

The Blue Mountain NEWS



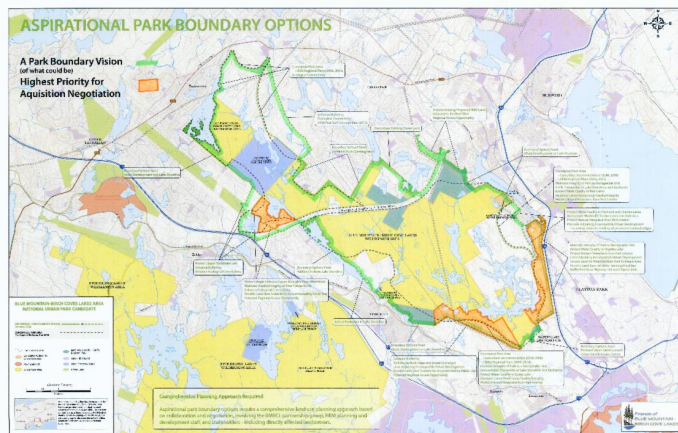
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LAND ACQUISITION ESSENTIAL FOR URBAN PARK

Early this spring, Friends submitted an **op-ed to the Chronicle Herald** calling for land acquisition as a critical step to establishing and preserving BMBCL national urban park. The op-ed outlined three key reasons why acquisition is necessary.

First, the lands considered critical for acquisition are those needed to consolidate the land base required for ensuring the ecological integrity and successful creation of a viable park. Establishing a functional park perimeter or boundary is essential.



Second, existing popular recreational use areas must be included within the future park area. Over the years, public use has become established on undeveloped and unoccupied areas, on an informal and unmanaged basis with little knowledge or awareness of land ownership. Popular hiking trails and valued backcountry canoe routes therefore criss-cross public and private property lines with many of the most popular trails and water routes dependent on access to and use of private land. The unfortunate net result is that currently dedicated conservation lands, by themselves, simply cannot provide the recreational opportunities to which visitors to the area have become accustomed.

Third, critically important adjoining lands, if not acquired, will soon be overtaken by Halifax's rapidly outwardly expanding development footprint, whether for housing, transportation, or other growth-driven land uses. So, without coordinated, coherent, and concerted action, potential opportunities to add these lands to the park will be lost, essentially forever.

Friends is concerned there is no grand vision or coherent plan for the establishment of BMBCL National

Urban Park, nor is there a strategy for the acquisition of much-needed additional land. In light of the urgency regarding land acquisition, the Friends of BMBCL have identified **aspirational park boundary** options, to encourage consideration of a park boundary vision and support identification of the highest priorities for initiating land acquisition negotiations.

Public meetings, hosted by the referenced park planning consultants, are planned to discuss plans for the management and use of existing conservation properties owned by one or more of the partner group. Later this year, further public discussion led by Parks Canada is anticipated regarding plans to formally designate the BMBCL area as a National Urban Park.

Please plan to attend these meetings Friends will post dates on our website. Also, contact your respective federal MP, provincial MLA and municipal councillor to let decision-makers know where you stand.

GETTING TO DESIGNATION

2024 is proving to be extremely busy in the Friends efforts to get to Designation. Part of the Parks Canada program in its development of the **National Urban Park program** has been an effort to develop a policy that will guide such processes, not only the present efforts involving 6 candidate sites, but also future candidate sites.

We understand that it had been hoped that the policy would be available for public review this Spring; but it is currently looking like this may occur by the end of Summer. What Friends have realized is that the timeline for Designation is running out of runway. We are now about to enter year 4 of the 5 year time frame.

As a result, we have been advocating for Designation this Fall and recently met with our local MPs to discuss the importance of an early Designation, all of whom are very supportive. Currently, of the 4-stage **National Urban Park** process that Parks Canada has identified : Pre-feasibility, Planning, Designation & Implementation. BMBCL is at the Planning stage. If Designation could occur this Fall that would leave some program time for the Implementation stage. Parks Canada is currently advising their timeframe for Designation is 2025.



STUDIES UPDATE

A couple of Parks Canada-financed studies, one managed by HRM, the other by the Province, are currently in progress. In the case of both studies, the original completion date as per the respective RFPs had been March 31, 2024. In both cases the studies were late getting underway thereby putting pressure on the March 31 target completion date.

