regular part of life in many rural communities. It is a common misconception that this community is anti-conservation, as many ATV users are accomplished outdoors folk and have a great appreciation for nature.

However, due to the Nature Trust’s focus on preserving Nature, we do not permit ATV use, or other motorized vehicles on our lands. There are very few exceptions to this policy such as where public consultation has identified a community need to keep a designated path open, or when it is necessary for property stewardship (like hauling out garbage).

ATV use can be quite destructive to sensitive habitats like wetlands and dunes. They can also unintentionally spread invasive species. We ask that Property Guardians note any evidence of ATV use on our conservation lands.



Campsites & Firepits

There are very few Nature Trust conservation lands that have designated camp sites. We ask that anyone who uses our land be respectful and “pack out” what they “pack in” – there should be nothing left behind.

Firepits are a relatively common stewardship concern. In general, we discourage fires on our conservation lands. Firepits are an invitation to have a fire and in some cases pose very little risk, while others are clearly hazardous and should be dismantled. We ask that you use your judgment around the safety of any fire pit you encounter. Is it on a rocky outcrop with no risk of spreading to a forested area? Does the pit look well established? These firepits are best left as they are. Is the firepit in a forested area with overhanging branches and proximity to trees and/or roots and poses a risk? Dismantle the pit, scatter the charred wood and cover the soot with leaves and moss. Please make note of the locations of all firepits on your monitoring forms and provide pictures when possible.

Tree cutting/ Harvesting

Commonly associated with firepits, tree cutting is not permitted on our lands (with the exception of pruning around trails and parking lots). Please make note of any trees cut or branch damage that you encounter on our conservation lands and take a GPS point and photos when possible. This can particularly be an issue around boundaries, where encroachment issues can occur. Please alert us to any tree harvesting on our lands and make note of the boundary where the encroachment has occurred (if on a boundary line).





Glossy Buckthorn



Rosa Rugosa



Japanese Knotweed leaves & flowers

Invasive Species

Invasive plants are harmful, non-native species which outcompete local flora and impact the entire ecosystem. There are many invasive species in Nova Scotia. The three most commonly found invasive plants on Nature Trust conservation lands are Japanese Knotweed (a fast growing, deep-rooted bamboo-like plant), Glossy Buckthorn and Rugosa Rose (common along the shoreline throughout the province).

If you feel comfortable with identifying these species, you can go ahead and remove them, but make sure to remove the plant right to the roots. Oftentimes patches of invasives are quite large, so removal is best done with a group. The stewardship team would be happy to assist you in organizing a removal event.



HEMLOCK WOOLLY ADELGID (HWA)

In the summer of 2017, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) confirmed the presence of HWA in southern Nova Scotia. HWA is an aphid-like insect that attacks and kills hemlock trees. Its egg sacs, which look like little balls of cotton or snow, can be found at the base of needles. It is not to be confused with spider sacs or spittle bugs which look similar, but are much larger in size than HWA. It can be spread by wind, animals, and human movement of nursery stock, logs, and other wood products including firewood.

You can help prevent the spread of this and other plant pests by buying your firewood where you plan to burn it. If you are in an area of southwest Nova Scotia where there are stands of hemlock, it is advised that you roll down your clothes and body with a sticky-lint roller to avoid the possible spread of HWA, or immediately change your clothes, bag up your field clothes and wash them before wearing them again.

If you think you have seen signs of hemlock woolly adelgid in your area, notify the CFIA. If you have spotted HWA on a Nature Trust property, please notify us immediately. Providing pictures is very helpful.



EMERALD ASH BORER (EAB)

The Emerald Ash Borer is a particularly destructive species of invasive beetle. As the name suggests, its prey are all species of ash tree (though not mountain ash, which is a different species of tree altogether). EAB has been identified in Nova Scotia and is likely to spread throughout the province in the coming years. EAB larvae create “S” shaped tunnels in the bark of the tree in the early stages of infection. Later stages of infestation result in “D” shaped bore holes in the tree’s trunk where full grown insects emerge from the bark.

