



The Blue Mountain NEWS

Photo: D. Bennett

Vol. 27 Summer 2026

Advocacy, Action and the Road Ahead: A Message from Our Chair

This year's AGM in June marked eight years of advocacy on behalf of the long-held dream of establishing the Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes area as a wilderness park, a place of peace, protected nature and a legacy park that will be here for generations.

Below are highlights from the Chair's report.

In preparation for the AGM, our chair reached out to key partners to see what information they would share with us. Here's a summary:

- HRM's Parks and Recreation Department advises that this year they plan for a new bridge and backcountry trail – Black Duck Brook to Hobson Lake to be completed by the end of summer. No activity is planned for the lands at Julius Blvd in Bayers Lake.
- Parks Canada reports that project manager meetings across the Partner Group have continued and that a meeting of Executive-level Partners is planned for later this month. She is anticipating a productive meeting to help guide the next steps (we certainly hope that leads to a signed Memorandum of Understanding).
- The Province, through the Department of Environment, is working on a new water trails map, with Partner groups collaborating.
- A Mi'kmaq Ecological Knowledge Study is underway, and a naming study, which may assist with trail planning.
- The Province (DECC) has advised Friends that their lands are subject to a No Fire rule this year (see further details below) and has posted signs. Please respect this rule.

Within Friends, our **Hiking and Stewardship groups** had another busy year. There are approximately 15 Hike leaders. Last year, there were 14 booked hikes with 101 participants in total.

They also provided a hike for some of our elected officials – and were joined by the Mayor, his assistant, four councillors, and two MLAs. Our hike leaders also organized a large number of volunteers and spent considerable time assisting with the Wild 10K and Eco-Endurance Challenge events at Maskwa.

Stewardship was reorganizing over the past year. Stewardship activities have always taken place. Anyone interested in participating in Stewardship, even informally while you are out for a hike, please get in touch with us. We'd love to have more eyes on the forest.

Our **Communications Committee** continued publishing newsletters, and the Team has been supporting other committees, including Hiking, Events, and Membership, to keep members informed about Friends' and our partners' activities.

Our **Membership & Volunteer Committees** are a powerhouse of commitment, organizing a wide variety of events, pop-ups, and larger public engagement events. Over the past year, this amazing team made at least 20 appearances. These include our Big Backyard Speaker Series, information tables at major HRM initiatives such as Agricola Street Open Street and HRM Bridgewalk, and many smaller appearances at farmers markets and community picnics. Today, we have over 1700 members thanks in large part to these two committees.

Finally, our **Planning Committee** has been very busy all year, meeting with elected and un-elected officials and sharing our position regarding the "Conceptual Park Area" (the land base required to create a complete and coherent [park management unit \(see Map 13 on bluemountainfriends.ca\)](#) and, in particular, the need for coordination of park planning and development planning (i.e. the [overlapping area of interest, see Map Overlain BMBCL Partnership Land on bluemountainfriends.ca](#), associated with the Highway 102 West Corridor Special Planning Area).

The Planning Committee also has produced a map (2024 vintage) showing "Aspirational Park Boundary Options" and an associated "Park Boundary Vision" that outlines areas to be considered for acquisition to complete a viable park area. This map forms the basis of the advocacy work and is [available on our website](#).

Our focus remains on the conceptual park area, as initially proposed in 2006 in HRM's first Regional Plan and then further refined and reaffirmed in HRM's 2014 Regional Plan Update.

Given the current situation, our efforts for the coming year will likely focus on two major items: pushing the National Urban Park towards designation; and continuing to engage on the Highway 102 West Corridor Special Planning Area and related issues, including boundary overlap between the Special Planning Area and the Conceptual Park Boundary, public ownership of the lakeshores and buffer zones, maintenance of water quality and quantity in the Birch Cove Lakes, and the identification (and creation) of Primary and Secondary Park Access points, with associated trail planning.

