

Seal Island Conservation Lands Draft Stewardship Plan 2020-2029

Purpose of this document

A stewardship plan is the heart of any effort to conserve a place's natural features. It declares what needs looking after ("features") and identifies what might affect those features. In response, it confirms what action needs to be done or policies adopted to safeguard those features. The last stage organises a program of action to undertake the work needed to achieve the plan's goals.

Stewardship planning is also a process where pieces of information and viewpoints need to be proposed, scrutinised and decided on to make sure that the Nova Scotia Nature Trust and those we work with have confidence in what is proposed.

The purpose of this document is to present these key parts of the stewardship plan, so that our stakeholders are able to succinctly see what we are proposing and what this may mean for them. The features identified as important by Seal residents in our visit in July should be recognisable in this draft, but we have also spoken with many others with an interest in Seal and incorporated their thinking too, as well as our own.

Next Steps

We need you to tell us what we have got right, what we have not, and what does not make sense. If you have a better idea how we can achieve the outcomes, tell us.

We have a questionnaire to help do this, which can be completed on line or in paper format and sent to us:

- Online questionnaire – here: <https://forms.gle/eCQVYJ9XifLhBhoAA>
- Hard copy questionnaire to mail back
- Scan or take a photo of questionnaire and send back to david@nsnt.ca
- Simply email (david@nsnt.ca) or call David (902-425-5263 | toll-free 1-877-434-5263)

By 7th December we will collect all these suggestions. We will produce a summary of your comments, and how we are doing things differently. At this point, we will draw up a timetable for the work and a budget. Following this the plan may be reviewed and a full one prepared for Nature Trust approval.

And then we can get on with delivering the plan!

Our vision for Seal Island Conservation Lands

Our dedicated volunteer and expert naturalists are observing nature on Seal Island more than ever before. The island remains a magnet for migrating birds seeking respite or refuge on their seasonal migration. Species of conservation concern such as Leach's Storm-Petrel and Atlantic Puffins are both breeding on the island. On the Conservation Lands, birds get the food and cover they need in the two large areas of Coastal Boreal Forest, small exposed Coastal Barrens of knee high shrubs at the margins, the small ponds and bogs, and, of course, The Pond, a barachois.

We are good neighbours in the thriving communities on the East and West Sides and at North Home. By working with others, we have found ways to meet the needs of both people and nature. We have celebrated with them the story of human life on Seal and enabled the care of its historic buildings and artifacts. Seal Island is a place where the sense of freedom, peace and tranquility is unchanged. Here the beauty of the natural world is all-pervasive.

Features to conserve

The Nature Trust's purpose is to conserve biological and physical features. We recognise the cultural values of the Island and will support the conservation of these features where this is compatible with our protection of the natural features.

Natural Features we will conserve:

- Boreal Forest
- Coastal Barrens
- Wetland Habitats
- Barachois system with its dunes, cobble bank, saltmarsh and brackish pond
- Nesting birds
- Stopover habitats for migratory birds
- Species of conservation concern

Cultural Heritage to support:

- The island's pristine natural beauty
- The sense of peace and tranquility
- North Home
- The Island's history and culture
- The presence of sheep
- The path around the island
- The opportunities to learn
- The wealth of ornithological research
- Community life

What are we trying to achieve?

Our Goals for Nature

Habitats

- The natural processes of forest development are not hindered by human activities on Seal Island.
- Small shrubs are either predominant or are expanding in areas of natural coastal barren.
- The Conservation Lands' ponds and bogs are ecologically healthy.
- The physical processes that build and maintain the cobble banks, dunes, salt marshes and brackish barachois are resilient.

Species

- Nesting bird species are thriving on Seal Island, including Leach's Storm-Petrel and Atlantic Puffins.
- Conditions on the Conservation Lands will not cause a decline in the use of Seal Island as a stopover for migrating birds.

- Local populations of species of conservation concern on Seal Island are more resilient thanks to the recovery actions we have undertaken.

Goals for People

Pristine Tranquility

- Garbage has been removed, reduced and prevented across the Conservation Lands.
- The island remains peaceful and tranquil.

History & Culture

- North Home remains a well-used residence.
- Historians and archaeologists have been able to record, protect and celebrate the island's cultural heritage.

Land Use

- We understand how sheep affect the Conservation Land, and recognise the role that they play in the island's ecosystem.
- The path around the island is maintained, with ATV access where this is needed for island life and the care of the Conservation Lands.

Learning

- The Nature Trust is able to provide opportunities for volunteers, students and others to learn about the special natural heritage features of the island.
- Ornithological research and observation of Seal Island is increasing in quality, quantity and scope without any data loss.

Being a good neighbour

- The Nature Trust is regarded as having made a positive contribution to community life.

