

Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park Reserve

Preliminary Management Statement



April 8, 2016

Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources

Parks and Recreation Division

Report PKS 2015-001

Department of Natural Resources

Cover photo taken by: Scott Munn

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<http://novascotia.ca/natr/parks/management/>

Invitation to Comment

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Parks, Outreach and Service Delivery Division is preparing a management statement for Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park as part of a multi-staged planning process.

After careful consideration of related planning information and review of comments received thus far, this document outlines management policies for Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park. For ease of review, this preliminary management statement is worded in the style of an approved management statement. Note however, that this document contains *proposed* site objectives, policies and actions related to managing the park's natural, cultural, and recreational values. The approved management statement will guide the management of the provincial park over the next 20 years.

Publication of this preliminary management statement provides an opportunity for public engagement and will help form the final management direction. You can get involved and submit your comments:

- Attend the public open house on Tuesday, June 14th, 2016 from 7pm to 8:30pm at L'Ardoise Community Centre, 206 Chapel Cove Road, L'Ardoise
- Complete the Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park Preliminary Park Management Statement Survey:
 - <http://novascotia.fluidsurveys.com/surveys/dnr-parks/point-michaud-park-management-statement-survey/>
- Submit a written comment via email to parkplanning@novascotia.ca
- Submit a written comment via regular mail to:

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Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources
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Truro, NS
B2N 0G9

The deadline for comment submissions is June 28th, 2016.

To make your submission effective, list the topic(s) you wish to discuss and briefly state your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the proposed management direction. You may also make suggestions or comments on other topics important to you.

Thank you in advance for your interest and comments on the future management of Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park.

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1.0 Introduction

Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park Reserve is a 60.6 hectare wayside class park, located in Richmond County. It's a popular day use beach featuring important conservation and recreation values. Locals and tourists use the beach for swimming, surfing, walking, wildlife viewing, and various park events.

The government of Nova Scotia acquired three properties in 1973, 1975, and 1987 for provincial park purposes. The park is serviced by the DNR district office in St. Peter's (eastern region).

2.0 Planning Context

The preliminary park management statement has been prepared consistent with direction contained in:

- The Nova Scotia [Provincial Parks Act](#);
- The Nova Scotia [Beaches Act](#);
- [The Path We Share: A Natural Resources Strategy for Nova Scotia 2011-2020](#); and
- [Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Plan for Nova Scotia](#).

3.0 Mi'kmaq Engagement

DNR will continue to support Mi'kmaq initiatives and activities at Point Michaud Beach. There has been a successful Mi'kmaq Learn to Surf program at Point Michaud beach since 2013. This program was developed through a partnership between Eskasoni First Nation, Surf Association of Nova Scotia, Municipality of the County of Richmond, and NS Department of Health and Wellness through the Mi'kmaq Physical Activity Leadership Program. In 2015, all five First Nations in Cape Breton (Eskasoni, Membertou, Waycobah, Wagmatcook, and Potlotek) participated in the Learn to Surf program. In 2016, the program will be expanding to include Paqtnkek First Nation and off-reserve youth in Cape Breton.