Some members may remember a "park concept", together with the proposed access points, that was presented to the public in 2012 at a joint HRM–Provincial meeting held at St. Mark's Church on Dakin Drive. That proposal received unanimous public support, and it has remained an important reference in the foundation of our advocacy efforts ever since.

We remain deeply concerned by the lack of meaningful public engagement regarding the future of this landscape, particularly as increasing development pressures threaten lands both adjacent to and within the Conceptual Park Area Boundary. Decisions that could permanently alter this wilderness area must not be made without transparency and public involvement.

Our priority is unchanged: protecting the ecological integrity of the land and safeguarding the lakes, waterways, wildlife corridors, and natural habitats that make this area so valuable. These features must form the heart of any future National Urban Park.

Our vision is clear: the successful establishment of Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes as a National Urban Park that protects this remarkable wilderness for future generations while providing thoughtfully designed trails, appropriate recreation opportunities, well-planned access points, and long-term stewardship of the land and water. With continued community support, we can achieve this long-promised and iconic park—one that will stand as a lasting legacy for Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia, and all Canadians.

To read the report presented at the AGMt, [visit our website](#).

CAMPFIRES PROHIBITED ON BMBCL WILDERNESS TRAIL SYSTEM

For many outdoor enthusiasts, a campfire has long been part of the backcountry experience. However, to reduce the risk of forest fires and protect one of Nova Scotia's most heavily visited wilderness areas, the lighting of campfires is now prohibited on the existing trail system within the Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area.

Importantly, this is **not a new regulation**. The authority to prohibit campfires has existed since a Ministerial Order signed in 2001 under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act (WAPA). While the Order generally permits campfires under strict conditions, it also reserves the right for the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change to prohibit them anywhere within a wilderness area when deemed necessary.

Why the change?

As visitation to the wilderness area has grown, so too has the risk associated with campfires. Even carefully tended fires can escape through wind-blown embers or smouldering roots, threatening surrounding forests and nearby communities. In addition, campfires can damage sensitive soils, encourage the removal of deadwood that provides valuable wildlife habitat, and leave lasting impacts on the natural environment. The current prohibition is intended to reduce these risks while helping preserve the wilderness character of the area for future generations.

Fines for violation

Visitors should be aware that lighting a fire where campfires are prohibited can result in significant penalties. Under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act, fines for lighting a prohibited fire range from **\$352.50 to \$1,502.50**.



If a fire is lit during periods when provincial burn restrictions are also in effect under the **Forest Fire Protection Regulations** of the **Forest Act**, additional penalties apply. Violating the daily burn restrictions can result in fines of **up to \$25,000**.

These penalties reflect the serious consequences that human-caused wildfires can have on public safety, wildlife habitat, and surrounding communities.

Enjoying the wilderness without a fire

Fortunately, modern camping equipment makes it easy to enjoy the backcountry without relying on a campfire. Lightweight gas stoves provide an efficient way to cook meals, while quality clothing and sleeping systems offer warmth and comfort throughout the evening.

Many visitors find that spending time watching the sunset, listening to wildlife, or enjoying the stars offers a rewarding wilderness experience that leaves no lasting impact.

Working together to protect our wilderness

The Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area is one of Nova Scotia's most treasured natural landscapes. By respecting the campfire prohibition, visitors help reduce wildfire risk, protect sensitive ecosystems, and ensure that future generations can enjoy the same unspoiled environment.

To report illegal activity, including prohibited campfires, call **1-800-565-2224**.

Together, we can help keep our wilderness safe, healthy, and resilient.

HELP US KEEP BMBCL BEAUTIFUL

The Friends of BMBCL Stewardship Program is asking everyone who enjoys the trails in the wilderness area to help identify issues that need attention.

If you come across garbage, abandoned campsites, trees blocking well-used trails, or other concerns, please let us know. We are especially interested in reports of campfire rings or any locations where campfires have been built.

