



Friends of  
BLUE MOUNTAIN -  
BIRCH COVE LAKES

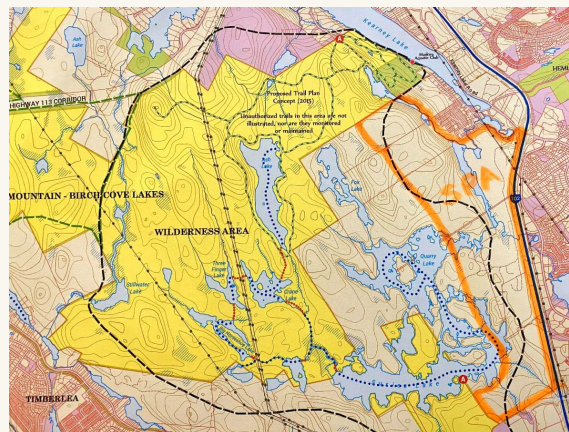
# The Blue Mountain NEWS

Photo: T. Beal

Vol. 25 Fall 2025

## HRM REQUESTED SPECIAL PLANNING AREA

Over the past few months, Friends has been working to gather updates about the National Urban Park (NUP) process and the Province's designation of a Special Planning Area (SPA) for the privately owned lands adjacent to Susies and Quarry Lakes. We remain concerned about the potentially severe implications for the BMBCL National Urban Park arising from the SPA designation and the fact that the SPA overlaps directly with the 'conceptual park area' in the 2014 HRM Regional Plan (see map).



HRM and the Province have always advised Friends that BMBCL was intended to remain a wilderness park. Parks Canada assured the Friends' Board last week (see article below) that this remains the concept, coupled with some "front country usage", which again has always been the concept. Yet, at complete odds with this concept is the SPA designation and its facilitation of upwards of 40,000 people residing on the BMBCL eastern boundary shores, including numerous high-rise structures. That means approximately 40,000 people living along the shores of Susie, Quarry, Washmill, Little Kearney, Charlie and Fox lakes.

Associated with this SPA decision is the deliberate effort by HRM Council to keep its request to have the lands designated hidden from public view. Council was aware of the public's position on this issue, and, instead of facing the public and defending the consideration of such a request, Council hid it from public view. If not for Justice Bodurtha, of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, who recently released a written trial adjournment decision, the public may never have known HRM Council made the request.

Here is what we know. The Annapolis v HRM trial got underway in April 2024. As the trial's start approached, all public engagement regarding the National Urban Park was halted. Reports that were in progress were kept from public view. Public consultations meant to be part of the park study process were paused. None of the completed park studies have been made publicly available, even though they were funded with public money. Further trial dates were held in November 2024. On May 16, 2025, the Province announced the Hwy 102 West Corridor lands were designated as a SPA.

It wasn't until Justice Bodurtha issued an oral decision in June 2025, which is now available online, that it became known that during an in-camera meeting on April 29 (following a prior in-camera meeting where an HRM staff report was presented), HRM Council voted to ask the Province to designate the Hwy 102 West Corridor lands as a Special Planning Area. Annapolis was informed of this in-camera decision several days later, and the Province complied on May 16th.

For Friends, this revelation is troubling and frustrating; our trust in our HRM elected officials and city representatives has been shaken. We have not been able to obtain clear information on how this occurred, why it happened, and what the future implications for a national urban park might be, despite repeatedly requesting details from city officials. When information becomes publicly available, Friends will respond.