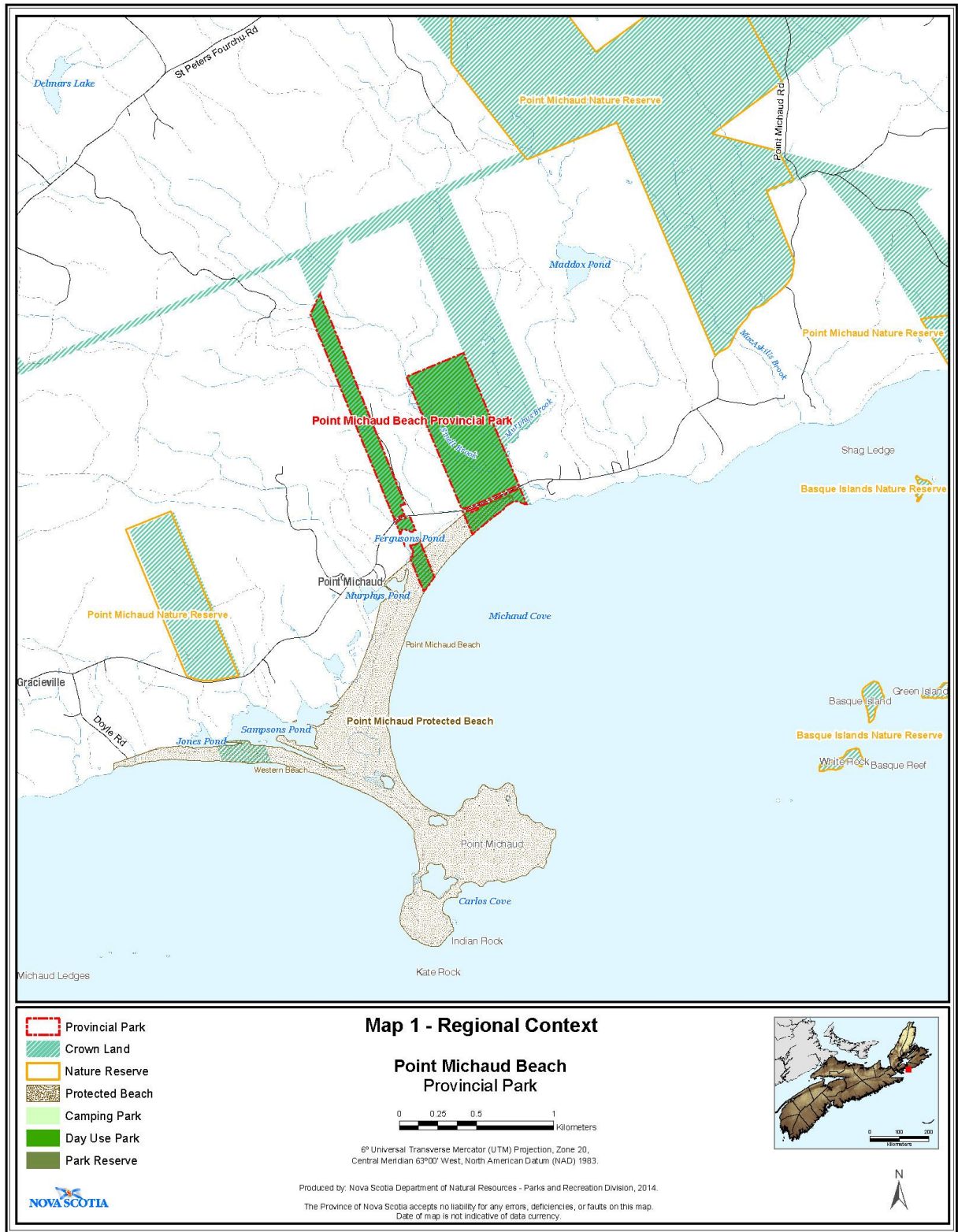
4.0 Location and Boundary

Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park is located in Richmond County, Nova Scotia. The civic address is 3796 Hwy 247, Point Michaud. The rural village of L'Ardoise is approximately 6km from the park (Map 1: Regional Context).

Point Michaud Beach is the only publically accessible surfing beach on Cape Breton Island. It features a 3km long sandy beach, backed by marram-covered sand dunes and large cranberry bogs. The beach features high conservation values and is designated under the *Beaches Act*. The boundary of the protected beach includes the western beach, the headlands (Point Michaud), and Point Michaud Beach (Map 1). The protected beach designation applies over private and publically owned land.

For the purpose of this management statement, the planning area includes all lands within the existing park boundary, the beach area within the high-water mark to the low-water mark, as well as neighbouring properties where there may be opportunities through acquisition or formal agreement

