


# The Blue Mountain NEWS

 Barrett

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## NEW FRIENDS OF BMBCL CHAIR READY TO LEAD

"If COVID has taught us anything at all, it's that we need to breathe fresh air, and we need to sit in a quiet place," says Mary Ann McGrath. "And I think eight or ten thousand acres of green space will do that for us." A longtime resident of Kearney Lake and a former Bedford Basin MLA, it's hard to imagine a better candidate for Chair than McGrath, who has been working to create and protect the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park for more than 30 years.



After accepting the position of Chair of the Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove board of directors at the 2021 Annual General Meeting, McGrath plans to devote her tenure to creating a national urban park that all Nova Scotians can enjoy for generations to come.

Among the first advocates for BMBCL, and with a deep knowledge of the people and politics, McGrath felt duty-bound to accept the position, she says. "There are no existing initial members that haven't taken the job, and I really feel that the chair position needs to have somebody who's got some legs in the game and some sense of what's happened," she says. "It just felt like it was my turn to step up and do more than just be a board member."

McGrath's work, she says, will focus on protecting and shoring up the borders of the park and working with the city, province and developers to plan for additional trailheads and designated parking, while continuing to advocate for BMBCL's designation as an Urban National Park. "The pace of development around the edges of the park is constantly ramping up, so if I could just keep moving the needle forward on those two main aspects I would consider that huge success," she says.

## NATIONAL URBAN PARKS AND THE FUTURE OF THE BMBCL

After decades of advocacy by a handful of devoted Nova Scotian conservationists, the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park is closer than ever to attaining fully protected status. Last August, the process took a big step forward with the announcement that the BMBCL area was shortlisted for Parks Canada's bold new initiative, the [National Urban Parks program](#).



As part of Budget 2021's investment of \$2.3 billion in "Canada's Nature Legacy," funds earmarked to protect biodiversity, conserve nature, and create jobs in nature conservation, up to \$130.9 million was set aside expressly to begin creation of a network of National Urban Parks in cities across the country. Following the lead of the

Rouge, a National Urban Park of nearly 80 square kilometers on the eastern edge of Toronto, the intent is to establish one national urban park in every province and territory by 2030.

While [Halifax](#) is among a handful of cities, including Saskatoon, Windsor and Winnipeg, that have signed statements of collaboration with Parks Canada to create National Urban Parks, a lot more work needs to happen to ensure the process moves forward. In addition to advocating for the protection of BMBCL on municipal and provincial levels, says Friends of Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes Society Chair Mary Ann McGrath, moving the Urban National Parks initiative forward will be a top priority for the coming year. "Status under the Urban National Parks is like a gold seal," she says. "Once it's in place, building anything in the park would be like telling developers, they could have at Peggy's Cove."

## BMBCL BACKGROUND STUDY

# HALIFAX

On January 14th, HRM issued a [Request for Proposals](#) for interested parties to submit proposals for a comprehensive study of the BMBCL area, as an essential first step toward creation of a park plan. The study is to include three main components: "...ecological and recreational assessment of the current conditions; and archaeological and cultural study; and analysis of land use and settlement in the study area; review of park governance models; and an engagement plan." The deadline for proposals is February 1st, 2022. To learn more, visit HRM's procurement webpage <https://procurement.novascotia.ca/tender-details>



## FRASER FAMILY DONATES LAND

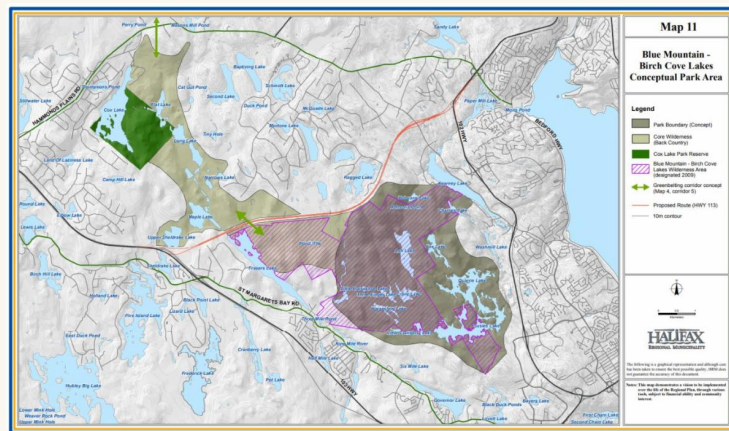
Earlier this month, the Nova Scotia Nature Trust added a piece of the "land puzzle" to Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes. Keith and Anne Fraser donated property, bordered on two sides by the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area, to the Nature Trust to protect the area from development. This piece of land is important as the 9-mile river bisects it. The acquisition of the 8.75-acre parcel of land is another part of the original

landholdings of the Fraser family—a family with a long history in the Timberlea area.

To learn more about Keith and Anne Fraser's donation, visit [Nova Scotia Nature Trust](#).

## REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW MOVING FORWARD

Almost two years ago, HRM gave the green light to HRM staff for a [Regional Plan](#) review. The 3-year review process undertaken by a five-member Regional Plan review staff team is now in the home stretch. After getting initial input from stakeholders, a Themes & Direction report was released in Spring 2021. Following this report, a further round of stakeholder consultations was undertaken, with the issuance in December 2021 of a 1,240 page "What We Heard" staff report.