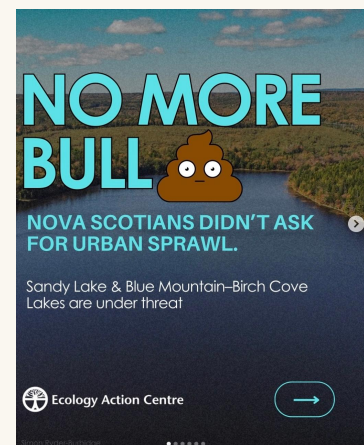
In terms of breaking ground, the best available information indicates that there will be no immediate development. Given the current situation with rising property tax rates and water rates, we believe it is incumbent on HRM staff to bring forward IMMEDIATELY what the potential taxpayer capital cost contributions could be for the development of the HWY 102 West Corridor lands. Such a report should include a worst-case scenario as well as a best-case scenario, and with numbers adjusted for projected inflation, as the work is not likely to begin in the near term.

Friends will strongly advocate for transparency regarding the SPA decision and expect the HRM Council to provide a clear explanation to Friends and HRM residents, especially since HRM is one of the national urban park partners. We do not trust HRM's decision-making process, are concerned about transparency, and remain unconvinced by the claim that the "no immediate development" will hold.

## NO MORE BULL CAMPAIGN

In response to the Province's declaration of SPA areas, the Ecology Action Centre and Our HRM Alliance have joined forces to promote the NO MORE BULL campaign. The campaign focuses on the Province inserting its authority in municipal decision-making and planning, specifically targeting Sandy Lake and the Highway 102 Corridor. Both of these areas will require costly infrastructure. Development will also destroy habitats for endangered species, degrade water quality and eliminate important forests that filter and improve our air quality.

The NO MORE BULL campaign includes a useful Action Toolkit. Information about the SPA areas highlights the ecological importance that we all need to understand. Suggestions on how you can play an important role are outlined. To learn more or access the [tool kit click here](#).



## NATIONAL URBAN PARK UPDATE

The National Urban Park (NUP) process is moving forward. We have been reassured thanks to a recent meeting with representatives from Parks Canada. The Parks Canada team is working diligently to facilitate the designation with the partners at the table. The partners are Kwiilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn, Sipekne'katik First Nation, Nova Scotia Nature Trust, Parks Canada, Province of Nova Scotia and the Halifax Regional Municipality.



During the recent meeting with the Friends Board, Parks Canada acknowledged that the process is moving more slowly than Friends would like, but assured us that progress is being made. Still, it takes time for each partner to facilitate decisions within their respective organizations and coordinate with one another.

Here are some meeting highlights that were shared with the Friends Board of Directors:

- Each NUP site can operate under a partnership model. While the models may vary between sites, they will all be based on partnerships.
- The Halifax site is one of the largest NUP sites, and the vision for the park is that most of the park will remain wilderness to protect the species. Currently, there will likely be a front-country and back-country approach to planning.
- Halifax's NUP planning process is examining ecological connectivity within the wilderness and outside the immediate area.
- Parks Canada will NOT be an owner of land but will designate NUP status and provide



operational and program funding.

- Parks Canada and partners are working on the governance model.
- Partners at the table have conducted studies and prepared reports. It is the partners' responsibility to decide whether these reports are made public. Parks Canada cannot make this decision on their behalf.
- Parks Canada requires public stakeholder engagement for designation. However, Parks Canada and partners determined that a governance model for the NUP needs to be established first. Parks Canada is working on the governance model.

[To read more about the NUP program, click here.](#)

## SUSIES LAKE WILDFIRE

This summer, one of Friends' biggest concerns came true—a wildfire in BMBCL. It appears the fire was confined to lands of NSECC, which are part of the proposed national urban park (NUP). At its peak, the fire covered approximately 25-30 hectares.

An unattended and illegal open campfire started the fire. There is no confirmation that it was related to an encampment. However, Friends' volunteers and hikers have observed and reported ongoing issues with encampment sites in this area. We continue to be very concerned that these encampments could cause unintended damage or wildfires if they are not effectively monitored or relocated.

Since the woods have reopened, Friends' trail stewards and volunteers have been working diligently to clean up remaining camp sites and have also cleaned up a large number of campfire sites. This takes a great deal of work on the part of our volunteers. We are very grateful for their dedication.

