

The Blue Mountain NEWS

Photo: I Barrett

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LET'S MAKE PARK DREAMS COME TRUE IN 2024

Dear Friend,

As 2023 comes to a close, we hope you'll [donate](#) to help Friends in its advocacy for preserving Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness area.

This beautiful wilderness is under threat; becoming a national urban park is still being determined, and your support can help secure critical park boundaries. Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes is an exceptional landscape home to towering woods, vital wetlands, and abundant wildlife. It is essential for the health of our region, and its proximity to Halifax makes it highly accessible for hundreds of thousands.

As the City grows, we invite you to commit to the belief that future generations deserve access to this extraordinary expanse of wilderness.

Your Gift will:

- Advocate to secure BMBCL Wilderness Area's boundaries
- Educate and motivate the public to protect habitats, create wildlife corridors, and support the park's boundaries.
- Train trail stewards to care for and maintain the trail, and hike leaders to share the wild with others

I hope you'll express your support for this wilderness by [donating today](#) (and receive a 2023 tax receipt). Together, we can protect this remarkable land. Happy New Year, and enjoy our final newsletter for 2023.

Mary Ann McGrath
Chair, Friends of BMBCL



ADVOCACY CONTINUES IN 2024

Currently, the national urban park planning process focuses only on the land owned by the provincial and municipal governments and the Nova Scotia Nature Trust. It omits the critically important wilderness around Susies and Quarry Lakes. This popular area deserves protection to safeguard the southern area of our future National Urban Park.

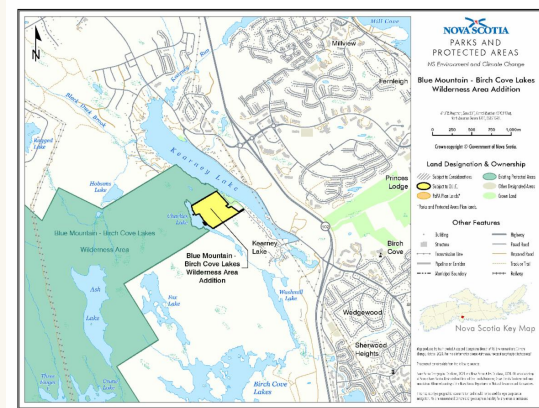
Friends of BMBCL are concerned that this approach is far too narrow. We will release a map of “aspirational park boundary options” in the new year. We will encourage the park planning process to include additional land and water needed to protect the natural attributes of BMBCL wilderness and ensure a high-quality experience for all park visitors. Stay tuned.



ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

On **December 20, Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change Minister Tim Halman announced** the addition of 15 hectares of Crown land to Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes (BMBCL) Wilderness Area (click image to enlarge map). This announcement was part of the 23 new designations around the province.

Adjacent to the Maskwa Aquatic Club on the western side of Kearney Lake, these lands have long served as the only publicly-owned opportunity to access the existing wilderness area—even if on an informal basis and without officially designated trails and active on-site management.



Although relatively small, this addition is significant as an important piece of the puzzle in consolidating the land base needed to support the successful establishment of the BMBCL national urban park. With this land now protected and part of the BMBCL area’s candidacy for national urban park designation, trail enthusiasts who have enjoyed using this area over the years can anticipate a higher standard of trail development and management as efforts progress toward formal national urban park establishment.

On behalf of the Friends, thanks are due to Minister Halman, Natural Resources Minister Tory Rushton and departmental staff for contributing to this positive step forward.

FRIENDS SUBMISSION UPHELD

This fall, Friends of BMBCL made a submission to the Utility and Review Board (UARB). The UARB was reviewing an application by HRM to confirm the number of city councillors (currently 16) and to alter the boundaries of polling districts. According to the UARB decision, since the last municipal election, the average number of electors per district has increased from 20,140 to 23,263. Friends advocated that we “...strongly believe that the park needs to be represented by several councillors, particularly all those with residents within proximity to its boundaries.” This was essentially the basis for reviewing the boundaries of Districts 12 and 16 made by HRM to be amended to include a larger portion of a proposed BMBCL National Urban Park.