The HRM park planning study was contracted to O2 of Calgary (who did the Halifax Green Network Plan for HRM), with a subcontract to Uplands Design of HRM. An interim version was presented to members of Friends (and other stakeholders) for feedback in February 2024 with a view to public review soon thereafter. We understand the draft final report has been in circulation for internal HRM comment and no date is currently available as to when this study will be presented for public comment.

The Provincial work is being undertaken by Strum Consulting and it involves a number of ecologically-related activities including wildlife corridor work. The final version of that study is now in the internal review process before public release. The Province has been unable to provide an ETA for its release.

HIGHWAY 113 UPDATE

Friends board members attended a number of the Joint Regional Transportation Agency (JRTA) pop-up sessions this winter advocating for the abandonment of what we believe to be a \$200m project to put a 4-lane highway through the middle of the park. This highway, because of topographical realities, looks like it would be significantly elevated in the area of the Brookline Subdivision putting highway noise on the doorstep of residents of this area.



Based on what we have seen to date, Hwy 113 remains within the target sights of the JTRA. Councillor Lovelace has been relentless in her support of the cancellation of the Hwy 113 project. She has put forward to Transportation Minister Masland another alternative along what is referred to as the Pipeline Road, an existing, unopened service road that would connect Hwy 103 and 101. Council also wrote the Province a year or more ago asking for cancellation of the Hwy 113 project with no response.

FOREST FIRE SEASON UNDERWAY

With the camping season underway, burn reminders are necessary. A fire is not allowed any day between 8:00 am and 2:00 pm. The Department of Natural Resources updates their website by 2:00 pm on when a fire is permitted for that day. [Check the burnsafe map](#) before you start a fire.

Fire pits are being found in BMBCL increasing the risk of a wildfire. In BMBCL and in many wilderness areas, it is essential that fire pits are carefully watched and put out. Wildfires often start small and initially go unnoticed but can easily spread very quickly.

We're reminding members and readers about the importance of safe burning and remind everyone how easy it is for a fire to spread out of control. The grounds are dry already.

Before you burn, remember to:

• Check to see if burning allowed? (Check the daily fire restrictions at novascotia.ca/burnsafe or **1-855-564-2876**.)

- Use a fire pit if available or build on bare rock, soil/sand.
- Keep a 3-metre clearance around and above your fire.
- Prepare the site by scraping the ground down to bare soil (1m radius).
- Never leave your campfire unattended.
- Keep a pail of water and a shovel nearby.
- If it's windy, do not have a campfire.

Remember when putting out your fire:

- Pour a lot of water on it.
- Stir in the water with a stick or a shovel.
- Add water and stir until the ash is cool to the touch.

Starting May 2024, the fine for violating daily burn restrictions is \$25,000. Daily burn restrictions also now apply to provincial, municipal and private campgrounds.

Our hike leaders and trail stewards are keeping a watchful eye, but everyone is encouraged to keep a watchful eye. **To report a wildfire or violations of the fire restrictions, call 1-800-565-2224 or 911.**



Don't start the next wildfire.

Be responsible.

Check before you burn.

Visit novascotia.ca/burnsafe/



2024 AGM - Wednesday, JUNE 19TH SEE YOU THERE

Our AGM is just around the corner. **Mark your calendar for June 19 at 7 p.m.** Join us in the **Russell Walker Room, Canada Game Centre** for an update on the national park program.

If you are interested in joining the Board of Directors, contact info@bluemountainfriends.ca We are always looking for more Friends willing to help make BMBCL a national urban park.

We always enjoy seeing people in person but if you can't make it, you can join us online. Click this link or the button below.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84933038757>



Access AGM online

THANKS FOR THE FEEDBACK

A BIG thank you to our members for responding to our membership survey. This was our first time doing a members survey and your feedback from the recent survey is immensely helpful. We learned that more than half of you know there was

still work to be done to make the national urban park a reality. We learned that many of you feel you are informed on important issues

We've also learned that many of you are looking for more family-friendly guided hikes and events explaining issues related to the wilderness. Rest assured, we're working towards planning for these suggestions. Thank you for your valuable input!



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: RICHARD VINSON

Richard Vinson is one of the original Friends of BMBCL. Joining the group in 2018, Richard has been an important supporter of the wilderness area and society. In fact, he helped organize the very first meeting in May 2018. "Many of us who cared about the future of the proposed regional park saw the need to take action and advocate pro-actively for the acquisition of land that was slipping away to development," says Richard when asked why he joined. "What is unique about the Friends group is the considerable role it plays in advocacy. Many other 'Friends' groups are supporting the well-being of existing parks, while Friends of BMBCL is working to create a park. This makes it a truly unique organization."