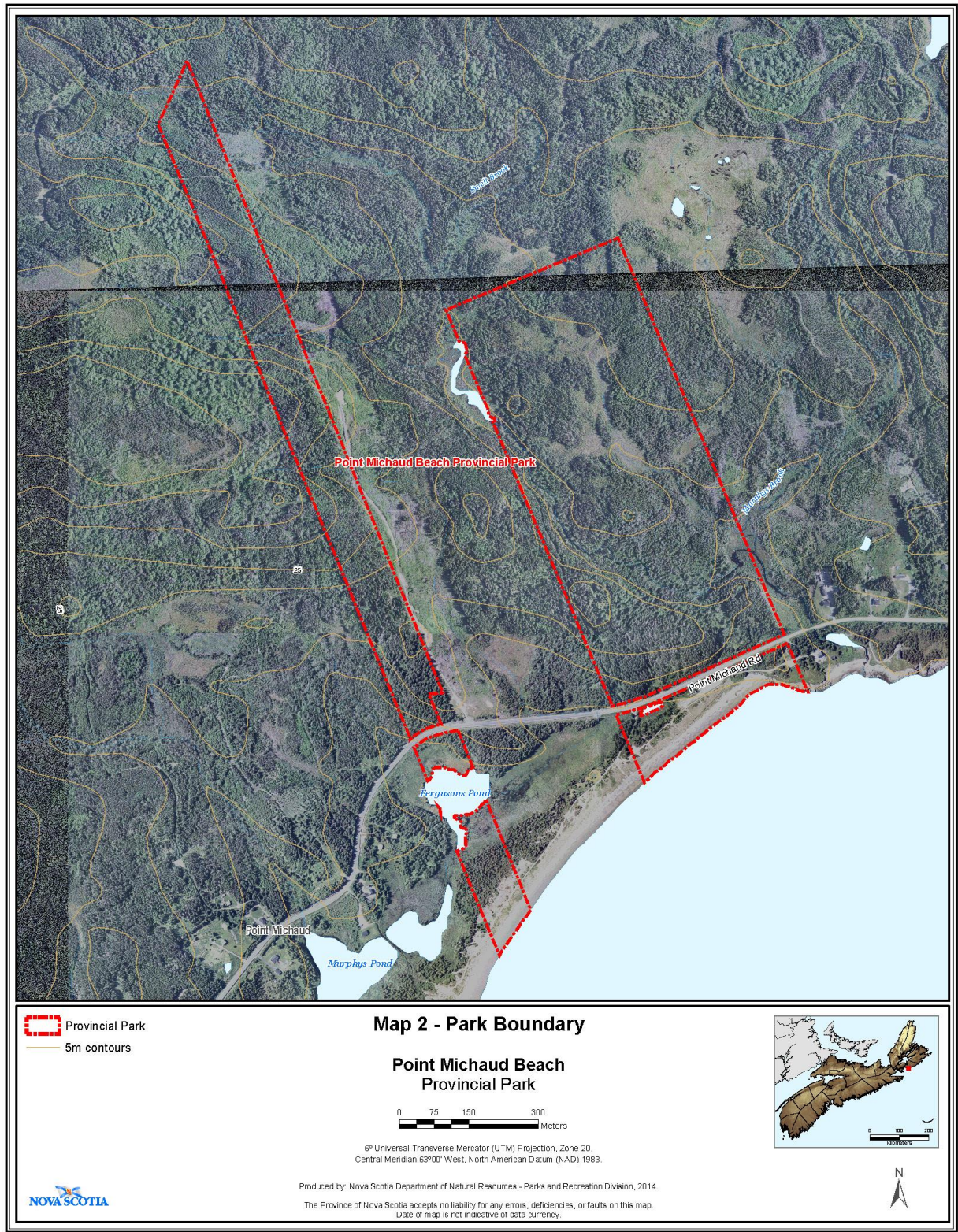
with the landowner(s) to enhance park values (Map 2: Park boundaries). Potential acquisitions will be evaluated based on their contribution to park objectives, and will be considered on a willing buyer, willing seller basis, subject to available resources.



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November 3, 2014

Map 1: Regional Context



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November 3, 2014

Map 2: Park Boundary

5.0 Park Values

5.1 Natural Heritage Values

Point Michaud Beach is located within the [Cape Breton Coastal Ecodistrict](#) (DNR) and the [Forchu Till Cliffs and Beaches Natural Landscape](#) (NSE). The following natural heritage values refer to both Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park and the surrounding area, including Point Michaud Protected Beach.

5.1.1 Biodiversity

Point Michaud is one of the most ecologically significant coastal systems in Nova Scotia, and is recognized as a globally significant Important Bird Area. Point Michaud is one of the few locations on Cape Breton Island where shorebirds regularly inhabit, including semi-palmated, spotted and least sandpipers, willets, and common snipe ([IBA Canada, 2015](#)). IBA Canada provides an [unofficial bird list](#) and [seasonal abundance](#) chart that includes 77 bird species at Point Michaud Beach.

Point Michaud is a classic tombolo system (two beach-dune systems attached to the mainland, other ends connecting to an island, with lagoons and ponds separating the main beach-dune systems from the mainland) (Figure 1). This varying landscape provides a high diversity of ecosystem types and plant communities, including beach-dune systems, bog and fen communities, salt marshes, and mixed spruce forest-dune heath complex. The beach-dune system is dominated by successions of sea rocket, orach and sandwort, backed by a thick belt of marram grass, with beach pea, yarrow, evening primrose, and other herbaceous plants on the landward edge of the dune (Bowen et al., 1975). A variety of mosses, lichens, sedges, and rushes occur in low lying areas. Other interesting species include cranberries, round-leaved sundew, orchids, and the rare grape fern (*Botrichium multifidum*).

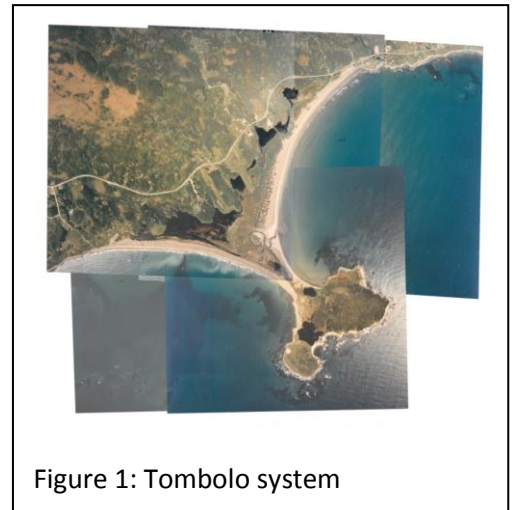


Figure 1: Tombolo system

5.1.2 Geoheritage and Coastal Processes

The following physical and geological description is quoted from a technical report titled *The Maintenance of Beaches* (Bowen et al., 1975):