The Friends of BMBCL provided input at both stages, given the potential implications for the proposed park area. One of the foremost concerns is what appears to be the lack of implementation provisions for environmental policies in the existing Regional Plan. A concern is the Utility and Review Board could place greater emphasis on development policies.

If any members have thoughts on this subject that they would like to share with the BMBCL board, please contact us or share your views directly with the HRM Regional Plan team by emailing [regionalplan@halifax.ca](mailto:regionalplan@halifax.ca). You can also keep up to date on projects by visiting HRM's [Shape Your City's homepage](#).

## WINTER HIKING TIPS



- Know the forecast and trail conditions
- Layer Up and Down - wear fewer layers while you're walking and layer up when you stop so you stay warm)
- Stay hydrated – often during the winter, you don't feel thirsty when winter hiking, but it is essential to keep sipping the water
- Keep electronics warm – batteries drain in the cold. It's essential to keep them warm so you can take beautiful photos when you arrive at your stop
- Be prepared - all season advice take the first aid kit, solar blanket, snacks and add some hand warmers during the winter)
- Leave your details – always tell someone where you are going and your timeframe

## ALIVE AND WELL

During a presentation by Sophie Kent-Purcell, from the Nova Action Youth Cohort, it was clear that wildlife in the BMBCL area is alive and well. In November, Kent-Purcell was on hand at the Friends' AGM to share her research.

From November 2020 to Spring of 2021, she set up trail cameras to investigate wildlife in the area. The cameras were busy with sightings of hares, pheasants, deer, porcupines and coyotes. One of the more exciting observations was of bobcats.



Bobcats are common in Nova Scotia. They often keep to areas with lower snowfall levels as they cannot travel easily through deep snow. Given this trait, it is not surprising bobcats are seen in wilderness areas close to communities.

Take a peek at [Kent-Purcell's website](#) to read more.

## MEET THE NEW BOARD

### **Mary Ann McGrath, Chair**

A longtime resident of Kearney Lake and a former Bedford Basin MLA, Mary Ann has been working to create and protect the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park for more than 30 years.

### **Eleanor Humphries: Vice-Chair**

A business consultant with wide-ranging experience in government and private industry and an avid hiker, Eleanor Humphries brings a formidable skill set and contacts to the Friends of BMBCL Society. She is the former President & CEO of the Halifax International Airport Authority and President & CEO of Credit Union Atlantic.

### **Diana Whalen: Secretary, Past-Chair**

Diana represented the riding of Clayton Park West from 2003-2017 as MLA. Prior to that she was a city councillor and a management consultant. Her career highlights include terms as Deputy Premier of Nova Scotia and Minister of Finance and Justice. Diana has long championed the BMBCL in the legislature and in the community.

### **Carol Ann Roberts: Treasurer**

A Retired MBA/CPA with degrees from Dalhousie, Acadia and SMU, Carol Ann Roberts' diverse CV includes eight years as District Comptroller for the Nunavut Housing Corp, a stint as business manager for CBC and running a family bookstore in Dartmouth.

### **Dale Smith**

With a career in parks and protected areas planning going back to the early 1970s, Dale Smith has been an advocate for conservation in government and, following retirement, the NGO community for decades.

### **Mary Ellen Donovan**

Mary Ellen was involved with the Friends of BMBCL formation. She retired after 37 years as the HRM's Director of Legal Services and Insurance. She is currently a board member of Nova Scotia's Nature Trust Conservation Committee and a board member of Bicycling Nova Scotia.

### **Nick Buxton**

Nick Buxton is an officer in the Canadian Navy and an outdoor enthusiast.

### **Mel Earley**

A former resident of Hammonds Plains, Mel Earley is a retired insurance executive, an avid hiker and a devoted community volunteer.

### **Ray Plourde**

Currently the Wilderness Co-ordinator at the Ecology Action Centre, Ray Plourde is a longtime supporter of BMBCL and a nature photographer, writer, and angler.

### **Catherine McKellar**

Catherine is a public relations professional with more than 20-years-experience working with non-profits in Ontario and Nova Scotia. She has a passion for the outdoors firmly believing in the many benefits of being in nature. Catherine is also our current Newsletter Editor.

### **Debbie McKinnon**

Originally from Cape Breton and a longtime Fairview resident, Debbie McKinnon is a devoted community volunteer who recently ran as a candidate for District 10.

### **John Bignell**

An Advanced Care Paramedic and the founder of NS Paramedics Society, John Bignell has 27 years of experience with EMS and a long list of volunteer positions in public safety and conservation across the HRM.



**JOIN**  
**FRIENDS OF BLUE MOUNTAIN BIRCH COVE LAKES**

Lend your voice to preserving this rare and unique wilderness  
in the heart of Halifax Regional Municipality

Visit [www.bluemountainfriends.ca](http://www.bluemountainfriends.ca) to join today

## **JOIN FRIENDS OF BMBCL**

Friends of BMBCL want to add more members this year. The goal is to have 1000 members by mid-year, lending a stronger voice for advocacy work. Encourage your friends to join and support BMBCL. For us, the more, the merrier.

To join, just click [Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness](#)

**CONTACT US:** Let us know what you think. Send comments or pictures to [bluemountainbirchcovelakes@gmail.com](mailto:bluemountainbirchcovelakes@gmail.com)

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