BMBCL is only 10 minutes from Richard's front door, and as he says, he can quickly find peace in the wilderness within minutes of arriving at a trailhead/access point. "I enjoy the solitude and wild space here. I always manage to make new discoveries on every visit." Richard's visits to the wilderness vary depending on his schedule. Lately, he has been visiting a couple of times a month. During his most active days, he found his way into BMBCL at least once or twice a week.

Richard is a life-long supporter of environment issues and is the chair of Leave No Trace Canada. He has also volunteered with the NS Nature Trust at many levels over the last 10 years and was one of the founding directors of the Friend's Board-where, as Communications Chair, he built the first website, "Hear the Quiet" and authored the early newsletters. He remains a strong advocate of the BMBCL. "We cannot give up everything to development, even within an urban area where we are facing a housing shortage. There's no point in building extensively and then having no place for folks to recreate. This, after having seen what is possible in other urban centres, where access to nature and a biodiverse environment is highly valued. These parklands will be with us forever as places our residents and visitors can enjoy and re-charge as we move into an ever-increasing, chaotic world," says Richard.

Richard is excited with the national urban park possibility. "I believe in the national urban park process," adds Richard. "However, I would like to see a moratorium on all development immediately adjacent to the proposed park boundary, at the very least, within a 100-metre distance. Development is moving quickly, and there is enormous pressure on the boundaries. Having such a wild space home to a wide variety of wildlife and literally surrounded by development is a profound rarity on a world scale. As so many of us know, it is clearly worth protecting."

THANK YOU URBAN TRAIL RACE

May 4th was a fun day in Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes with a whole new group of people visiting the wilderness and seeing firsthand its beauty thanks to the team from **Urban Trail Racing**. Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes was the location for the first Urban Trail Race, Wild Lakes 10k, of the 2024 Race season. Three locations were selected for urban runs—McNab's Island (half-marathon on July 6), Cole Harbour Heritage Park (October 19) and Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes (10k on May 4).

Race director, John Spears, started organizing urban trail races in Ontario, believing they offered an opportunity to introduce runners to new wilderness areas in urban centres. When John returned home to Nova Scotia, he decided to bring urban trail runs here. John emphasizes the importance of introducing urban parks and wilderness areas to runners, as these runs offer opportunities to build community. "We collaborate with a variety of groups to ensure that each race is well-organized, enjoyable, and safe," says John. As a member of Search and Rescue, John ensures SAR is involved in the safety plan for each run. He also works with local land stewards to ensure trails are properly marked, and runners have on-trail support.



Finally, both participants and volunteers can share encouragement over refreshments and treats before and after the races. Organizers also work to be “green,” so participants are encouraged to bring their own mugs. “To bring it all home, part of our commitment to community building is donating a portion of the proceeds from each race to [Halifax Search & Rescue](#) and the local association that acts as stewards of the area,” adds John.

Thanks to John and his team, Friends received a donation of more than \$500. The Wild Blue Race on May 4th was a huge success. We’re looking forward to next year’s run already. Thanks, Urban Trail Race!

WHO LOVES BLUE MOUNTAIN BIRCH COVE LAKES? LEAVE NO TRACE



Richard Vinson arced around Charlie’s Lake, enjoying the land and sun, when he spotted a flash of colour among the rocks and moss. It was a scrap of orange peel, left behind by earlier hikers. As he continued, he saw another scrap, and another, and another, and another.

“It was like they had peeled a whole bushel,” he remembers in disbelief. The simple experience made for a turning point. As a founding director of Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes, Richard has long cared for the preservation of the land, but now he became deeply invested in good trail stewardship.

In 2021, Richard joined [Leave No Trace Canada](#), where he now serves as Director of Partnerships and chair. Leave No Trace is an international organization dedicated to promoting outdoor ethics while encouraging people to enjoy time in nature. At their Centre for Outdoor Ethics in Boulder, Colorado, they’ve conducted more than 30 years of research to validate the best ways to enjoy the outdoors without harming it.

Richard uses the orange peel story to illustrate the importance of the principles. “People often wonder, ‘what’s the big deal’, and the answer comes not just from one person’s impact, but all of us, collectively. A peel will take more than a year to biodegrade. It’s not endemic to the area and so it’s unfamiliar to local fauna. And it can carry pesticides that can harm the land.” One peel may be a minor threat, but many, day after day, can end up impacting a whole ecosystem.