At Point Michaud, on the Atlantic Coast of Cape Breton Island, the barrier beaches which now connect the island of Point Michaud to the mainland provide a textbook example of a double tombolo, the two beaches enclosing an area which has become a tidal lagoon. The steep, western beach of coarse sand and pebble is backed by a single, high dune ridge, protecting the area from the dominant direction of wave approach, which is SSW to SSE. The eastern beach of fine sand has a very gentle slope and is protected by the Basque Islands offshore and Point Michaud itself.

A geological and coastal resource analysis was recently completed by the Geological Services Division of DNR for Point Michaud Beach (Finck, 2015). This report includes an analysis of: 1) geomorphology and

general geology; 2) coastal processes and sedimentary characteristics of the beach; 3) shore face stability, erosion and progradation (growth seaward); 4) cyclical changes within the beach and backshore environment; 5) sea level rise; and 6) implications for present and future infrastructure and park sustainability. The full technical report is available on the DNR webpage, [here](#).

5.2 Cultural Heritage Values

There are no known cultural heritage values of provincial significance.

5.3 Outdoor Recreation Values

Point Michaud Beach provides opportunities for day use recreation that includes: beach walking, supervised swimming, surfing, paddle boating, scenic viewing, picnicking, relaxation, experiencing solitude, photography and nature appreciation. Other values include spending time with family and friends, photography, birding, windsurfing, kite flying, volleyball and sand sculpting.

6.0 Summary of Threats

Point Michaud Beach is susceptible to coastal processes (storm events with high tidal surges or wind driven waves) that cause site erosion. Sea level rise may threaten the dune system, biodiversity values, and park infrastructure.

Based on the geological and coastal resource analysis, the DNR geologist anticipates that the beach system at Point Michaud will remain stable for many decades, possibly centuries. It is possible that the beach may erode and then rebuild in response to major storms, on a time scale of several decades.

There have been issues with off-highway vehicles travelling through the park and protected beach. Trampling due to vehicle and human traffic on the dune systems pose threat to biodiversity and recreational values.

In the 1970s the eastern end of Point Michaud beach was mined extensively (Bowen et al., 1975), which ultimately lead to protecting the beach under the *Beaches Act*.

7.0 Park Classification

Classification organizes Nova Scotia's provincial parks into broad categories, each of which has a particular purpose and characteristics which contribute to the overall provincial park system. Park classification defines individual park roles in providing opportunities for natural and cultural heritage protection, outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation and/or tourism. Classification is a key element in determining the general policy basis for park management which in turn determines the type and extent of activities that may take place in a park.

Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park is currently classified as a wayside park. The objective of the Wayside Park class is to provide specific recreational facilities and services adjacent to travel corridors or communities and they may be a roadside picnic area, scenic viewpoint, access point, boat launch, or

small park of local importance. However, due to the important recreation opportunities that exist at Point Michaud Beach, it recommended that the classification change to an Outdoor Recreational Park. An Outdoor Recreation Park is a park that incorporates quality recreational resources capable of supporting a wide variety of outdoor activities and is established to meet the recreational needs of residents and visitors (*Provincial Parks Regulations*, 1989).

8.0 Purpose and Vision Statements

8.1 Purpose Statement

The purpose of Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park is to provide opportunities for low-intensity day use recreation and natural and cultural heritage appreciation, while protecting the park landbase and biodiversity.

8.2 Vision Statement

Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park provides coastal access and high quality opportunities for beach activities, swimming, surfing, picnicking, and nature appreciation. As one of the few public beaches in Richmond County, it provides opportunity for both locals and tourists to experience the breathtaking beauty of this wild Atlantic beach.

9.0 Park Objectives

Management of Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park will be consistent with the core mandate of Nova Scotia Provincial Parks, as outlined in the [Provincial Parks Act](#).

<i>Provincial Parks Act objectives:</i>	How Point Michaud Beach will be managed to be consistent with the <i>Provincial Parks Act</i> objectives:
Outdoor Recreation: provide opportunities for a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities ranging from relatively high intensity near-urban facilities to low intensity wildland experiences.	Point Michaud Beach supports low intensity day use activities such as: swimming; surfing; picnicking; walking; and nature appreciation.
Protection: preserve unique, rare, representative or otherwise significant elements of the natural environment and historic resources of Nova Scotia.	Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park contains a small section of marram grass covered flat dunes, and is connected to the broader beach ecosystem. Locally significant cultural heritage values include stories from the past (nearby ship wrecks, fishing industry, rum running, airplanes using the beach as a runway) and relevance to current culture (surf and watersport culture, tourism attraction, gathering spot for friends and family, and part of the Canadian identity).