To submit a report, email

stewardship@bluemountainfriends.ca with as accurate a location as possible. Photos are always appreciated and help us respond more effectively. We also encourage all wilderness users to practice personal stewardship by following Leave No Trace principles.

If you choose to dismantle an unauthorized fire pit yourself, please send us the location along with before-and-after photos. This information helps us monitor where fires are being built and supports our ongoing stewardship efforts.

Working together, we can help protect this special wilderness area and preserve it for future generations.



SPECIAL PLANNING AREA PUBLIC FEEDBACK REPORT RELEASE

On June 16, the Municipality released its *What We Heard* report on the proposed Highway 102 Special Planning Area (SPA). The report is intended to summarize public feedback from the three in-person open houses held on November 19, 2025, at St. Peter's Church in Bedford, as well as the online survey conducted between November 12 and December 11, 2025.

The Board of Friends of Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes is deeply disappointed with the report and does not believe it fully and accurately reflects the public's concerns. Throughout the consultation process, residents repeatedly raised significant issues about the impact of this proposal on the future national urban park, the ecological integrity of the Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes wilderness, and the

years of collaborative community planning and government commitments that have shaped the vision for this landscape. Yet, in a 21-page report, these concerns are reduced to a single paragraph.

Equally troubling is the omission of the written feedback sheets submitted by participants. Including these sheets is a standard practice with public consultation. These comments provide important context and, in our view, paint a far more accurate picture of the widespread concern, frustration, and opposition expressed during the consultation process. By excluding this feedback, the report fails to fully represent the community's voices and risks minimizing the extent of public concern over this unprecedented development proposal.

Meaningful public consultation requires more than simply collecting feedback—it requires faithfully and transparently reporting what was heard. Unfortunately, this report falls well short of that standard. [To read the report, click here.](#)

NOTE: Residents may continue to submit correspondence regarding the SPA to the new lead planner, Yanan.Gou@halifax.ca throughout the project.

HIGHWAY 102 WEST CORRIDOR SPECIAL PLANNING AREA

PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

HALIFAX

Halifax Regional Municipality
PO Box 1155, Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3V 2C5

halifax.ca

PROTECTED AREAS SUMMIT AROUND THE CORNER

Nature Nova Scotia is hosting a Protected Areas Summit on Saturday, July 25th, in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The summit is intended to build on the momentum generated by the June 10th press conference and transform the public support demonstrated that day into coordinated action across the province. The Summit will mark the launch of Protected Areas Week 2026 (July 25-August 1)

By bringing together organizations, community groups, and individuals who care about Nova Scotia's designated and proposed protected areas, Nature NS hopes to strengthen our collective voice, build new connections, and identify meaningful ways to support the protection of these important places.

The day will include:

- Networking and collaboration opportunities
- Action-oriented activities such as letter writing and contacting elected officials
- Opportunities to connect supporters with specific designated or proposed protected areas
- Discussions on next steps for protected areas advocacy in Nova Scotia
- Lunch provided for participants
- Guided hikes in nearby natural areas following the indoor portion of the event

This is a free event, but registration is needed to ensure a seat and lunch. For more information and registration, visit naturens.ca



REMEMBERING MICHAEL HAYNES

This spring, Friends of Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes, along with the wider Nova Scotia hiking community, lost a passionate advocate, respected author, and tireless champion of the outdoors—Michael Haynes.

Michael's love of nature and adventure shaped a lifetime of achievement. According to his family, he was an accomplished cross-country racer, marathon runner, orienteer, and YMCA aerobics instructor. He was perhaps best known for his extraordinary dedication to hiking and for authoring some of Nova Scotia's most celebrated trail guidebooks.

As his family noted, "Michael meticulously researched and authored multiple trail guidebooks, including Hiking Trails of Mainland Nova Scotia and Hiking Trails of Cape Breton. It was his life's work to share his passions with others, and his zeal inspired many to join him in enjoying and protecting these gifts." Friends had the privilege of welcoming Michael as a speaker in our Big Backyard Speaker Series in October 2024. Those who attended will remember his deep knowledge, enthusiasm, and unwavering commitment to encouraging others to explore and appreciate the natural world.



