

The Blue Mountain NEWS

Photo: I. Barrett

Summer 2022, Edition 15

NATIONAL URBAN PARK UPDATE

The Friends of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Society is encouraged by recent progress on the pre-feasibility study to assess the potential candidacy of the proposed Blue Mountain park area for inclusion in Canada's new national urban parks program.

Unlike traditional national parks that typically are set within rural or remote parts of Canada, national urban parks are intended to be established in the immediate vicinities of the country's major population centres – in essence, to enhance opportunities for Canadians to access, enjoy, understand and appreciate nature, where we live.

The feasibility assessment, led by Halifax Regional Municipality with support from Parks Canada, was launched in February of this year through Stantec, an international consulting firm with offices in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada. Early efforts have focussed on a series of consultations with stakeholder organizations and members of the public with a demonstrated interest in the proposed park area. These sessions were designed to tap into known park advocates' and supporters' knowledge of the proposed park's natural and cultural features, recreational uses and park-establishment opportunities and challenges of interest or concern.

Stantec's professional and technical staff are also documenting relevant attributes of the proposed park area, such as topography and soils, wetlands and watercourses, flora and fauna, significant and sensitive natural areas or features, and surrounding development and land use. Currently scheduled to be completed this fall, the assembled information will inform decisions regarding the BMBCLs area's potential as a national urban park candidate and lay the initial groundwork for future park planning.

The Friends group has long recognized the critical need for a well-conceived park plan to guide park establishment efforts. The preparation of a comprehensive and coherent park plan will require coordination of the interests of all three levels of government, the cooperation and integration of the efforts of landowning and land-managing agencies and organizations involved to date (i.e. the provincial environment department (4365 acres of designated wilderness area), Halifax Regional Municipality (515 acres of acquired parkland) and the Nova Scotia Nature Trust (565 acres secured for protection), and commitment to open and transparent engagement and consultation with primary stakeholders and the public at large.



Enthusiasm around the area's potential candidacy as a future national urban park is a welcome infusion of renewed energy into efforts to move Halifax's iconic BMBCLs urban wilderness forward from concept to reality.

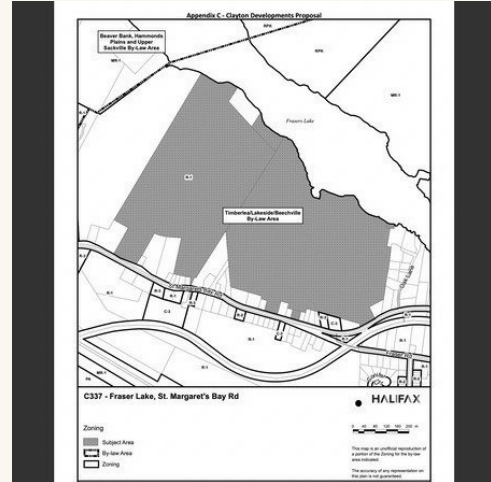
However, despite these positive indications of progress, significant challenges remain to be overcome. Most notably, the acquisition of lands critical to the success of the proposed park, and development pressures that continue to encroach on the periphery of the proposed park area. Advocacy efforts of the Friends of BMBCLs, and others, therefore must continue unabated.

Please share this information and encourage others to join Friends of BMBCL. To learn more about the National Urban Park program, check out this [webinar](#).

ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT, ANOTHER PRESSURE POINT

The proposed development in Timberlea is located at the outer edge of the proposed BMBCL conceptual park area and could negatively impact the Nine Mile River watershed. Clayton Developments plans to build 690 homes on 115 acres. This equates to six houses per acre. The developers have requested a service amendment to the existing area for this size.

The proposed development directly fronts Frasers Lake, and a significant portion of this proposed development falls within a watercourse/wetland area. Approximately 15 acres of the proposed development is watercourse/wetland, which is unsuitable for housing or sewer. With the amount of clear-cutting required to achieve the proposed development density, groundwater runoff will be negatively affected as it leads to the lake. In short, the freshwater system will be at risk.



Frasers Lake is part of the Upper Nine Mile River waterway that starts with Coxs Lake in Hammonds Plains, running through the western sector of the BMBCL park area and the Chebucto Peninsula entering the Atlantic Ocean at Shad Bay. "I am concerned about the impact the continued development of this vulnerable area will have on the Nine Mile River watershed," said Deputy Mayor Pam Lovelace. Healthy freshwater systems are shrinking, and humans and wildlife depend on these complex resources for drinking, food supply, and economic activities like tourism.

Developments along waterways can hurt the wilderness as well. In this situation, the existing forest cover will be destroyed. Ecosystems that support year-round wildlife, migrant birds that move through the area in the summer, wildflowers and fungi, and fish populations may all be affected.