Education: provide opportunities for exploration, understanding and appreciation of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage through interpretation, information and educational programs.	Point Michaud Beach provides visitors the opportunity for appreciation of nature through self-directed exploration of the park. Natural heritage interpretation, scenic viewing, and improved accessibility will contribute to a better appreciation of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage.
Tourism: provide resident travellers and out-of-Province visitors with opportunities to discover, experience and enjoy Nova Scotia's distinctive outdoor recreational and heritage resources.	Point Michaud Beach provides a regional tourism opportunity as it is one of the few public beaches in Richmond County, and is the only public surfing beach in Cape Breton.
Maintain the landbase of the park system: assemble and maintain, within a system of provincial parks and park reserves, a land base adequate to meet present and future needs of Nova Scotians for outdoor recreation and heritage resource protection.	The landbase of Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park will be protected for the enjoyment and appreciation of future generations. Designation under the <i>Provincial Parks Act</i> will enhance management capability and underscore the Province's commitment to protection.

10.0 Zoning

Zoning is a tool that spatially delineates areas within a park that have common management objectives, intentions, values and/or uses.

Policies are applied in each zone to enable different management approaches that are appropriate for those areas. These policies are outlined in the following Policies section (11.0).

Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park includes one proposed zone, described below.

Zone Name: Recreation Development Zone (61 hectares)

Description: PID 75105114 and PID 75069245.

Management Intent: To provide high quality day use recreation opportunities that includes accessible coastal access, scenic viewing, picnicking, walking, nature appreciation, and cultural heritage appreciation. Any development will support such activities and may include accessible boardwalks, change houses, parking areas, interpretive kiosks, picnic tables, and/or benches.

11.0 Policies

This section provides site specific management policies and any associated actions required to effectively manage Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park in accordance with applicable legislation and policies. The policies are broken down into management themes (e.g., wildlife, recreation) and sub-headings. Section 12 provides a summarized list of priority actions.

11.1 Wildlife

The main wildlife values within the park parcel are associated with the marram grass covered dune, which is associated with the larger beach ecosystem within the protected beach boundary (Map 1). The dune complex provides wildlife and migratory bird habitat. The dune system is currently facing threats from visitor disturbance, habitat destruction, and erosion due to off-highway vehicle riding. Anticipated threats include increased coastal erosion and sea level rise, due to climate change (over the course of several decades or centuries). Actions to address threats may include: enforcement of illegal off-highway vehicle riding within the park and protected beach; education and awareness of wildlife values; and promotion of leave no trace principles.

11.2 Vegetation

Vegetation will be managed according to the Guidelines for Vegetation Management in Provincial Parks, Park Reserves, Protected Beaches, and Trails (DNR, 2002). Any trees, limbs, or branches that pose a risk to public safety or park operations will be removed. Removed vegetation should remain on-site to provide wildlife habitat wherever possible. Planting of non-native species for aesthetic purposes is not permitted.

11.2.2 Vista Maintenance

Any vegetation that impedes upon the scenic vista of the beach may be removed, provided there is no adverse ecological or erosion impacts. There is currently an overgrowth of vegetation along the park road going south-east from the parking lot entrance, up the hill. This vegetation may be managed to maintain or enhance the scenic viewing opportunity.

11.2.3 Dune Restoration

Point Michaud beach is predominantly sand (fine particles as opposed to coarse gravel or cobble), and has a poorly defined, low angle berm that is typical of wide, sandy beaches (Finck, 2015). Above the berm, Point Michaud exhibits a wide, low angle backshore. The back shore ranges from non-vegetated to heavily vegetated, predominantly wind-blown sand. The transition from bare sand to vegetation is abrupt (Figure 2).

As a result of dune erosion, a snow fence was erected at the eastern end of Point Michaud Beach in the late 1990s. Although there has been an increase in sand deposition and re-vegetation, according to Finck (2015), “the snow fence did not actively trap sand and cause the back beach to build seaward. This happened across the entire beach without the presence of the fencing” (p. 15). In beach areas where there was no snow fence, there was re-vegetation and sand deposition across an area over 14 m wide (Figure 3), whereas the re-vegetated area by the snow fencing was only 8.5 m (Figure 4).

