

The Blue Mountain NEWS SPECIAL EDITION

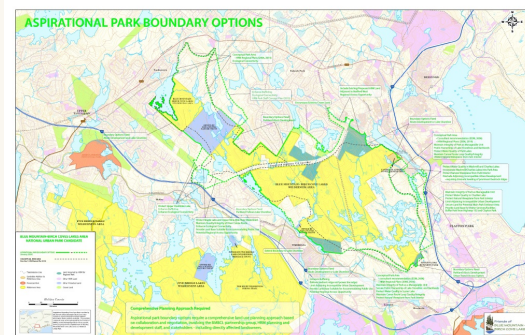
IMAGINE BIRCH COVE LAKES NOT INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL URBAN PARK

Photo: FliteLab

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BE BOLD: CREATE AN ENDURING NATIONAL URBAN PARK FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Friends of BMBCL believe now is the time to be bold when planning BMBCL National Urban Park, and are proposing **Aspirational Park Boundary Options** to guide the park planning process now underway. We believe the current approach of the 'partnership group'[1] that is overseeing park planning, which is being led by HRM through contracted consultants, is flawed and will limit opportunities to achieve the park's true potential. The essential problem is that the planning consultants have been directed to look only at lands already owned and managed by one or other of the partners (**BMBCL Partnership Lands**).



This limitation will have serious consequences, if not removed. Adjoining lands and waters with potential for acquisition and incorporation into the park will be ignored and overlooked. As a result, HRM's national urban park will fall short regarding:

- ensuring effective protection of the full range of natural features associated with the BMBCL wilderness; and,
- building upon the quality outdoor opportunities and experiences, including hiking, canoeing and swimming, for which the area has long been known.

Imagine a BMBCL park plan without provision for inclusion and protection of the namesake Birch Cove Lakes!

Unless a suitable park boundary is established, the significant features of the BMBCL area will not be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of



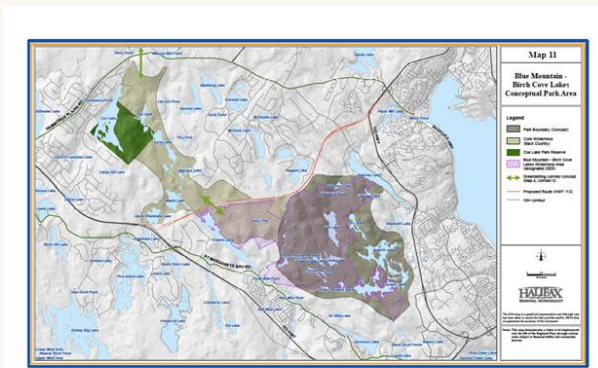
current and future residents of HRM and of visitors from the rest of Nova Scotia and Canada.

The early establishment of a viable park land base is critical, especially in light of the recent accelerated growth of Halifax's population and associated **development pressures**. If adjoining lands with park-related values are not incorporated into the park very soon, these lands will be consumed by the rapidly expanding urban development footprint, whether for housing, transportation or other growth-driven land uses.

Limiting park planning to partner-owned lands is problematic because property boundaries do not necessarily align with the character of the underlying land and water base. As a result, significant natural features and processes that extend beyond, or that occur adjacent to, properties owned by the partners will be overlooked and will not be considered as possible candidates for acquisition and protection as part of the park.

As well, public recreational use in the BMBCL wilderness has become established over time on an informal and unmanaged basis, and with little knowledge or consideration of land ownership. Popular hiking trails and valued backcountry canoe routes, criss-cross public and private property lines, with many of the most popular trails and water routes depending on access to and use of private land. Unfortunately, lands currently owned by the partners, on their own, are not well-suited to providing future visitors with quality access opportunities, associated facilities and services or the array of outdoor experiences anticipated to be provided in BMBCL National Urban Park.

For Friends of BMBCL, it is crystal clear, restricting the BMBCL National Urban Park Plan to only partner-owned lands will not lead to the establishment of a high-quality national urban park in the BMBCL area.



The Friends of BMBCL Society was formed in 2017 to support and promote the creation and development of the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park and to encourage the responsible use and stewardship of the area. The BMBCL Regional Park was first proposed as a 'conceptual park area' in HRM's 2006 regional plan (**Map 13**), and was later reaffirmed and enhanced via the 2014 regional plan update (**Map 11**). The conceptual park area covers most of the natural land and water features that are popular with hikers, canoers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. This conceptual area has been supported consistently by Regional Council and has served as the baseline reference for Friends of BMBCL in its efforts to promote

park establishment.

