

NS HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND FINAL REPORT

NOVA SCOTIA NATURE TRUST

Plants on the Edge:

Securement and Stewardship of Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora Habitat (Phase 2)

Project Goal:

To conserve in perpetuity the critical lakeshore, wetland and shoreline habitats in southwest Nova Scotia that support nationally significant Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora (ACPF), and to mitigate threats to ACPF through stewardship and education.

Project Objectives:

- To permanently conserve the critical and unique lakeshore, wetland and shoreline habitats where nationally significant Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora (ACPF) occur in southwest Nova Scotia through purchase, donation and conservation easements;
- To maintain the diversity of native species by conserving the important “edge” habitats where freshwater and land ecosystems meet;
- To conserve this important “edge” habitat as an integral and functioning component of freshwater and land-based ecosystems;
- To reduce human impacts and threats to critical ACPF habitats through landowner education and voluntary stewardship;
- To educate children on habitat conservation using new specifically created interpretive materials for ACPF wetland habitat conservation;
- To engage landowners in active habitat conservation and stewardship;
- To educate users of these lake systems and local communities in habitat conservation;
- To engage local citizens in a coordinated program to monitor the abundance and health of ACPF habitats, and permanently conserved ACPF wetland sites.

Project Activities and Results:

- *Landowner outreach:*
 - Letters were sent to 157 landowners, 47 priority landowners received follow-up calls and 30 properties/landowners were visited. 12 new candidates were identified for Stewardship Agreements (SAs).
 - For those landowners who requested it, visits were followed up with thank-you letters and reports and/or photos of ACPF plants on the property
- *Stewardship:*
 - 3 new Stewardship Agreements protecting 89 hectares of ACPF habitat on Gillfillan, Ponhook and Salmon Lakes.
- *Securement:*
 - 2 properties supporting critical ACPF habitat were permanently protected: totalling 32 hectares and over 4.7km of shoreline on Molega and Gillfillan Lakes.

- One additional property on Molega Lake is in the final stage of securement; all processes have been completed and the property will be conveyed to the Nature Trust as soon as the Capital Gain exemption for Ecological Gifts announced in the recent federal budget is enacted.
 - 2 baseline reports and 2 securement stewardship plans were completed. 4 land appraisals and 3 legal title assessments were completed. 2 legal surveys were completed for the Molega properties (a survey was not required for the Gillfillan property). Habitat assessments were completed for 21 properties identified for permanent securement.
 - 2 monitoring visits to the Gillfillan property were completed by volunteer Property Guardians. Several properties are in the securement process of negotiation, legal and technical procedures.
 - The design of interpretive, roadside and boundary signs for secured properties is completed and in the production stage, with installation scheduled for summer 2006.
- *Public Education:*
 - The Nature Trust hosted 2 ACPF walks with 23 participants (including community members, landowners, and members of local conservation organizations).
 - Up-to-date ACPF interpretive material was distributed to all 157 landowners contacted and 23 participants of guided walks and monitoring training sessions.
 - Numerous media releases were distributed and 6 articles were printed in local and regional newspapers about ACPF and related Nature Trust outreach and monitoring programs; 2 CBC radio interviews were conducted with Nature Trust staff (1 re. the Rare Plant Monitoring program and 1 re. the Gillfillan Lake property closure, which included the participation of a Recovery Team member)
 - The AVEDA Earth Month campaign raised \$12,220 for the Nature Trust. ACPF Bookmarks and brochures were printed and distributed to clients through 14 AVEDA salon locations throughout Atlantic Canada during the month of April. AVEDA International has chosen the Nature Trust to be the Atlantic Canada Earth Month Partner again for 2006.
 - A layperson's *Field Guide to Atlantic Coastal Plain Plants* including photos and descriptions of 30 plants was completed, printed, and is in distribution.
 - A *Children's Activity Guide to Atlantic Coastal Plain Plants*, for the use of landowner/users with children, local schools, and children's groups, is in final design stages and will be published online for the upcoming field season. The *Activity Guide* will be available in French and English. Meetings were held with staff of Kejimikujik National Park and YMCA Camp Wapomeo to discuss collaboration for public education on ACPF, referral of interested landowners to the Nature Trust, and design and use of children's material.
 - 12 new Rare Plant Monitors were trained at 2 monitor training sessions in August 2005. 22 Rare Plant monitors were active in 2005 at 19 ACPF sites on 5 lakes; a great increase over past years. Monitoring data sheets were returned to the NSNT and submitted to the ACPF Recovery Team in mid-November.
 - New Nature Trust Coastal Plain Flora and Property Guardian brochures were created and printed
- *Evaluation:*
 - Holders of all 29 voluntary Stewardship Agreements (SAs) received letters, follow-up calls, and site visits where possible, to evaluate the status of their properties and determine the effectiveness of these agreements for mitigating threats to ACPF species and habitat. Of all SA holders who were engaged (50%) responded positively and