For more information or to sign the [petition](#).

NEW TRAIL STEWARDS IN BMBCL WILDERNESS

On a sunny Saturday in May, a group of Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes volunteers gathered at the edge of the wilderness area equipped with backpacks, snacks, and canteens for a daylong excursion. The occasion was the first-ever Trail Steward Training event, a program designed to give volunteer stewards the tools to encourage responsible and sustainable land use among everyone who uses it.



The role of the trail steward arose out of a need to protect our remaining wild spaces, including the BMBCL, from being "loved to death," a phrase advocates use to describe the damage caused by indiscriminate overuse. While increasing numbers of people are recognizing the value of spending time in the woods, the more people who use a trail system the more damage tends to be done – anything from inadvertently trampling slow-growing plants, to allowing dogs to roam off-leash to littering. The role of a trail steward is to monitor the activity of other hikers on the trails for these and other destructive behaviours, and, where appropriate, look for opportunities to educate them on appropriate trail use.

The Bluff Wilderness Trail Association's Mike Lancaster, an experienced forester and trail steward on the popular

Bluff Wilderness Trail in Timberlea, was the day's instructor, providing a crash course in everything from identifying local flora and fauna to how to non-confrontationally approach groups who may be engaging in dangerous or destructive activities. Accompanying the group were Mel Earley, former Co-Chair of the Stewardship Committee, and Mark Young, the new Trail Steward Coordinator for The Friends of BMBCL.

One of the main topics was of the dangers posed by campfires. While campfires are permitted in the BMBC there's a right and wrong way to have one. Forest fires remain a major risk in heavily used areas like BMBCL Wilderness.

SUMMER STUDENTS IN BMBCL WILDERNESS

With support from Canada's Summer Jobs program and Nova Scotia's SKILLS program, Friends of BMBCL hired three university students to help Friends better understand BMBCL hikers and visitors. Tait Kinch, Laura Patterson, and Hailey Stapleton have been busy hiking, chatting, and collecting information since the start of June.

"We have been working on two surveys. We have a visitor experience survey, and we're working on a resident survey," says Hailey Stapleton. "The goal is to better understand what visitors think of the area and what they need to enjoy this beautiful wilderness even more. We also want to know what residents are experiencing with more visitors coming to the area and how Friends of BMBCL can better support its mission—protecting BMBCL."

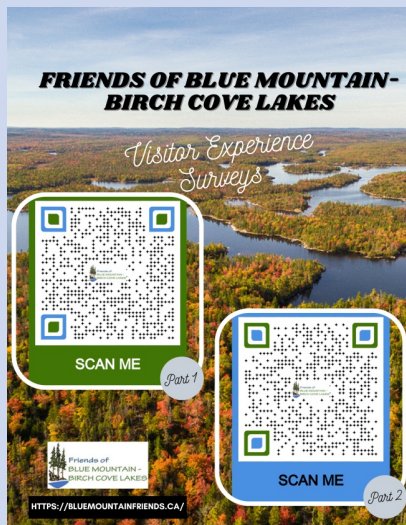
According to Laura Patterson, one of the biggest challenges with the work was the large geographical area. "The area is large, and there are just the three of us. We are trying to cover the various access points to the wilderness and conduct door-to-door work. Our daily step counts are pretty high."

The students' time with Friends of BMBCL is quickly coming to an end. Their nine-week placement ends in early August. "This has been a great experience for the three of us," adds Tait Kinch. "Fresh air, beautiful wilderness and knowing our work can help to protect this unique wilderness has made this one of the best summer jobs we have had."

Friends of BMBCL thank Canada Summer Jobs and SKILLS NS.



L-R: T. Kinch, H. Stapleton, L. Patterson



PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

Your opinions matter and gathering your opinions about your experiences and views of BMBCL visitors is critical to the Friends of BMBCL advocacy efforts. This summer, surveys have been developed and we are hoping visitors can take a few minutes and tell us what they think. The survey is divided into two parts. Just click on the links below to start.

[Part 1](#) of the survey is targeted at all visitors to the wilderness area.

[Part 2](#) of the survey is targeted at regular visitors and nearby residents of BMBCL Wilderness.

HIKING WITH FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS

Hiking in the beautiful BMBCL Wilderness or any other Nova Scotia trail is an excellent opportunity to exercise, find peace and spend time in nature. It is also a great time to exercise our dogs but hiking with dogs can be controversial. Dog owners enjoy being

with their pets and allowing them to be outside, while some non-dog owners get frustrated when dogs run free or when owners don't pick up after their pets.

Friends of BMBCL want to foster an understanding of trail etiquette among all of us who hike with our dogs and to help ensure everyone can enjoy the trails, even dogs.