Key Actions & Policies

Habitats

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Action / Policy</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Boreal Forest	investigate the extent to which sheep and hares interact with forest succession	Clarity over how either species are affecting forest succession	We know that the natural processes of forest development are not hindered by human activities on Seal Island.
	Find out how much dead wood is produced a year and compare with firewood needs on the island	Clarity over whether subsistence firewood collection can be sustained without harming forest development	
	Forecast impact of climate change on forests at Seal & develop adaptation plan	An action plan to facilitate resilience of forest ecosystem	
Coastal Barrens	Investigate the relationship between hares, sheep and grassland in open areas	Clarity on whether either species is significantly affecting the areas of natural coastal barren and if so, how we can alter to ensure sub-shrubs predominate here	Small shrubs are either predominant or are expanding in areas of natural coastal barren.
	Adjust grazing by either hares or sheep so that sub-shrubs are expanding	Sub-shrubs are able to predominate in natural coastal barren areas	
Wetland Habitats	Investigate the effect of muskrats and other introduced species on the development of wetland habitats	Clarity on whether introduced species are significantly interfering with the natural ecosystem	The Conservation Lands' ponds and bogs are ecologically healthy.
Barachois	Assess resilience of processes and ability for human activity to impact these processes	Clarity that human activity in the marsh, dunes and cobble bank – such as ATV use do not interfere with the natural dynamics of barachois	We know that the physical processes that build and maintain the cobble banks, dunes, salt marshes and brackish barachois are resilient despite the effects of human activities.
	Assess & forecast effects of climate change on dune system & cobble bank & develop adaptation / mitigation measures accordingly	Identify adaptive measures needed to maintain resilience of the physical processes	
	Policy presuming against the construction of coastal defences or structures that interfere with natural dynamics	The physical processes that build the barachois are not interfered with	

Species

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Action / Policy</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Nesting Birds	Subject to a feasibility assessment, remove rats and red squirrels from the island	Improved habitat leading to breeding success for Leach's Storm-Petrel, Atlantic Puffins and other birds.	Nesting bird species are thriving on Seal Island, including Leach's Storm-Petrel and Atlantic Puffins.
	Investigate the impact of gull populations on other bird nesting success	Clarity on whether intervention on gull populations is beneficial and appropriate	
	Investigate effects of climate change on food supplies for insectivores and marine birds and develop mitigation / adaptation plan as appropriate	Identify actions needed to enable nesting bird species are able to cope with effect of climate change on food supplies	
	Investigate the current and likely future carrying capacity of habitat across the Seal / Mud Island group of islands for species that have nested at Seal in the past	Clarity on which species which have historically nested at Seal might require conservation action for them to breed in Seal / Mud Islands area	
Seal as a Stopover Habitat for Migrating Birds	Monitor use of island for change, review whether changes are linked to habitat changes at Seal	Clarity that the stewardship of habitats has meant Conservation Lands remain a valuable stopover for migrating birds	Conditions on the Conservation Lands will not cause a decline in the use of Seal Island as a stopover for migrating birds.
Species of Conservation Concern	Review species at risk recovery plans and develop actions needed at Seal	We know what actions are needed to protect species at risk on Seal	Local populations of species of conservation concern on Seal Island are more resilient.
	Undertake species at risk recovery actions	Species at risk have more resilient populations on Seal.	

Pristine Tranquility

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Action / Policy</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Pristine Beauty	Nature Trust to work with municipal authorities to remove domestic garbage from Seal	Alternative methods for disposing garbage provided	Garbage has been removed, reduced and prevented across the Conservation Lands.
	Past garbage at the burn to be removed	Accumulated garbage is removed	
	Investigate with agencies academics and conservation partners on methods to reduce sources of marine debris, including fishing debris such as lobster pots	Less plastic and other marine debris accumulates at Seal Island	
	Undertake volunteer activities to remove marine debris	Accumulated marine debris is reduced	
Peace & Tranquility	Nature Trust promoted visits to Seal will focus on voluntary activity such as biological recording or stewardship action	Nature Trust is able to bring volunteers to island to support stewardship work	The island remains peaceful and tranquil.

History & Culture

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Action / Policy</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Goal</i>
North Home	Arrange subdivision of property and separation from Conservation lands	Provides certainty so that those at North Home can use it and look after it.	North Home remains a well-used residence.
History and Culture	Nature Trust to encourage and participate in celebrations of Seal Island life	The island's cultural heritage has been celebrated	Through the encouragement of the Nature Trust, historians and archaeologists have been able to record, protect and celebrate the island's cultural heritage.
	Nature Trust to encourage and facilitate identification, recording and protection of cultural heritage	Cultural heritage structures and objects able to be conserved	

Land Use

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Action / Policy</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Sheep	Assess the overall effect of sheep grazing on natural values	Clarity on whether they provide net benefit for the Conservation Lands.	We understand how sheep affect the Conservation Lands, and recognise the role that they play in the island's ecosystem.
Path around the island	Residents and volunteers clear vegetation and windblow along path	Path around the island is maintained	The path around the island is maintained, with ATV access where this is needed for island life and the care of the Conservation Lands.
	Cutting of new routes inland when paths eroded by sea	Path around island is complete	

Learning

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Action / Policy</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Opportunity to Learn	Nature Trust to facilitate learning opportunities and trips to Seal for naturalists	More people are able to learn about nature on Seal Island	The Nature Trust is able to provide opportunities for volunteers, students and others to learn about the special natural heritage features of the island.
	Policy to encourage sharing of insight between residents, volunteers & expert ecologists	Activities more likely to exchange of knowledge between residents, volunteers and experts	
Wealth of ornithological research	Encourage volunteer and academic data to be held in open and current formats	Knowledge about Seal not likely to be lost	Ornithological research and observation of Seal Island is increasing in quality, quantity and scope without any data loss.
	Nature Trust to engage with Acadia and other universities to support and expand observation work, and align with stewardship actions	Capacity and capability of bird research on Seal is increased	

Being good neighbours

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Action / Policy</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Community Life	Nature Trust establishes forum for resolving issues in a timely and consensual manner.	An effective means of communication is established through which agreement can be found	The Nature Trust is regarded as having made a positive contribution to community life.