We are deeply grateful for Michael's support of Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes and for his efforts to raise awareness of this extraordinary wilderness in the heart of HRM. Michael's legacy will endure on every trail he documented and every hiker he inspired. He will be greatly missed.

Michael's final trail book was released on July 14. The book focuses on trails in Cape Breton. [Click here for more information](#)

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT - MARK YOUNG

Submitted by Margot Metcalfe

Mark Young is a gentle giant of a man, not because of his stature (although he's not a tiny man), but because of the generous spirit that he brings to all that he does. Currently, this manifests in many ways – he is a new grandfather! It is also evident in his work on the Hike Program for Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes (BMBCL) wilderness area, where Mark has been a key leader since the program's inception nine years ago.

He first encountered the area when he was dispatched into it as part of his job as a policeman. Mark was thrilled to discover the bountiful beauty on his doorstep and became an avid hiker here. He also soon realized that the area was threatened with development. That brought him into engagement with the public meetings that evolved into the establishment of Friends. He chose to serve for three years as the first Chair of the Board for Friends.

Mark has some key passions in relation to the wilderness area - sharing its beauty with others, developing membership, and ensuring stewardship. He carried these priorities into his years as Chair of the Board and, afterwards, with the help of others, began developing the first of these - the Hiking Program. This program ensures that we have qualified Hike Leaders, with Hike Leader and first aid training, leading our hikes. Mark strongly believes that the more people become aware of the beauty of this land and water, the more support we will have for preserving it.

Mark's journey of engagement with nature began young. He remembers summers as a child, playing in the forests and swimming on the beaches of St. Margaret's Bay. As an adult and parent, he and his wife, Gina, have taken their children on many camping excursions. Once the children became adults and left home, Mark began a new journey of relationship to the wilderness.



His fascination with flora and fauna led him into an exploration of the ways in which the wild plants that surround us can be used as medicines and foods. Where it is possible and permitted, he loves to forage. Through these activities, Mark felt an even deeper connection with the wild world. The important word here is "connection", which occurs in Mark at a visceral and spiritual level.

To know Mark is to be touched by that deep connection he has to all living things, including his Hike Leaders and the people on his hikes. His generous side is quick to point out the many people who helped to create the current Hike Leader program, which involves much planning and training. Several individuals and the Ecology Action Centre's Karen McKendry were crucial in the early stages.

Currently, Bruce Chanter also plays a pivotal role in this huge volunteer commitment for Friends of BMBCL. Bruce says this about Mark. "Mark really is the heart of the Hike Group. If it wasn't for him, I don't know if Friends would be leading guided hikes. Because of those hikes, more people have joined Friends, and many members have been able to develop a deeper appreciation of the area we are working to protect."

Like others in this organization, Mark has lived a long-time commitment to the wilderness area. We follow his passionate footsteps with devotion. (Interestingly, Mark just rejoined the Board as the representative for the Stewardship Committee.)



THANK YOU FRIENDS



Friends of Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes extends its sincere thanks to **Bedford Players Theatre** for their extraordinary generosity and community spirit.

Last month, Bedford Players dedicated 100% of ticket sales from select performances of *Calendar Girls* to support Friends and our ongoing efforts to protect the Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes wilderness area.

The evening was a wonderful celebration of community, laughter, and local talent, while also raising important funds to support conservation and advocacy efforts.

The generosity of Bedford Players Theatre and everyone who attended demonstrates the power of community partnerships in preserving the natural spaces that make our region so special.



Friends is grateful for the ongoing support of **Bay Treasure Chest**. For several years, their generous donations have helped strengthen our efforts to protect and advocate for this extraordinary wilderness area.