At all times, we need to manage our dogs on the trail. Whether the dog is on or off-leash, we should be able to heel our dog, be able to recall and be willing to step aside when others want to pass, especially when on narrow trails or going uphill.

Teach dogs to stay on the trail. Staying on the trail is important to help protect flora and fauna. Use the time to train your dog. Dogs love to be engaged with their owners. Work on sitting, staying by your side, or even waiting. Take a long leash (maybe a 30' leash), some high-value dog treats and practice. Remember, not everyone loves dogs (and that is ok). Avoid saying, "my dog is friendly!" as your pet sprints or approaches another hiker. Show other hikers your dog is a good listener, and you have control. Keep your pet close to you until you know if the other hikers want to engage.

Finally, let's pick up after our pets. Take waste bags and a plastic container to put the bags in, or tie the waste bag to your backpack. Many trails don't have garbage cans along the routes. We may be inclined to leave a waste bag on the trail and "pick it up on the way out," but no one wants to see a waste bag when trying to enjoy nature. We may also be inclined to "let nature take care of the waste," but pet waste adds excess nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus to the environment. So, the bottom line is that it's up to dog owners to follow the "leave no trace" rules so everyone can enjoy the trails.

Check out our [website](#) events for a list of upcoming hikes, and sign up so you can enjoy the BMBCL beauty with a certified hike leader.



SUMMER HIKING TIPS

- Tell someone where you are going and your timetable (it is not uncommon for hikers to get lost in BMBCL)
- Drink lots of water AND keep up your electrolytes
- Avoid hiking during the hottest parts of the day
- Wear your hat and breathable clothing (light colours help as well)
- Take plenty of rest stops in the shade
- Take a few minutes after the hike to do a check for ticks

IT'S A PASSION FOR CHARTER MEMBER WENDY MCDONALD

As a charter member of the Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes, McDonald has been involved with the group since its inception and learned about it initially through her work with the Halifax North West Trails Association. "Our group had earlier partnered with two other volunteer groups to fundraise and develop a Trail Plan for one small area near Kearney and Charlies Lakes," she says. While it was never implemented, the public meetings and advocacy around the plan highlighted the need for a Regional Park, and would eventually lead to the creation of the Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes.

Originally from the West Island of Montreal, Wendy met her husband, the late Bob McDonald, as a graduate student at the University of Toronto. When Bob McDonald was



offered an academic position at Mount Saint Vincent University, the couple moved to Halifax, and have been here ever since. "I had previously worked for a few years in Sydney for the Health Department as a Community Nutritionist," Wendy says. "But Halifax and Clayton Park have been home all these many years."

Through working with three levels of government, training stewards and hike leaders, and educating the community on the group and its mission, Wendy has helped move the Friends of BMBCL's mission forward over the years. "Resources, both financial and volunteer, are limited, and it is impossible to connect with all users, but through social media, membership and newsletters, advocacy continues," she says.

As a citizen scientist and amateur naturalist, Wendy's passion for the outdoors has led her to participate in several "bio-blitzes" in the Wilderness Area. In a 2009 event hosted by Saint Mary's University, and co-led by a team of scientists and amateur naturalists, she helped to identify over 800 species of flora and fauna. "It was an eye opener for all of us," she says.

In addition to her field and advocacy work, Wendy is also passionate about sharing her love of the outdoors with as many people as she can. "An appreciation of nature is special for all ages and it helps us all to slow down," she says. Something as simple as teaching someone about the carnivorous pitcher plant, she says, can be an "aha moment" for folks new to the natural world, and spark a lifelong curiosity about nature.

In recent years, with the help of **iNaturalist**—a citizen science app that lets users photograph and tag flora and fauna, sharing their data with others—Wendy has been working to catalogue her findings everywhere she goes. "BMBCL WA is an outdoor classroom that needs to be shared!" she says. Now focused on **a mini challenge project to collect at least 10 iNaturalist observations on 10 Nova Scotia trails**, an accomplishment that will earn Wendy a badge from Hike Nova Scotia, she encourages others to engage with the outdoors in any way they can. "As they say, it's not about the destination but the journey... and naturalists are slow walkers!"



Photo: S. d'Entremont

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 to join today

JOIN FRIENDS OF BMBCL

Hey, Friends of BMBCL, we love it if you share our newsletter and encourage your friends and family to join. Remember, **IT'S FREE**, and, for us, the more, the merrier.

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

SAVE THE DATE - SEPTEMBER 27, 2022 AGM

CONTACT US: Let us know what you think.

Send comments or pictures to bluemountainbirchcovelakes@gmail.com

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



Newsletter Ed: C. McKellar