updated staff of the status of ACPF on their shorelines. These results were confirmed with monitoring visits to 25% of SA holders' properties.

- 2 permanently secured properties monitored by Nature Trust staff and volunteer Property Guardians
- Long-standing Rare Plant Monitors and Nature Trust staff participated in a survey on the user-friendliness and effectiveness of monitoring data sheets. The results are being used to redesign monitoring sheets for the 2006 field season.
- Appropriate records were maintained in order to evaluate project success when comparing project outcomes to project goals.

Achievements and lessons learned

- This year has been an exceptional one for the Nature Trust's *Plants on the Edge* project. We exceeded our expectations with respect to landowner contact and follow-up, and expansion of our monitoring programs:
 - 32 hectares, including over one kilometer of shoreline supporting unique ACPF habitat, are legally protected, forever, and will be monitored regularly by volunteer Property Guardians. 89 more hectares have been protected through informal Stewardship Agreements (SAs) with landowners, who agreed to protect ACPF habitat on their lands. SAs were confirmed as effective tools when telephone calls and on-site visits that were carried out with SA holders confirmed protection and some restoration of ACPF habitat.
 - 10 new Rare Plant Monitors were recruited and trained and 22 plant monitors were active at 19 sites in south-west Nova Scotia, confirming continued existence of known ACPF sites. Monitor reports on species and habitat conditions for 2005 were returned to the Nature Trust and submitted to the ACPF Recovery Team for tracking of species populations and habitat.
 - The Plants on the Edge project received significant media coverage in 2005 and 2006, more than in previous years, in Halifax and in regional South-west NS media. Though this increase in public awareness of ACPF species and habitat does not translate directly into mitigation of threats to species and habitat, this increased awareness continues to facilitate the Nature Trust's targeted outreach efforts with landowners and land users in the region and project collaborators across the province.
- Lessons learned include the value of maintaining liaisons with other organizations active in conservation activities in the region, notably Kejimikujik National Park and small local community clubs in the southwest. These relationships have been valuable resources for volunteer recruitment and in-kind support, monitoring activities, and public outreach.

Recommendations for follow-up

Habitat Conservation

- Continue development and delivery of habitat conservation program by:
 - Identifying and prioritizing properties for permanent conservation in perpetuity
 - Identifying, contacting and negotiating formal conservation with landowners of priority habitats
 - Completing ongoing negotiations initiated in previous year of the project
 - Completing habitat assessments and formal securement procedures

- Obtaining appraisals, legal work and legal surveys for properties targeted for securement
- Continuing support to volunteer Rare Plant Monitors (for properties with ACPF present) and Protected Area Guardians (for secured properties)

Outreach

- Continue development and delivery of landowner outreach program by:
 - identifying new key landowners
 - maintaining contact with key landowners and stewardship agreement holders
 - identifying new candidates for stewardship agreements

- Continue development of Atlantic coastal plain local resident outreach program by:
 - hosting guided walks
 - delivering public presentations
 - targeted distribution of interpretative material
 - expansion and improvement of existing targeted interpretative materials
 - public celebrations to mark project achievements
 - supporting existing volunteer Rare Plant Monitors and training new monitors