Another common sign of infestation is called “epicormic shoots” – this is where there is crown die off in the tree, but small shoots are emerging from the roots, trunk or branches in an effort to redirect nutrients and continue growth. As the crown of the tree dies, the rest of the tree will soon follow, regardless of these small shoots.

If you see signs of EAB in your area, notify the CFIA. If you see signs of EAB on a Nature Trust property, please notify us as soon as possible. Documentation such as pictures are appreciated.

Hunting Blinds

Hunting blinds are a relatively common occurrence in forested parts of the province, including on Nature Trust conservation lands. The Nature’s land use policy states that we do not permit the construction, maintenance or operation of structures on our conservation lands.

If you come across a hunting blind while monitoring a property, please take note of the general location (take a waypoint if travelling with a GPS unit) and take a few pictures. The Nature Trust will provide a written notice for you to post on the hunting blind on your next visit.

Signage

The Nature Trust uses two primary types of signage: boundary signs and interpretive panels. It is important that signage is kept in good condition, as it serves as a reflection on the organization and our care of the property. Signs that have been vandalized, damaged or are found in disrepair should be replaced as soon as possible.

It is important that boundary signs are installed along property boundaries where footpaths and other trails/roads cross a boundary. Boundary signage is not required on all property boundaries, but is placed where issues may arise, such as encroachment. In some cases, boundary blazes will need to be maintained by way of painting or flagging the boundary. The stewardship plan will advise on whether the boundary of your property needs to be blazed/flagged. Please reach out to the stewardship team if you require some boundary signs for your next visit.

Interpretive panels will require semi-regular maintenance – a wipe down with a wet cloth will usually suffice. Please make note of signage condition in your monitoring report.

Other signage on Nature Trust lands is addressed on a case by case basis.

Uncommon Stewardship Issues

GROW-OPS & OTHER ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

A rare but possible issue you may stumble across is illegal marijuana growing operations. These are less common than they used to be before legalization, however they are still an issue. If you encounter a grow-op on your monitoring visit, please be cautious. We ask that you document the operation, make a note of its location and contact us for next steps.

If you happen to encounter an active growing operation with people present, please do not engage and leave the scene immediately.

Other illegal activities you may encounter include poaching, garbage dumping and off-season hunting. Use your judgment – if you feel unsafe at any time, do not engage and simply return to your vehicle. In situations of poaching and off-season hunting, conservation authorities will need to be contacted. Contact information can be found on page 41.



ABANDONED MINE OPENINGS

Due to its long history of mining, there are many abandoned mine openings (AMOs) in Nova Scotia. The Department of Mines and Energy has a map with general locations of known AMOs, which will be included in your maps from the Nature Trust. This map is not extensive, however, and unknown AMOs may exist that are undocumented. This is particularly common in areas with a long mining history, such as the St. Mary's River and the Eastern Shore.

If you come across a suspected AMO, please make note of it on your monitoring form and take a GPS waypoint (or mark the location on a map) and pictures. These location points will be submitted to the provincial government to improve the accuracy of your AMO data and mapping. We can access signage through the Department of Mines and Energy to post around AMOs.

INJURED WILDLIFE

If you encounter injured wildlife while on a monitoring visit, there are a couple of organizations that you can call. The most well known would be Hope for Wildlife or the Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre (which is especially well equipped for birds of prey). You do not need to transport the injured wildlife if you are not comfortable doing so. These organizations have volunteers who will come to you and collect them.

Hope for Wildlife: 902-407-9453 (phone or text, open 7 days per week, 7am-8pm)
Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre: 902 893-0253

ENCROACHMENT

Encroachment happens when an adjacent landowner's activities cross the boundary line onto Nature Trust lands. Often times these are minor encroachments and are done unknowingly. This can be timber harvesting, dumping, quarrying and in rare cases road or structure building.