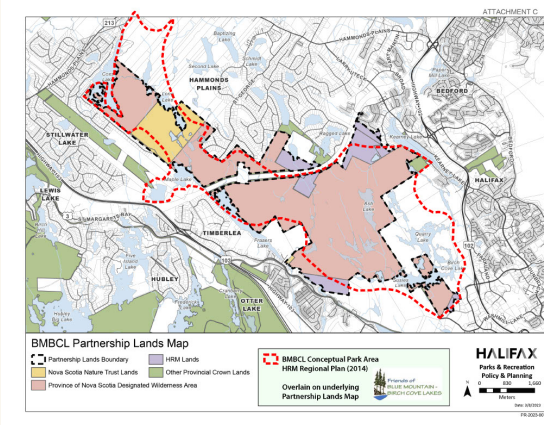
The formal recognition of the area as a national urban park candidate, first proposed by Parks Canada in August 2021 and then formally confirmed in May 2023, has significantly increased the importance and urgency of planning for successful park establishment. With BMBCL the only official national urban park candidate east of Toronto, it is perplexing that the partnership group, along with the governments, departments, and organizations its members represent, has limited the scope of planning for this exciting new park opportunity. The partner lands, although important, were secured for park or conservation purposes over time on an ad hoc basis without benefit of guidance from a comprehensive park plan. A planning approach that considers all associated lands and waters is needed to ensure the establishment of a high quality and enduring national urban park.

Now is the time to be bold, and to look beyond the boundaries of lands already owned and secured.

Friends of BMBCL have **overlain the outline of the conceptual park area** on lands owned by members of the partnership group to illustrate how the current limited approach falls short -- not only of HRM's 2014 vision for BMBCL Regional Park but also of the expanded and enhanced vision that should befit a candidate national urban park.

Friends of BMBCL's **Aspirational Park Boundary Options** highlight specific areas (with accompanying captions indicating the rationale for their identification), as potential candidates for consideration and negotiation for acquisition. Specific criteria include:

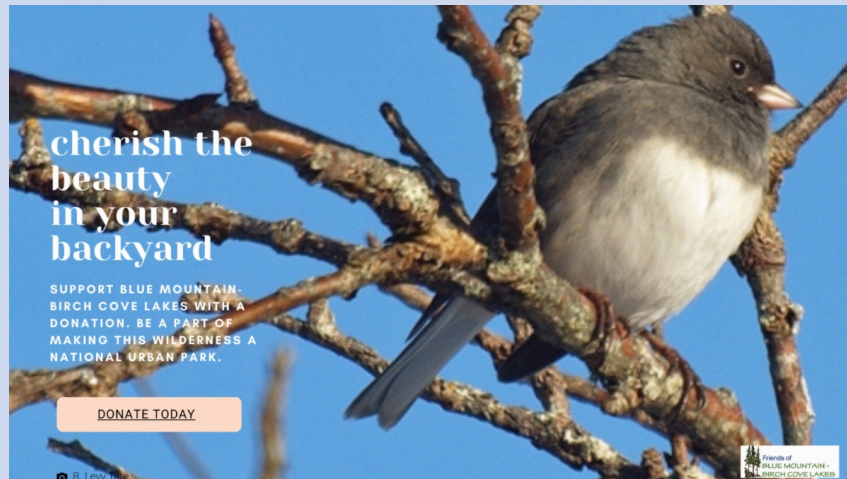
- complying with the 'conceptual park area' approved by HRM's council and/or with concepts previously recommended by HRM staff;
- establishing a viable park management unit;
- ensuring the Birch Cove Lakes (the namesake of BMBCL) shorelines and backlands along with important lakes, waterways and wetlands are publicly owned;
- protecting water quality in park lakes;
- maintaining the quality and integrity of primary park canoe routes;
- protecting significant viewpoints and maintenance of natural viewplanes from park interior;
- securing land for future primary park entrance and other secondary accesses required to serve surrounding communities;
- providing a land base for essential park visitor facilities and services; and
- limiting adjoining incompatible development to buffer the park area.



We believe these **Aspirational Park Boundary Options** provide the framework needed to guide essential negotiations regarding land acquisition and ultimately for the establishment of a viable boundary that will enable the park to flourish and endure over time. The final park boundary must be designed to preserve the ecological integrity of the untouched BMBCL backcountry while also considering the expectations of current and future users and supporters for generations to come.

Friends of BMBCL are committed to striving for the strongest possible vision for BMBCL National Urban Park, and encouraging the partnership group to step up to meet this challenge.

[1] The 'partnership group' is comprised of Parks Canada, Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change, Nova Scotia Nature Trust and representatives of the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, including Kwilmu'ku Maw-klusuaqn (KMK) and Sipekne'katik First Nation.



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