Recently, Bay Treasure Chest featured Friends in its newsletter, providing us with a valuable opportunity to share our story, our vision, and the importance of protecting BMBCL with a wider audience. Expanding awareness of our work is essential to building the strong community of supporters needed to secure this landscape's future.

Partnerships like this do more than provide financial support—they amplify our message, connect us with new advocates, and inspire others to help protect one of Nova Scotia's most significant natural areas. Thank you to Bay Treasure Chest for your generosity.



Friends extends its sincere thanks to Pam Lovelace for her years of support, leadership, and commitment to protecting this remarkable wilderness area.

As Deputy Mayor and HRM Councillor, Pam was a consistent advocate for the BMBCL vision, frequently lending her voice and influence to efforts to protect and enhance this important natural landscape.

Following her time in elected office, she continued that commitment by joining the Friends' Board, where she brought valuable insight, passion, and dedication to our work.

As Pam concludes her time with Friends, we thank her for the many ways she has supported our organization and our mission. We wish her every success and happiness in her next chapter in New Brunswick.

FRIENDS OF FRIENDS: CARP NS

With 320,000 members across Canada, CARP (Canadian Association for Retired Persons) is Canada's largest advocacy association for older Canadians. It is a non-partisan association that advocates for older Canadians. Its mission is to advocate for better healthcare, financial security, and freedom from ageism.



Here in Nova Scotia, the local chapter has taken a strong position on environmental issues, recognizing the link between the environment and health and that a healthy environment underpins seniors' physical and mental health. The Environment Committee was established in 2010 in response to CARP's national priority of encouraging healthy lifestyles among seniors, in part by promoting walking and hiking in outdoor settings. Today, CARP NS environmental priorities include climate change, biodiversity, coastal protection, Crown land planning, and Indigenous rights. The committee is led by Dale Smith (BMBCL board member) and James Boyer (former BMBCL board member).

Last summer, a CARP NS survey of its membership found that the majority of 900 respondents want CARP NS to advocate for sound, safe environmental policy and action. In fact, 91 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that CARP NS should advocate for "the protection of the ecological integrity of the natural environment and for the sustainable use of our natural assets and resources." The survey results support CARP NS's advocacy for protecting places, including BMBCL, that enhance seniors' lived experience while encouraging a balanced approach to economic development and environmental protection.

As a friend of Friends of BMBCL, CARP NS has taken a particular interest in advocating for the full designation of BMBCL National Urban Park and for better coordination among all interested parties to

protect Birch Cove Lakes and integrate park and development planning. Most recently, CARP NS submitted a strong position on the Highway 102 Special Planning Area. Friends of BMBCL fully endorsed this submission ([click here to read the submission](#)). To read Friends of BMBCL's endorsement, [click here](#).

CARP NS believes that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed by the vested stakeholders for the vision, governance, and an action plan, should be the next step. "We are monitoring development plans carefully and advocating that Nova Scotia take a leadership role in creating a National Urban Park. This is a unique opportunity to showcase the City of Halifax as a leader in urban planning" says Ron Swan, CARP NS Chapter Chair.

CARP NS will continue its longstanding collaborative relationship with Friends. "Together we are stronger, and with CARP National formally endorsing its support for the park, we believe organizations like ours make a difference. By engaging the public, our voices will be heard. I believe we can achieve the right balance among growth, the development of natural resources, and the conservation of our environment," adds Swan.

To learn more about CARP NS, visit carpnovascotia.ca

LOOK FOR FRIENDS THIS SUMMER



July 26th
4:00 - 6:00 pm
Clayton Park Community
Barbecue
Veterans Corner (Langbrae
& Parkland Dr)



August 2nd
2:00 - 4:00 pm
MacDonald Bridgewalk



September 13th
12 noon - 4:00 pm
Agricola Open Sunday
Rain Date September 20th



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](#).



Friends of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Society | 606-78 Regency Park Dr | Halifax, NS B3S 1T2 CA

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)