On December 21, the Utility and Review Board (UARB) released its **decision**. The Board found (see p.27 of Board’s decision), “In our opinion, it is reasonable to have such areas represented by multiple councillors when possible, as doing so will potentially increase the advocacy and representation for such areas. The Board is mindful that the presence of such areas is important for many members of the public, particularly in large urban areas like HRM.”

With this ruling, four municipal councillors, Lovelace, Stoddard, Morse, and Outhit, will be directly responsible for park issues. Friends see this as a real positive to have several councillors able to speak directly on behalf of park interests.

ANNAPOLIS CASE MOVES FORWARD

HRM and the Annapolis Group are down to the short strokes getting ready for their two-month trial (39 hearing

days) set to start April 15, 2024 – less than four months away. Most recently, the case management judge ruled in November that the City did not have to produce a large selection of documents that Annapolis Group was seeking.

Over the years, the case has moved through different levels of the judicial system. In October 2022, the **Supreme Court of Canada ruled** that a constructive taking at common law doesn't require land to be actually taken by the state from the owner. This decision means that before the Supreme Court of NS, the Annapolis Group will argue that HRM has deprived them of all reasonable uses (including development) of the land.

With the case now in the final stages, the outcome for Friends is unsettling regardless of winning or losing. If Annapolis loses, and the Supreme Court of NS rules HRM did not *de facto* expropriate any Annapolis Group lands (or "*constructively take*" as the Supreme Court of Canada described it), then Annapolis is back where it was in 2017 when this all started – that is, pursuing additional development rights for its extensive holdings around a number of key Birch Cove lakes, including Susies, Quarry, Washmill, and Fox Lakes.

On the other hand, if Annapolis wins, and the Court finds that *de facto* expropriation has occurred, then HRM would be on the hook for a damages claim "to be determined". If HRM faces a significant financial hit, we are concerned Annapolis will secure development in the heart of the beloved Birch Cove Lakes. Friends believe that the priority focus of HRM (and the BMBCL NUP partner group) should be on acquiring priority lands central to the Birch Cove Lakes, including critical areas of lands owned by Annapolis.

12 NEW TRAIL STEWARDS

Rain pattered down on 12 members of FBMBCL as they hiked around Hobson's Lake, learning the fundamentals of ecological stewardship. The group was training to join the ranks of FBMBCL Trail Stewards, advocates of the land who help conserve and protect the plants and animals that call it home.

The training was hosted by Mike Lancaster, the Executive Director and Stewardship Coordinator of the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association. Mike has devoted his career to caring for and designing thriving landscapes and shared his knowledge with the group.

"We're grateful to work with Michael," says Hailey Stapleton, Chair of FBMBCL's Stewardship Committee. "He's helping us learn the methods to conserve and care for the land we love."



David Jack, a passionate conservationist and member of FBMBCL, joined on the hike. He said that one of the most important practices for a trail steward is to be motivational, not confrontational. "Being a good steward is about encouraging others to embrace and protect the wilderness themselves. We want to be side by side with the people who enjoy the park, not in their face."

Another round of Trail Stewardship training is being organized for spring 2024.

Trail Stewards Learn To:

Care for and Keep the Trail: Clear trails that are free from major debris help ensure hikers stick to the right path. To be a responsible trail user, we should avoid "braiding" and straying off a designated trail to avoid mud or puddles. It causes erosion to the trail and harms animal habitats.

Practice Seven Generations Thinking: This mindset, practiced across Haudenosaunee cultures, encourages us to act in the best interest of our descendants seven generations from now. It encourages trail visitors to make decisions that consider the well-being of those far in the future, not just today.

Spot BMBCL's Rarities: The land is home to remarkable and unusual plants, such as the Broom Crowberry and the Lady's Slipper Orchid. The famed ecologist John Muir called the orchid "one of the rarest and most beautiful" of Canada's flowering plants.

Know the Law of the Land : The Wilderness Protection Act governs how visitors to BMBCL can enjoy the area. Stewards learn what's allowed and what's not in the wilderness.