This tragedy highlights the urgent need to resolve land issues, designate a park, and secure funding. Once national urban park status is granted and a governance model determined, suitable forest management practices can be adopted to help prevent a tragedy like this from happening again. This fire clearly underscores the importance of effective forest management, particularly in the forests surrounding the city. We were lucky the wildfire didn't grow larger. This was thanks to the combined efforts of firefighters and a short period of favourable weather, which helped ground crews contain the initial blaze before it could spread extensively. A change in wind direction also helped to support firefighting efforts, pushing the fire away from nearby homes and allowing firefighters to work more effectively. We cannot depend on luck when managing this urban wilderness. Many people were affected by the 2023 wildfire. Let's move forward with the national urban park to protect this wilderness and the surrounding neighbourhoods.



## SPREADING THE WORD

This summer, Friends of BMBCL took advantage of the sunny days (actually, we don't need sun to get us out promoting BMBCL). Our volunteers were on hand at community and city events, sharing information about BMBCL and tirelessly advocating for this beautiful wilderness to become a national urban park. Thank you to each volunteer for your time and energy. We can't do this without you.



On August 3, our volunteers were enjoying the view on the MacDonald Bridge while sharing information about BMBCL. They participated in the Walk The Bridge community celebration, where



Volunteers were on hand during the Friends of Clayton Park Society BBQ. It was a great day for everyone and a wonderful opportunity to advocate for BMBCL within the community.

During this event, our extraordinary volunteer Wendy McDonald received the 2025 Volunteer

hundreds of visitors came out to take in the view and learn about their community.

Award presented by Lt Gov Savage. This was in recognition of the countless hours she has given to the community. Wendy, Chair of Membership, Friends of BMBCL, is a tireless leader in the preservation of BMBCL wilderness, and well known to the Nova Scotia hiking crowd. Congratulations Wendy!

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

This summer, Friends received support from two organizations—the Bay Treasure and the Wild 10K. For a few years, Friends of BMBCL has received support from the Bay Treasure Chest. This year, Friends received \$600.



The Bay Treasure Chest weekly toonie draw, a 50/50 lottery, was established in early 2014 by five local not-for-profit service organizations as a fundraising partnership in the St. Margaret's Bay, Nova Scotia, area. Over the years, the fundraiser has supported numerous community initiatives and provided scholarships to local students.

Thank you, Bay Treasure Chest, for your ongoing support of BMBCL.

This was the second year for the Wild Lakes 10K, which is one of the Urban Trail Racing (UTR) events. This year, the Halifax Search & Rescue Eco-Endurance Challenge (E2C) 10K race also took place that day. Runners started from the Maskwa Aquatics Club parking lot and headed into this stunning wilderness area. It was an exciting event that brought people from across Canada to experience this unique wilderness. This year, UTR donated \$1,000 to Friends of BMBCL to support our advocacy efforts.



Thank you, UTR, for your support and for showcasing the beauty of BMBCL with your Wild Lakes 10K.

## COX LAKE TREE PLANTING

In the August Nature Trust newsletter, *Landlines*, we read about the **Clean Foundation's Thriving Forests** Program and how this year, as part of the Trust's partnership with the Thriving Forests Program, over 12,000 trees were planted on the Cox's Lake Conservation Lands. This was the property that Don and Joleen Gordon preserved through a conservation easement with the Nature Trust in 2023.

The May 2023 wildfires impacted portions of the property. Tree-planting efforts focused on planting in these areas to support regeneration and biodiversity. Friends is thankful to everyone who's worked to safeguard and rejuvenate this beautiful wilderness.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Throughout the year, Friends of BMBCL hosts or participates in a variety of events. Visit [our website at bluemountainfriends.ca](https://www.bluemountainfriends.ca) to view our updated schedule of activities. This fall we have guided hikes, community events, and, fingers crossed, our Big Backyard Speakers series will return.