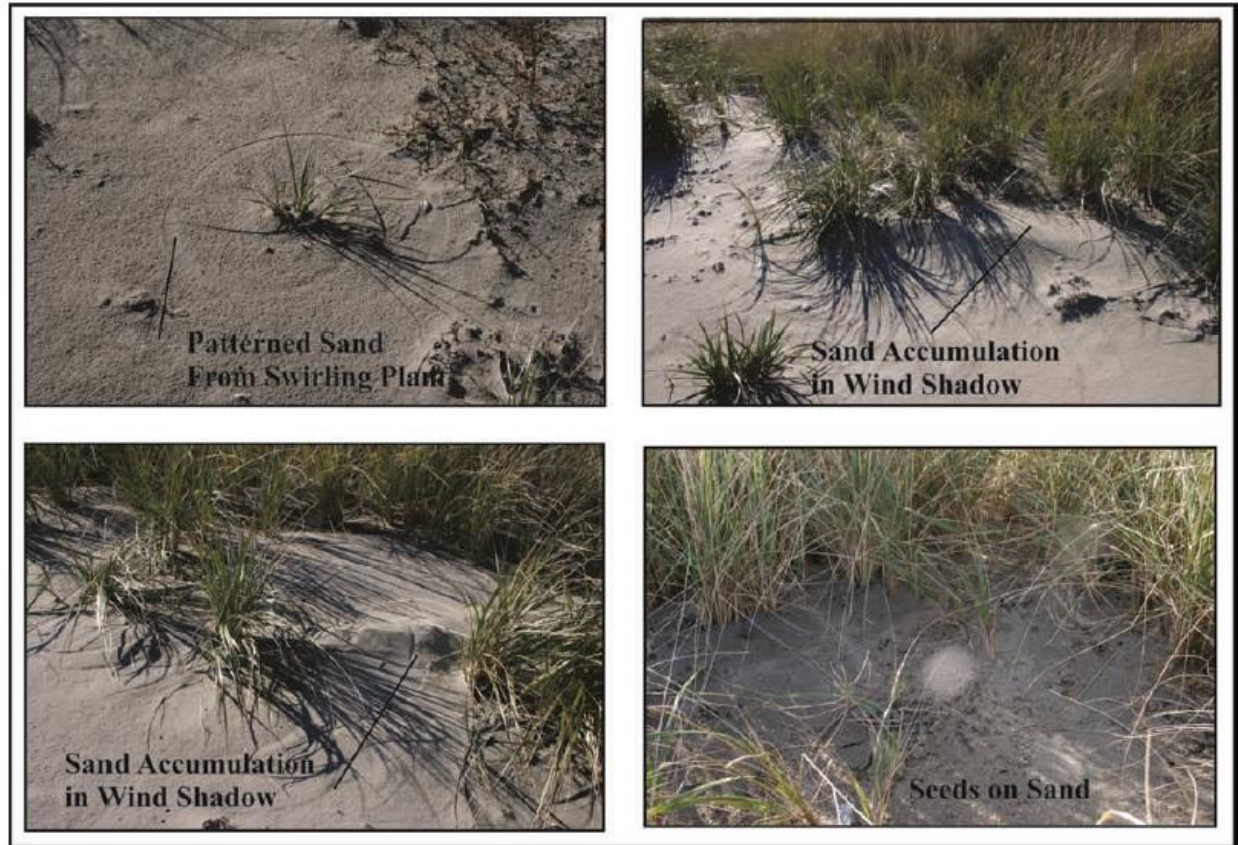


Figure 2: Images show wind-blown sand trapped by vegetation on the back beach area of Point Michaud Beach (Finck, 2015).



Figure 3: Image shows the sediment build up, re-vegetation, and over 14 m of back beach progradation on the seaward side of the former erosion scarp along the central and western part of Point Michaud Beach (Finck, 2015).