Ground your conservation in values: Stewards engage and empower wilderness area recreators to make sustainable and environmentally conscious decisions by appealing to common core values such as ecology, legality, and community

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: HAILEY STAPLETON

Hailey Stapleton is a young, dynamic supporter of BMBCL who has jumped

in with both feet to support the Friends mission. Last summer, Stapleton was hired as a summer student to help share the joy of BMBCL and to research who was visiting the wilderness area. She was one of three students hired through the Young Canada Works program. "I had long been in love with the wilderness area, but after spending a summer working with them, I also really came to love the Friends organization," says Stapleton. "It is a privilege to spend time surrounded by people who are so dedicated to and knowledgeable about Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes." Today, Stapleton is leading the charge with the Stewardship committee.

I have been hiking in the area for many years. "I have always thought of myself as a lifelong learner. In my opinion, you couldn't ask for a better classroom than BMBCL. There are so many unique and special plants and animals to spot, and lots of wonderful granite formations. I love to learn about BMBCL's traditional and historic uses...I often hike to introspect and have learned a lot about myself on trail in BMBCL. It's nice to have somewhere so close to home and yet so untamed to explore. In the summer, I am there pretty much daily, but for the rest of the year, I go at least a couple of times per month. It's gorgeous in all seasons."

"To say that the area holds a special place in my heart doesn't begin to cover it. I have spent countless hours swimming, hiking, paddling, snowshoeing, and more in the wilderness area. I have read many books while lounging on BMBCL's glacial erratics and studied for so many tests and exams under the shade of its pines. I've spent hours conversing with friends and family on trails and made many new friends while stopping to rest on its lake shores. I go to BMBCL to introspect, unwind, celebrate, console, and consolidate. It is truly a remarkable area."

As a young member, Stapleton wants to see this area protected and to see more young people to enjoy this area. "I would love to see the area protected and preserved for generations to come as a Parks Canada National Urban Park. It's such a beautiful spot and one that you really have to see to fully appreciate. I love seeing people take it all in for the first time- it's a wonderful gift to share that experience with someone!"



A VERY SUCCESSFUL JOINT VENTURE

In November, Friends was selected as the charity of choice for the **Bedford Players**. Over eight days, Friends shared knowledge of BMBCL with the theatre patrons while Bedford Players donated a portion of every ticket sold and tips from the canteen. After 11 great, hilarious performances, Bedford Players donated \$1364.45. Thank you, Bedford Players!



Friends also send a special thank you to Joy Laking. Joy donated a 2024 calendar of her paintings as a door prize. She has frequently painted scenes in BMBCL. Robin Sayward was the winner—someone who enjoys the arts and the outdoors and plans to become a new Friend of BMBCL.

PHOTOS:

Top Photo: Bedford Players cheque presentation. L-R Wendy Hutt, Bedford Players; Mary Ann McGrath, Chair Friends of BMBCL; James Boyer Events, Friends of BMBCL

Lower Photo: Joy Laking calendar presentation to Robin Sayward.

AMAZING YEAR THANKS TO VOLUNTEERS

2023 was a busy year for Friends. Over the last 12 months, we've advocated for policy changes, hosted a speakers series, led hikes throughout BMBCL, trained new trail stewards, attended farmers markets and picnics, cleaned trails, posted, commented and shared on social media, and so much more, all in the name of seeing BMBCL become a national urban park.

Volunteers do ALL of this work, and the Board of BMBCL wants to sincerely thank all our volunteers and members. Everyone who gave their time, energy and voice to support BMBCL. Words cannot express our gratitude. We are so close to seeing this 30-year dream become a reality. Let's keep strong for 2024!



Every time volunteers give their



Hike leaders taking public officials into BMBCL to explain and show the importance of this wilderness.
Photo: B. Chanter, MP R. Perkins



Every donation matters and thanks to volunteers we are able fund new campaigns. Photo: C. Boyer

time and energy to sharing information about BMBCL, we are building awareness and support. Photo: J. McNeil.

WHO LOVES BLUE MOUNTAIN BIRCH COVE LAKES?

The Sierra Club

Over the coming editions, Friends of BMBCL will highlight other like-minded groups that love and support BMBCL. Our first is The Sierra Club.

Neon green hammocks stretch between pine trunks in the forest west of Kearney Lake. As they sway in the wind, a troupe of children, some just five years old, others in their teens, busy themselves with crafts and projects. Some are whittling, some are studying a spider's web, and others are dragging fallen branches and boughs to build shelter from rain and wind.



