

The Blue Mountain NEWS



Photo: Heather L.

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THE ROAD TO DESIGNATION: BLUE MOUNTAIN-BIRCH COVE LAKES WILDERNESS

Submitted by: Pascale Salah,
Parks Canada



Photo: NS Department Environment and Change

Location: Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, a 2,304-hectare area at the edge of urban Halifax.

Meet the Parks Canada team: Pascale Salah, Project Manager; Lara Peters, Manager of National Urban Parks and Program Policy; Miriam Padolsky, Director of Urban Parks and Ecological Corridors.

Key current partners: A Partner Group has been created to provide oversight for the pre-feasibility and planning phases of the candidate national urban park designation process. The Partner Group informs, guides, and has decision-making authority regarding activities undertaken as part of the designation assessment. It is comprised of jurisdictions, landowners, and rights-holders, including: Parks Canada, Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn, Sipekne'katik First Nation, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), Province of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Nature Trust.

Stakeholder engagement: Opportunities will be provided for stakeholders and other interested groups to meaningfully contribute to discussions about Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes and the national urban parks program. For example, a series of meetings was launched in May 2023, bringing together project partners and representatives from stakeholder groups, including the Friends of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, to help inform and advance activities related to the planning phase of the national urban park designation process.

Regional context: Residents have been advocating for a park at Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes for several decades, with HRM exploring a concept in the area since 2006. Known as 'Keji in the City,' the area features a mix of protected woodlands, barrens, lakes, and wetlands that provide a refuge for wildlife amid an expanding and ecologically fragmented suburban and urban landscape.

Program objectives: The National Urban Parks Program has three core objectives:

- **Conservation of Nature:** Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes is an area of high ecological value. Twenty-three Species at Risk and 61 Species of Conservation Concern are known within or near the candidate site lands, which include the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Provincial Wilderness Area.
- **Connecting People with Nature:** Halifax has become one of the fastest-growing regions in Canada. Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes is already a popular destination for residents to connect with nature.

- Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: The area is located within the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq people, whom Parks Canada works with nation-to-nation. Opportunities are being explored regarding the candidate national urban park as a place for traditional and cultural practices, a place to demonstrate leadership in conservation and a place with the potential for economic benefit for communities.

Where are we in the process? A Statement of Collaboration between Parks Canada and HRM was signed in July 2021, with all landowners and rights-holders joining Parks Canada and the Municipality to form a National Urban Park Partner Group in May 2022. Pre-Feasibility background assessments such as ecological, recreational and cultural studies have now been completed, as well as initial public engagements. Mi'kmaq-led background assessments and community engagements are ongoing.

Milestones: May 2023: Release of the **Pre-Feasibility Report** for the national urban park project in Halifax and implementation of the Planning Phase of the national urban park designation process.

Where can I find more information about the national urban park program? www.parksCanada.gc.ca/national-urban-parks

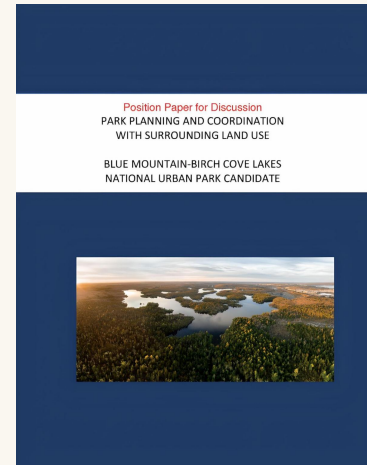
FRIENDS' POSITION PAPER RELEASED

Since Friends was formed in 2018, the Planning Committee has worked long and hard to advocate for establishing the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes area as a protected wilderness surrounded by urban-suburban Halifax. And, since the federal government's August 2021 announcement of the new National Urban Park Program, these efforts have redoubled to elevate the area's original status as a regional park (proposed initially in 2006 by HRM as a 'conceptual park area') to candidacy for designation as a National Urban Park.

The Friends of BMBCL planning committee and board members have met with political leaders and government staff at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. They have reviewed a long list of related staff and consultant reports and recommendations accumulated over the past decades. Information gained has been consolidated into a **position paper** (click the link to access the paper on the Friends website). The position paper sets out the Friends' recommendations regarding planning for both the establishment of the park and the coordination of park-related interests with surrounding land use planning and development activity.

Endorsed by the Board as a working draft (updating as new information becomes available), this paper is intended to serve as a basic reference in meetings and discussions with the partner group (see above article by P. Salah), landowners and rights-holders, relevant political representatives, and members of like-minded organizations.

Questions and comments are welcome. Contact planning@bluemountainfriends.ca



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT BODES WELL FOR PARK PROGRESS

The Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes regional park proposal has begun to catch the wind in its sails, and the coming year is expected to see significant progress toward park establishment.

The game-changer that moved things forward was the August 2021 announcement by federal Environment and Climate Change Minister Guilbeault of the new National Urban Park Program, together with the identification of Halifax's BMBCL area as one of six leading potential candidates across the Country for early designation.

The focus and resources provided by Parks Canada's program leadership and corresponding funding support have proven an effective catalyst for bringing the group of primary partners together (see the article by P. Sahal above) to work on park establishment in a coordinated and coherent way – for the first time since the initial proposal was advanced in 2006. Most recently, interested and supporting stakeholders, including the Friends of BMBCL, also have been invited to the table. Two very positive and productive meetings occurred (May 1st and June 26th), and more are planned regularly over the coming months.