Fall is here, the wilderness areas are open again, and our hike leaders are ready to take you into the BMBCL Wilderness Area. Fall is the perfect time to see the beauty of



On Sunday, September 21, Friends will join the fun at the Agricola Open Street from noon to 4pm. We'll be located between

BMBCL up close.

Visit our hike schedule and sign up today. Registration is required.

Bloomfield and Ontario. Friends of BMBCL ball caps will be for sale at \$20.00, with proceeds supporting our advocacy efforts and trail stewardship.

## Hike Schedule and Registration

### REMEMBERING MARY KENNEDY

PREPARED BY WENDY MCDONALD

Mary Kathleen Kennedy passed away peacefully on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at the age of 69.

Mary retired from BIO after a long career and soon extensively shared her passion for nature as a naturalist and birder. She and her husband, Don, travelled across Nova Scotia, Canada and internationally, enjoying the outdoors all the while promoting [iNaturalist.ca](https://www.inaturalist.ca) and making new friends wherever she went. She believed anyone, regardless of age or ability, could become a “citizen scientist” and that nature was worth discovering and preserving.



She was a long-time member of Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes and freely gave an iNaturalist webinar for our members during the pandemic. She also set up our BMBCL Project on iNaturalist allowing nature-lovers to document and discover species throughout the wilderness area. Each year, she encouraged our hiking group to lead an iNaturalist hike into BMBCL as a way to add important information about BMBCL. Over the years, observations in the iNatural BMBCL Project have grown, thanks to Mary and others who led nature walks.

Mary believed strongly that everyone should enjoy nature and that each of us can be a citizen scientist. She often led the charge during the annual International Biodiversity Challenge, working hard to be one of the top observers during the challenges. She encouraged many to compete with other cities north of the border, all in an effort to observe, document and have fun in the outdoors.

Hike Nova Scotia has a Biodiversity Challenge Badge, which encourages the use of iNaturalist.ca on 10 of our Nova Scotia trails. Consider challenging yourself, as a tribute to Mary. To learn more, visit [Hike Nova Scotia](https://www.inaturalist.ca) and, when you are visiting BMBCL, share what you see by adding to our project in [iNaturalist](https://www.inaturalist.ca).

A celebration of life will take place on Sunday, September 28, at the Fairbanks Interpretive Centre, 54 Locks Rd, Dartmouth, between 1:00 and 3:00 PM. Dress casually and colourfully in honour of Mary and her love of nature.

### 2025-2026 BOARD MEMBERS

In June, we hosted our AGM. We have a busy year ahead, and our board will be working hard to move the National Urban Park advocacy forward. Our Events Chair position remains open. If you are interested in joining us in this role, please get in touch with [chair@bluemountainfriends.ca](mailto:chair@bluemountainfriends.ca)

Thank you to all the volunteers for giving their time and guidance as board members. Here is the 2025-2026 Board.

Mary Ann McGrath, Chair  
Eleanor Humphries, Vice-Chair  
Honourable Diana Whalen, Secretary  
Carol Ann Roberts, Treasurer  
Dale Smith, Planning Co-Chair  
Mary Ellen Donovan, Planning Co-Chair  
Todd Beal, Communications  
Wendy McDonald, Membership  
Richard Zurawski, Stewardship  
Mary Ellen Hamilton, Volunteer Coordination  
Ray Plourde, Member-at-Large  
Frank Wormald, Member-at-Large  
Events Chair: Open



## HOW TO BE A GOOD NATURE VISITOR

Submitted by Wendy McDonald

You may be a weekend explorer or a regular user of the BMBCL, but we all can be better stewards of the wilderness that we share with all creatures. Here are a few tips.

**Follow the path.** To minimize soil erosion and other damage, such as trail braiding, when the trails are wet. Staying on the main paths and walking in single file on the narrow trails helps to avoid damage to the adjacent vegetation.