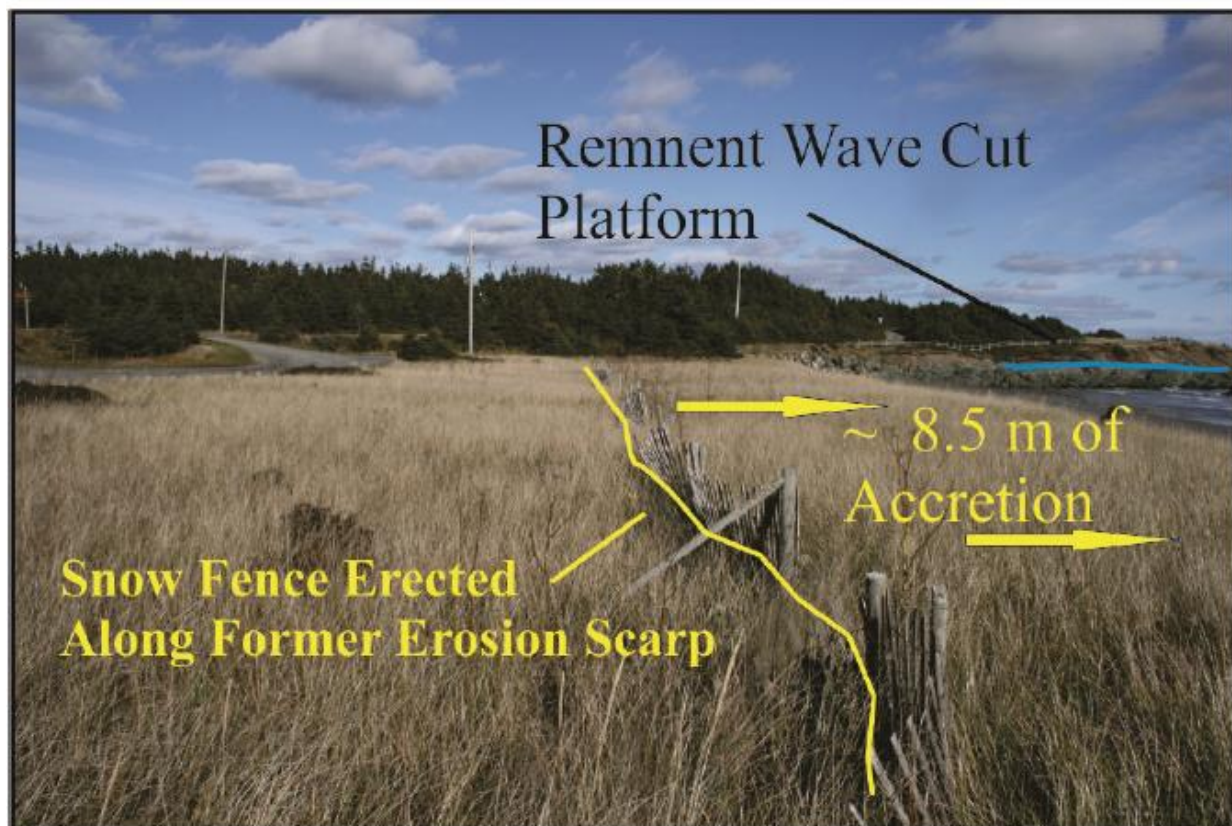


Figure 4: Snow fence erected along the base of a former erosion scarp with subsequent sediment build up and re-vegetation on the seaward side of the snow fence (Finck, 2015).

Although the snow fence may not assist in dune restoration efforts, it does serve to protect the dune by limiting and controlling access to the beach. Furthermore, efforts to remove the snow fencing may damage the dunes. Therefore, the snow fencing will remain in place.

11.2.4 Disturbances

Any fire that may occur in the park will be actively suppressed. Insect, disease, or invasive species infestations will be managed on a case-by-case basis. Many disturbances are recognized as a component of the natural ecosystem and generally will be allowed to progress undisturbed. Where disturbances threaten natural values or human safety, a control program may be undertaken if appropriate. The Guidelines for Vegetation Management provides further direction on insect and disease management.

11.3 Education and Interpretation

The natural and cultural heritage values associated with Point Michaud Beach may be enhanced through interpretive signage. DNR will work with the County of Richmond to develop interpretive themes for Point Michaud Beach. Potential interpretive themes may include: coastal geography and processes; local flora and fauna; wildlife viewing and bird watching opportunities; and cultural history.

11.4 Recreation Management

Point Michaud Beach will provide day use recreation opportunities to promote public enjoyment and appreciation of the parks' natural and cultural heritage values.

11.4.1 Beach Activities and Accessibility

The white sandy beach is the primary attraction at Point Michaud. Popular activities include beach combing, walking, sunbathing, sand play, and generally spending time in nature. There will be no enhancements to the beach itself (e.g., removing seaweed or raking sand), apart from removing potentially hazardous debris (e.g., lobster traps). However, the beach experience will be enhanced by installing a fully accessible boardwalk from the parking lot to the beach.

11.4.2 Surfing

Point Michaud is one of four publically accessible surf beaches in Nova Scotia, and is the only publically accessible surf break on Cape Breton Island. DNR will continue to support surf initiatives and activities at Point Michaud beach, where feasible. There is currently a small building in the parking lot where surfing gear is stored and rented by third parties. Since 2002, the Point Michaud Surf Classic event has been hosted annually at the park.

11.4.3 Swimming

Swimming is a popular activity at Point Michaud Beach. Since 2010, the Nova Scotia Lifeguard Service has been supervising the beach, in partnership with the Municipality of Richmond County. The supervised swimming area is approximately 100 metres in width, and is marked by red and yellow flags. The water conditions at Point Michaud beach are variable, and rough conditions may create potentially dangerous rips and currents (Nova Scotia Lifeguard Service, n.d.). DNR will continue to support the Nova Scotia Lifeguard Service to provide supervised swimming at Point Michaud Beach.

11.4.4 Picnicking

Picnicking at Point Michaud beach is supported by several picnic tables on the hill to east of the parking lot. The picnicking opportunity will be enhanced by additional picnic tables, built to accessible standards.