As Director of Partnerships, Richard now works to promote the principles to people all across Canada. He consults with environmental groups about how to care for their land and confers with land managers about how to welcome visitors while maintaining trail health. “Leave No Trace now has over 18,000 active instructors around the world,” he says. “Our approach is all about encouragement: we’re not the trail police; we want to build a culture of responsibility. We want visitors to understand their role in the long-term health of their forests and trails.”

If we act together, we can ensure everyone can enjoy this spectacular slice of wilderness, for years to come.



LEAVE NO TRACE'S SEVEN PRINCIPLES

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

SUMMER PLANS



COMMUNITY FUN

Watch for us at the many great farmers markets and Community BBQs. Stay up to date on the comings and going by visiting our [website events calendar](#).

If you are planning a community family-friendly event and would like to invite our booth please drop us a note to info@bluemountainfriends.ca.

Here are a few highlights:

- Clayton Park West Community Summer BBQ – co-host Rafah DiCostanzo, July 28 (4-6 pm), Veteran’s Corner Parkland Dr.
- Fairview Community, BBQ, Piercy Field, August 17

Visit the [Friends Events calendar](#) for more details.



HIKES

Our Hike Leaders are constantly planning guided hikes into BMBCL.

This summer, join Nature Nova Scotia and Friends for a 2 hour guided hike through a former moose habitat. The hike will feature discussions on the current threats to the species, including the proposed Highway 113, changes in the forest system, and habitat loss.

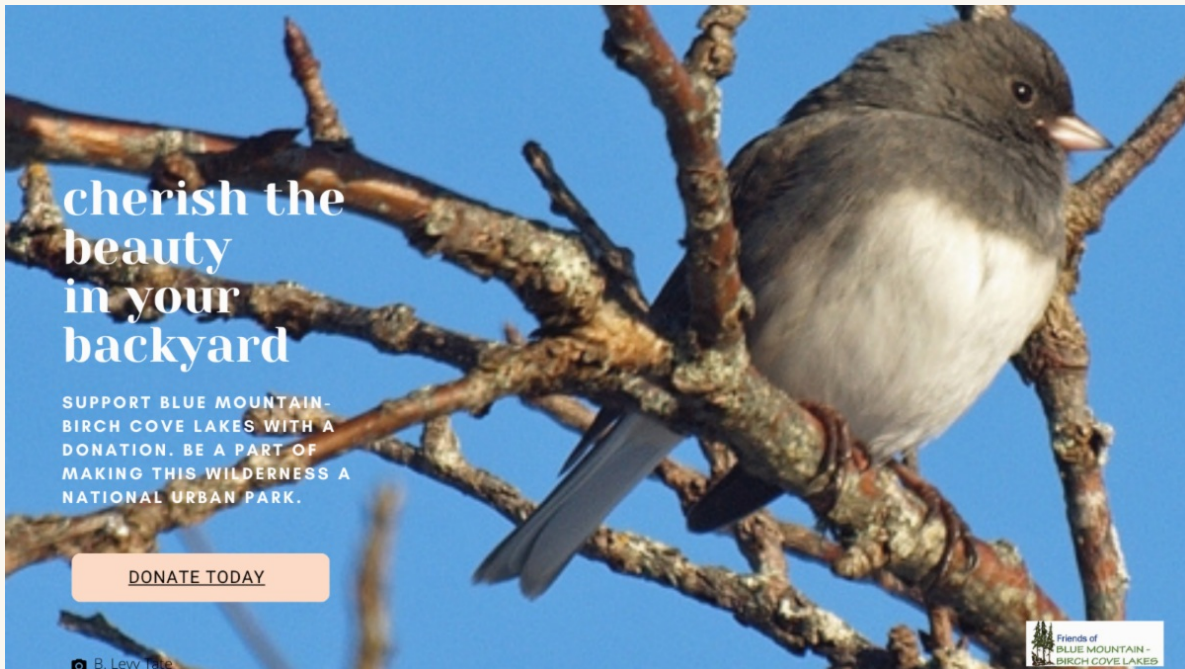
Registration is required. Please go to the [Friends website](#) to register, and **keep checking back for new hikes**.



SHARING OUR KNOWLEDGE

There is so much to learn about this wonderful wilderness area-- flora, fauna, and the efforts to create a national urban park.

If you are looking for informed speakers on several subjects related to Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness, please contact us at info@bluemountainfriends.ca.



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](#).