Efforts to establish the BMBCL park area have entered a refreshing new era of information sharing, which is fostering a surge of optimism amongst park proponents and supporters. Particular credit is due to the leadership of Pascale Salah, Project Manager, National Urban Parks and to representatives of the primary partners who collectively have opened up the park planning process to greater transparency and receptivity to hearing suggestions and advice from BMBCL park advocates.

Friends of BMBCL, which has long pressed for effective public input and stakeholder engagement, is excited to see how the coming months will unfold.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU

Over the past few months, Friends has received support and donations from a few different supporters. We are so grateful and appreciate every donation.

PACE Atlantic for their \$5000 donation. Identified as a Community Interest Corporation, PACE is one of the first private sector businesses to support Friends of BMBCL and our advocacy efforts.

Iona Stoddard donated \$5000. This will help purchase trail cams and promotional materials on BMBCL.

Carrie Phillips-Kaiser donated a portion of her sales from the Peggy's Cove Arts Festival.

Bay Treasure Chest supported BMBCL once again with a \$500 honorarium.



L-R: BMBCL Board Member Mary Ellen Donovan, Mary Ann McGrath (Chair) receiving cheque from Robert Patzelt (PACE Atlantic CIC Chair), and Julian Boyle, President, PACE Atlantic



Carrie Phillips-Kaiser artwork



L-R: Iona Stoddard, Mary Ann McGrath



Thank you, Rafah DiCostanzo, for hosting Friends at her Summer Community BBQ. We laughed, added new members, enjoyed the food, and most importantly, shared how valuable BMBCL is to the future of HRM.

Also, **thank you to our volunteers!** Everyone that hosts a table welcoming people to meetings or shares their knowledge about BMBCL is making a big difference. We can't do this without you. A special shout to volunteers David Seller and new members Karl Lugosch and Nashim Gargari for stepping up to help at our AGM this year.

SUMMER FUN



BIG BACKYARD BIOBLITZ

From August 3-7, the annual Big Backyard Blitz is scheduled. Every contribution counts—butterflies,



PHOTO: Simon d'Entremont

birds, flowers in the woods. The BioBlitz is a great way to know your area better and to help organizations protect the wild creatures and greenspace you enjoy.

All you need is a smartphone, tablet or digital camera. Take a picture and then share your observations online.

Sign up today by visiting the Nature Conservancy website at <https://natureconservancy.ca>

AGM WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Our AGM was held in June, and we are excited about two new board members.

Hailey Stapleton and Samuel Shaji. Hailey is a speech-language pathologist with the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE). She holds her Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology from Dalhousie University and her Bachelor of Arts with Honours in English Literature from MSU. Hailey worked with the Friends of BMBCL ("BMBCL") in the summer of 2022 as one of three summer students in the position of Visitor Information Collection person.



Samual works as a Banking Advisor, Business Specialist for the Royal Bank. He has experience in business and leadership, having been elected to the role of Executive Vice President and Provincial Deputy Chair of the Students' Union at Cape Breton University (CBU). Over the time he was studying at CBU, he was a strong advocate of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion within the Province. Samuel is keen to help Friends bring the joy of BMBCL Wilderness to new Canadians living in HRM.

Returning Board members include Mary Ann McGrath (Chairperson), Diana Whalen, John Bignell, James Boyer, Mary Ellen Donovan, Eleanor Humphries, Raymond Plourde, Carol Ann Roberts, Dale Smith, and Catherine McKellar.

NEW HIKE LEADERS READY TO LEAD THE WAY

Late this spring, Friends was thrilled to host its third Hike Leader Training weekend. Ten participants have now joined the ranks as certified Hike Leaders and are ready to lead groups into the BMBCL. The training is certified through the Outdoor Council of Canada and occurred over the course of two days. With a mix of classroom and field activities, participants gain hands-on knowledge and understanding on how to safely organize and lead hikes. Each participant has committed to leading or assisting a minimum of four hikes over the next two years.



A new hike schedule is being planned, so check our website in the fall for hikes led by these fun, well-trained new Hike Leaders.

HOW TO SURVIVE A WILDFIRE WHILE HIKING

As we face more climate challenges, it's important for hikers to know how to take care of themselves. Here are a

few tips for surviving a wildfire.

- Always check the status of the area where you are going.
- Contact any park guides to determine the conditions of the area.
- Understand that the fire burns faster going uphill.
- Fire needs wood and vegetation to fuel itself. Look for areas where there are fewer trees or brush. If you are stuck in an area open area, try to clear any brush quickly.
- Look for roads or streams. These breaks in the landscape help to slow down the fire.
- Cover your mouth and nose with clothing to protect your lungs.
- Stay out of valleys. They can draw heat closer.
- If the wind is blowing **into** the fire, run into the wind.
- If the wind is blowing **behind** the fire and blowing toward you, run perpendicular to the fire.
- Be a responsible hiker. Know how to put out a campfire properly and know when or if you can have a campfire.



(Sources: Outdoors&OnTheGo.com, GoExploreCroatia.com, Northerncaliforniahikingtrails.com)

CONTACT US: Let us know what you think.

Send comments or pictures to info@bluemountainfriends.ca

All previous editions, starting in 2018, can be viewed [on our website](#).



Newsletter Ed: C. McKellar