11.4.5 Access and Parking

The parking capacity at Point Michaud beach is adequate for the majority of the beach season. Should parking demand significantly increase, DNR will investigate additional parking options. DNR will continue to monitor the parking demand and safety concerns regarding roadside parking along highway 247.

To help support active transportation, bicycle racks will be installed near the parking lot.

11.4.6 Hiking to the Headland (Point Michaud)

Many visitors enjoy hiking along the beach to the headland/point (Point Michaud, Map 1). This beach hike requires crossing a stream, which shows varying water conditions and levels. DNR does not support

a bridge crossing as the stream is located on private land (protected under the *Beaches Act*), and the stream bed is highly dynamic.

Although wilderness hiking is permitted, no amenities, services, or trails will be provided or developed along the beach nor at the headland.

11.4.7 Food and Non-Food Concessions

DNR is currently developing policy to enable more food and non-food concessions within provincial parks. Any proposals to operate private business within the park will be considered, provided the proposed concession positively impacts the visitor experience and reflects the park vision.

11.4.8 Camping and Open Campfires

Camping and open campfires are not permitted at Point Michaud Beach.

11.4.9 Other Recreation Uses

Other recreational uses such as scuba diving, snorkeling, stand up paddle boarding, kite boarding, kayaking surfing, and boogie boarding occur at Point Michaud Beach. These recreational uses and emerging recreation uses are permitted provided there are no conflicts with applicable legislation and policy.

11.5 Way-Finding Signage

DNR is currently reviewing way-finding sign standards and will install new directional signs to Point Michaud Beach as resources become available.

11.6 Partnerships

In the implementation of the approved park management statement, DNR may pursue opportunities for partnerships involving other agencies and groups through formal partnership agreements. Partners will work with DNR to assist with the implementation of the approved park management statement and will follow provincial park policies, standards, and regulations.

11.7 Operations Policies

The Regional Services Branch of DNR is responsible for creating and implementing a park operations plan for Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park. The park operations plan will address budget, staffing, maintenance schedules, and coordination of enforcement activities. Park operations and maintenance will be consistent with the Nova Scotia Provincial Parks Operating Standards (available upon request).

11.8 Additions to the Park

DNR Parks & Recreation Division would support, in principle, adding property to the park, provided the proposed addition will enhance park values. If suitable lands adjacent or near the park become available

for addition, they will be evaluated based on contribution to park objectives, willing seller/willing buyer, and available funding.

11.8.1 Recommendation to Designate the Headland (Point Michaud)

To further underscore the Province's commitment to protection and coastal recreation opportunities, it is recommended that Point Michaud (Property Identification number: 75106336) be included within the Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park designation. The property is currently classified as ungranted Crownland (owner unknown). It is recommended that the ownership status be confirmed, and if Crown owned, be added to Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park.

Point Michaud headland contains 1031 acres and is currently a designated protected beach. The natural, cultural, and recreation values of Point Michaud headland complement the park objectives of Point Michaud Beach Provincial Park (section 9.0). Point Michaud headland contains various natural values and offers opportunities for wilderness hiking and nature appreciation. Currently, visitors to Point Michaud beach hike approximately 2.5km along the protected beach to the point/Point Michaud headland. A hiking trail through the forested areas on Point Michaud headland may be considered in the future.

12.0 Implementation priorities

The following table summarizes actions identified in the Policy section. Implementation of actions are subject to the availability of funding and resources. Unforeseeable changes in priorities or policy may affect implementation. Refer to the park concept map in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Implementation Priorities

Action identified in management direction	Comments
Short Term	
Vista Maintenance	Assess vegetation barriers to the scenic view from the hill looking down to the beach. Remove vegetation where there are no adverse ecological or erosion impacts.
Pursue partnership opportunities	Potential partnership opportunities with Richmond County and Parks Canada.
Medium Term	
Accessible boardwalk and trail installation	Site assessment will occur in 2016, boardwalk and trail installation will occur as resources become available.
Install accessible vault toilet and change houses	Site assessment will occur in 2016, installation will occur as resources become available.
Accessible picnic tables	Placement of additional, accessible picnic tables near the main parking lot and near the small

	parking lot on the hill.
Install bicycle racks	To support active transportation, install bicycle racks near the parking lot.
Investigate additional parking options	Site assessment will occur in 2016
Long Term	
Install new way-finding signage	DNR is currently reviewing way-finding sign standards and will install new directional signs to Point Michaud Beach as resources become available.

13.0 Review and Adjustment of Management Direction

This management statement will be reviewed after it has been in place for 10 years to determine whether it's still relevant, effective, and current or if adjustments are needed. In circumstances where the statement is not providing sufficient direction to protect the values or address existing or emerging threats, the statement can be reviewed prior to the next scheduled review.

External requests for amendments to address specific requests or needs may be considered.

15.0 References

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Appendix I: Park Concept Map