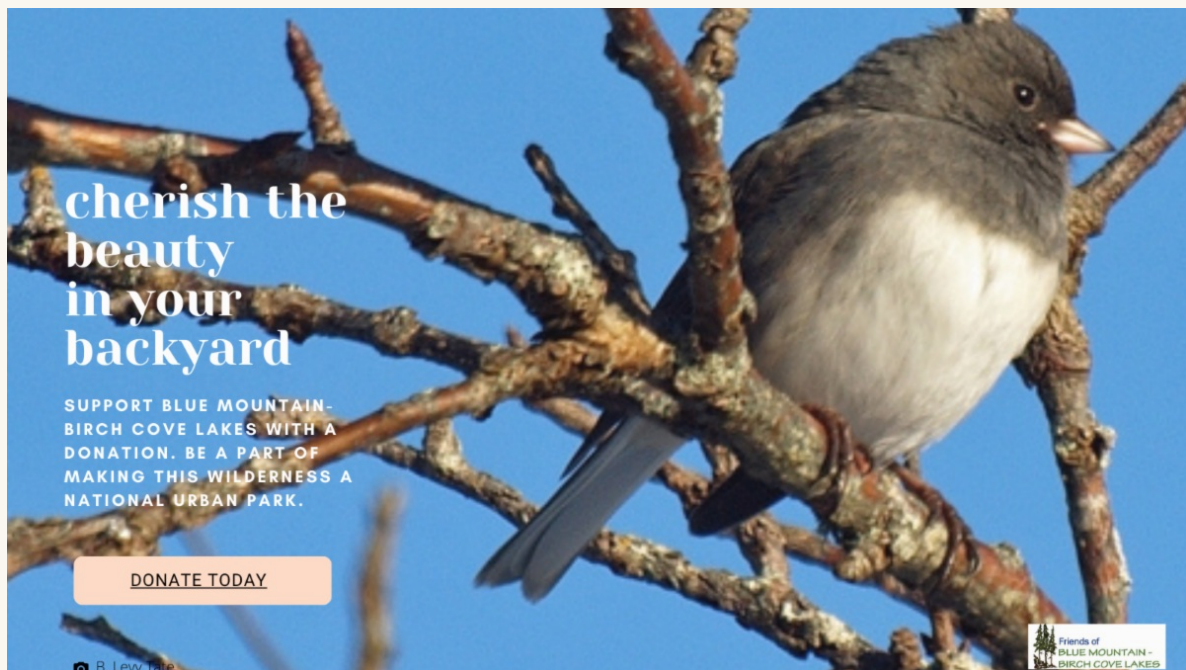
**Take only photos.** Our woodlands and water courses are full of nature's treasures, and each one plays an important role in the delicate balance of the ecosystem. They may also have an important cultural or historical background to the area. Take photos to enjoy these special finds so you remember your experience. Seasonal changes make it even more interesting if you can document the transitions.

**Share the space.** As we explore and enjoy an outdoor experience, think about the wildlife and their space. Each person and pet can affect the wilderness. Leash your pet so wildlife is protected, and your pet is also protected. Wildlife is less stressed with dogs on a leash, and wildlife habitat is less damaged when dogs and people stay on paths.

Observe from a distance and become a citizen scientist by documenting what you see.

Use [iNaturalist.ca](https://www.inaturalist.ca) with a smartphone or camera. Adding the information to a nature database or the BMBCL Project can help conservation efforts, track changes over time and inform wilderness management decisions.

**Leave No Trace.** Pack it in and pack it out. It's that simple. Bring a garbage bag with you before leaving home or the trailhead. You may encounter trash left by others; do what you can to help remove the litter. This will lead to cleaner trails for everyone and help prevent wildlife incidents. Become familiar with the seven principles of the Leave No Trace international initiative by visiting [leavenotrace.ca](https://leavenotrace.ca)



**CONTACT US:** Let us know what you think.

Send comments or pictures to [info@bluemountainfriends.ca](mailto:info@bluemountainfriends.ca)

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