All are working under the watchful eye of Ashley Whynot, Program Coordinator for Wild Child Forest School. Wild Child has been running in Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes for over a decade, with Canada's branch of the Sierra Club acting as organizer and lead.

"Forest School is about learning on the fly," Ashley says. Unlike regular school, with its bells, desks, and set curriculum, Forest School prioritizes flexibility. "Being outside offers endless opportunities for problem-solving and learning," Ashley continues. "We follow the children's passions, and it's my job to offer them guidance as they indulge their curiosity. If they want to practice with a tool or learn more about mushrooms, I help them do it safely. I like to say that I have a 'utility belt' of activities, knowledge, skills that can help them learn and grow in the direction they want."

Forest Schools trace their roots to Scandinavia in the years following World War Two. They've since spread around the world, spiking in popularity since the outbreak of COVID-19. Forest Schools emerged as an attractive alternative when the pandemic closed classrooms and made gathering inside dangerous.

Ashley says Forest Schools were ready to meet the challenge. She sees them as a remedy to many of the troubles facing children. "Kids today spend more time being sedentary. They're more involved with technology and are more often indoors. Forest School gets them outside and moving, and it can alleviate problem behaviours that make school difficult. Some kids struggle to sit still for hours in a classroom. At Forest School, they don't have to. It's like children can just breathe when they're out here."

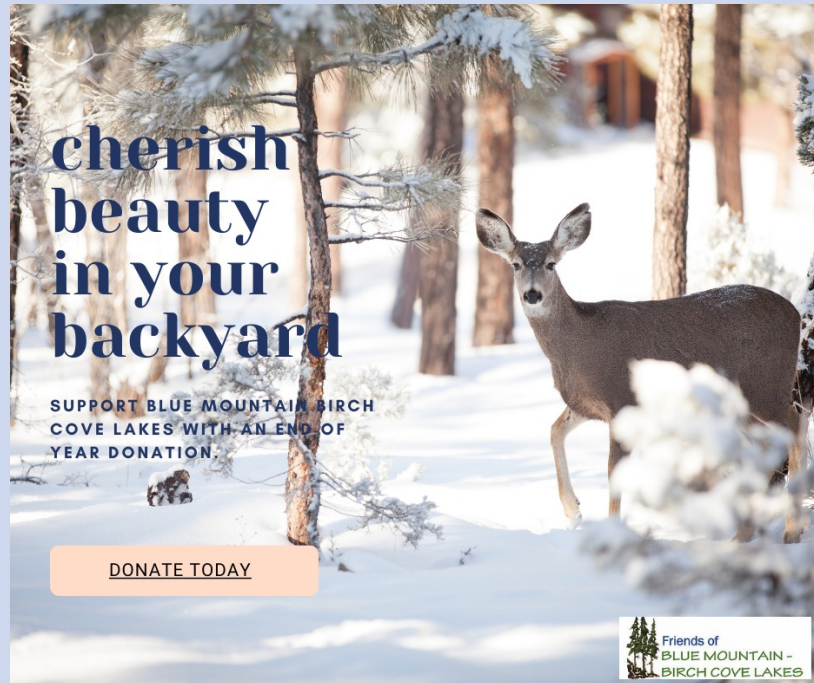
The woods, lakes, and trails of BMBCL has proven an ideal space for Wild Child. It's close to Halifax and rich with plant and animal life, and the Forest School strives to keep it that way. Their groups hammer home the importance of respecting one another, respecting themselves, and respecting the forest. They make sure to leave no trace, packing out everything they bring in. They make use of deadfall and don't pull living things.

"We teach the children that they're a part of the world, not just observers, and that comes with serious responsibilities," Ashley says. "When they know better, they do better, and it's inspiring to hear how the children become stewards, sharing these lessons with their friends and families. They become ways of

being, not just rules for school.”

As she talks about her work and the school, Ashley returns again the importance of the land. “There’s something magical about Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes,” she says. “There are so many beautiful animals, plants, and living things here. It would be devastating to lose it. The Mi’kmaw have taken care of this land for millennia, and we’re honoured to be here; we want to honour them by keeping it alive.”

Wild Child will launch new programs in spring 2024.



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](#).



Newsletter Ed: C. McKellar