Please document any encroachment issues you encounter – take pictures, GPS points and a written description of what you saw (please date this statement as in rare circumstances it may be needed to support legal action). The Nature Trust needs to be aware of these issues before any action is taken to rectify the encroachment.







Contact with Visitors & Locals

A part of your role as Property Guardian is as a representative of the Nature Trust. When you engage with locals and visitors, you are doing so on behalf of the organization, so please be kind and friendly whenever possible. You are an ambassador for the property, so please feel free to introduce yourself to people you may encounter – some people may not even know they're on a Nature Trust conservation land and it's a great opportunity to introduce people to the organization.

You may encounter people who are being disrespectful to nature – please do not assume that this is their intent. Many people are unaware of the impact their actions can have on the surrounding environment, for example a young couple walking their dog off leash on a beach with Piping Plover.

Ex. "Hello there! I'm a volunteer with the Nature Trust. Beautiful day for a walk on the beach. I see your dog is off leash. Are you aware that this beach is home to the endangered Piping Plover (the one on the conservation license plates no less!) and they are skittish, ground-nesters? Your dog might scare them and cause them to flee their nest, leaving their eggs vulnerable to predators. Would you mind keeping your dog on a leash during nesting season?"

Only engage with people if you feel calm and able to do so in a respectful manner. Seek to deepen their knowledge and respect for the place – not blame and chastise them for their ignorance. Most people are happy to know more about how they can be better stewards of the land. If you're angry, please do not engage. Make a note of the activity you witnessed on your monitoring report. If you come across people

engaged in illegal activity, or who are angry or aggressive, please leave immediately. Your safety is of the utmost importance. We ask that you contact the Nature Trust to inform of us of the activity you observed and share any photos or information you may have gathered.

Getting to know neighbours and locals is a great side effect of being a Property Guardian. We've had guardians in the past who have made friends with the neighbouring land owners – opening the lines of communication. Neighbours can be very helpful at keeping you in the know about potential issues and providing site details to inform your visit (ex. Is the river very high this spring? Should I wait to visit until the water level has gone down a bit?). This isn't a requirement of the role, to meet the neighbours, but if you feel comfortable introducing yourself, go ahead!



iNaturalist & eBird/ Data Collection

The Nature Trust does not require Property Guardians to be expert naturalists, but we do encourage data collection on our lands through various citizen science platforms!

Many of our conservation lands have iNaturalist projects, meaning any observations collected using the iNaturalist app will automatically be populated on the project page for that location. It's like a constant bio-blitz! Please let us know if you find any rare or endangered species, as we will submit these records to the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre and will update our stewardship plans as needed.

We also have an eBird account – so please share your birding lists with the Nature Trust account (contact our Volunteer Coordinator for more details).

It is important to note that your relationship with your assigned property (or properties) will deepen over time and your knowledge of place will grow. We encourage you to share this knowledge with the Nature Trust, as our staff cannot develop these relationships in the same way (with over 120 properties to care for). Your knowledge of place is vital to the continued care of these conservation lands and ensuring the conservation values of that place are safeguarded, in perpetuity. We invite you to organize events, like stewardship days or guided hikes, to share your knowledge with others.

Volunteer Support

Please remember, you are not alone! The Nature Trust is here to support you in your stewardship efforts. We can provide resources to facilitate your stewardship education, from additional training and workshops to recommendations of books and lending out tools and field equipment. We can rally volunteers to help with larger stewardship tasks or call in the experts when required. We are here for you, so please don't hesitate to reach out.

Key Contacts

Nature Trust Office 902-425-5263

Provincial Conservation Officers (Wildfires, Poaching, Other Outdoor Concerns)
1-800-565-2224

Hope for Wildlife 902-407-9453

Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre 902-893-0253

RCMP Emergency: 911

RCMP Non-emergency: 1-800-803-7267

Non-Emergency Medical Assistance: 811

Thank You!

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