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Success for Nature and Nature Lovers on St. Mary's River

August 12, 2023 (Halifax, NS) — At a community celebration in Sherbrooke today, the Nova Scotia Nature Trust announced three more outstanding conservation gems poised for protection on the beautiful St. Mary's River. The lands are home to spectacular old growth forests, rare Acadian floodplains and endangered wildlife and will add more than 500 acres to a growing corridor of protected areas along this much-loved river.

The Nature Trust's pending new conservation lands encompass rich wetlands, a prominent old growth hemlock forest and extensive provincially-rare and ecologically important Acadian floodplain forests. With less than one per cent of Nova Scotia's old growth forests remaining, and over 90 per cent of floodplain forests lost to clearing, these are significant conservation wins, both for biodiversity and for resilience against climate change impacts. They provide critical habitat for several species at risk of extinction in Canada, including Wood Turtles, Canada Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Rusty Blackbird, Common Nighthawk and Barn Swallow.

"We're delighted to announce this new deal to save three more outstanding ecological gems on the St. Mary's River," says Nature Trust Executive Director, Bonnie Sutherland. "These 500 acres will preserve rare and significant old growth and Acadian floodplain forests, habitat for nationally endangered wildlife, and fantastic places for people to explore and enjoy the beloved wild river."

As the river has a long history as a treasured recreational resource, securement of public access opportunities will be welcome news for anglers, paddlers and other nature-lovers. They include canoe access points, a walking trail through the forest at Crows Nest and a provincially designated Barrier-Free Fishing Site (wheelchair-accessible) at McKeens Brook pool.

The Nature Trust has secured a deal to purchase the three properties, part of a generous community donation by the Oland family and collaboration with the Historic Sherbrooke Village Development Society. The transfer to the Nature Trust is anticipated to finalize in the next several weeks.

Recognized as home to some of the province's last intact Acadian floodplain forests, best remaining stands of old growth hemlock, and a hotspot for biodiversity and endangered species, the St. Mary's River has been a focus for conservation for decades. With much of the shoreline privately owned and habitats facing increasing risk, the Nature Trust's unique work in private land conservation was recognized as a critical complement to long-standing salmon, turtle and watershed conservation efforts on the river.

The Nature Trust launched the [St Mary's River Conservation Legacy Campaign](#) in 2006 to protect private lands identified as top provincial conservation priorities. The long-term vision was to connect these biodiversity hotspots by preserving a contiguous corridor of intact riparian habitat, essential to the long-term health of the river.

Beginning with a generous land donation by the late A.M. Sandy and Shirley Cameron, followed by other land donations, as well as financial and volunteer support from many friends of the river including the David and Faye Sobey Foundation; Paul and Marsha Sobey; Hardy and Barbara Eshbaugh; the Donner Canadian Foundation; the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust; federal government partners and many others, the vision of the *St. Mary's Legacy Campaign* is

being realized. The “ribbon of green” now encompasses a remarkable 9,500 acres of protected areas, including Nature Trust lands and provincial parks and protected areas.

The growing assemblage of intact riparian ecosystems not only protects irreplaceable biodiversity, but provides critical ecological functions, controlling water flow, sedimentation and erosion, helping to keep the river cool, clear and fast-flowing which is critical for the health of the river and the species that depend on it for their survival. The large areas of mature forest and wetlands also provide an effective carbon sink, an important nature-based solution to climate change mitigation and resilience.

“Almost two decades ago we launched what some may have considered an overly ambitious campaign, with a vision of protecting the most important ecological gems of the river, connected by a ‘ribbon of green,’ a contiguous corridor of intact riparian habitat,” says Sutherland. “Today we celebrate another milestone in realizing that vision – over 9,500 acres and 52 kilometres of wild St. Mary’s River shoreline protected forever. Thank you to all who have helped to preserve this incredible river legacy!”

The upcoming conservation wins are welcome news to the local community and many others who cherish the river and view it as an irreplaceable part of their history, culture, way of life and future. A healthy, intact St. Mary’s River is recognized and greatly valued as a recreational, economic, ecotourism and educational asset for the community.

This win is also welcome news to Nova Scotians increasingly concerned about the growing environmental crises and their impacts, from unprecedented flooding and hurricanes to loss of wildlife and treasured natural areas.

“We know that protecting habitat is key to saving biodiversity and building resilience against devastating climate change impacts, and there are positive, tangible ways every Nova Scotian can step up for nature” notes Sutherland. “Owners of ecologically important land can explore conservation options, volunteers can help care for special wild places all across the province, and if you can – donate to save more wild places like the St. Mary’s River.”

To support the Nature Trust’s effort to save these and other important wild areas on the St. Mary’s and across the province, charitable donations may be made at nsnt.ca or (902) 425-5263.

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

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