

SAVING SPACES FOR SPECIES PROJECT



FINAL REPORT TO HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND
OCTOBER 2011



INTRODUCTION

Species at risk (SAR) are an integral part of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural history. They have key roles in maintaining healthy ecosystems, and provide opportunities for education, research, and recreation – all in ways that are compatible with preserving their habitat.

Our province is home to many species at risk. For some of these species, the few remaining sites in Nova Scotia are the last refuges in Canada. These species, although on the brink of extinction, are integral to our biodiversity and our culture. In Nova Scotia, we have an opportunity and responsibility to preserve part of our country's natural history. Excellent research and coordinated efforts guide recovery actions to save these species, with the Nature Trust contributing to these efforts through the permanent protection and stewardship of critical habitat.



The Nova Scotia Nature Trust is a non-government charitable organization that was incorporated under the Nova Societies Act in 1994. The Nature Trust is designated as a land trust under the Conservation Easement Act of Nova Scotia, and is an approved environmental charity under Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program.

The mission of the Nature Trust is to protect Nova Scotia's outstanding natural legacy, including critical and threatened wildlife habitat, through land conservation. We envision a future in which Nova Scotia's native species, unique habitats, and natural landscapes are protected in perpetuity, and in which this natural legacy is appreciated and actively stewarded. Our goals are achieved by working with private land owners and other partners to identify and protect the most critical and threatened wildlife habitats in Nova Scotia.

PROJECT GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of the 2010/11 Saving Spaces for Species project was to increase the knowledge Nova Scotians have about SAR in the province, and increase good stewardship practices on properties with SAR habitat. This goal included promoting private land conservation options for land owners of SAR habitat, and introducing all interested Nova Scotians to ways they can assist directly in SAR habitat stewardship.

The objectives of the Saving Spaces for Species project were to increase the public's knowledge and actions that protect SAR habitat through the following methods:

- 1) Identify and prioritize properties for protection that are known to contain SAR habitat.
- 2) Contact priority property landowners to speak with them about SAR habitat and how to steward it.
- 3) Visit priority properties, with landowners, during the summer months.
- 4) Assess SAR habitat quality, overall quality of the property, threats to SAR habitat on the property and landowner's interest in private land conservation.
- 5) Instruct landowners in identification of SAR, SAR habitat and stewardship actions they can take to support SAR habitat health (including opportunities for permanent forms of protection).
- 6) Raise awareness among landowners, and the public, about SAR habitat as an important feature of our province.
- 7) Engage Nova Scotians in stewardship activities on SAR properties through volunteering.
- 8) Negotiate with landowners towards permanent, legal protection of the SAR habitat on their properties.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

- Using data on nationally and provincially listed SAR, the Nature Trust has created GIS-based maps of priority properties which include landowner names and contact information. We received feedback from partners on our preliminary results and made subsequent revisions. This activity is ongoing and we are planning a workshop with conservation experts to further review the maps.
- We increased Nova Scotians' awareness of the work being done to protect SAR habitat through direct communication (such as mailings and phone calls). Over 10,000 landowners received information in the mail about SAR habitat conservation in Nova Scotia.
- The Nature Trust conducted property visits to priority sites during the summer months, with the landowners present (when possible). SAR habitat on their properties was identified and pointed out to them. As well, landowners received additional information on Nature Trust projects. We completed assessment reports for priority properties to be used to make decisions about conservation options (for example, permanent protection, and stewardship only). Twenty-two site visits to priority properties were completed. The data collected from these site visits were input into a GIS program and added to existing data on SAR occurrences, habitat quality and extent. Combined with new data from a GIS contractor who developed a rigorous, map-based approach to our prioritization efforts, as well as expert input, the Nature Trust has updated its maps and priority lists for specific stewardship and securement activities. One assessment report led to permanent protection of a priority property in the 2010/11 fiscal year. Following the assessment reports, several properties entered the "pipeline" towards permanent protection and work with those landowners is ongoing.
- As a result of our work, a greater number of landowners and Nova Scotians are able to recognize specific SAR and their habitats, and have been given the tools to carry out actions supporting healthy habitats. Targeted mailings were sent to 587 priority landowners who own land with at risk Atlantic coastal plain flora (ACPF) habitat. This included an NSNT brochure, a brochure about ACPF, and a lake-specific factsheet about rare ACPF potentially found on each landowner's property.
- We raised awareness among landowners and the public about SAR habitat as an important feature of our province. This communication happened in part through events such as public guided trips to SAR habitat and public celebrations of newly protected SAR habitat:

The Nature Trust partnered with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and Nova Scotia Environment's Protected Areas branch for a paddling trip in the Tusket River watershed to view at risk ACPF.

The Nature Trust celebrated the protection of two properties which provide habitat for Blanding's turtles and Eastern ribbonsnakes. The event included guided nature walks, a barbeque, and the opportunity to join guardians in their search for turtle nests later on in the evening. Participants had the opportunity to learn about the importance of land stewardship while spending a fun-filled afternoon outside immersed in nature.

As well, the Nature Trust celebrated the protection of a property with important habitat for two at risk (threatened and endangered) species of ACPF, enabling us to showcase these plants and their habitat. We also





gave a presentation about ACPF to a community nature group; 15 people attended this presentation.

The project has received media coverage, both provincially and locally, including articles in the Chronicle Herald, Halifax Metro, and the South Shore Reports. Additional coverage of the Saving Spaces for Species Project was published in the Nature Trust's print newsletter, Natural Landscapes (also available on the Nature Trust website).

- The Nature Trust continues to engage the public through its two main field-based volunteer programs: the Property Guardian program and the Rare Plant Monitoring Program (now called the Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora Volunteer Monitoring Program). Landowners, ecological experts, and general nature enthusiasts all participate in these programs. They are trained to identify species, assess threats to habitat, monitor environmental conditions, and engage in other stewardship activities.

Twenty-three new volunteers were recruited to become rare plant monitors for ACPF. Seven were trained; the remaining 16 were recruited following the 2010 summer season and were to be trained in the summer of 2011. Eleven new Property Guardian volunteers were recruited and trained. Six SAR properties have trained and active Property Guardians (up from four in 2009/10). We continue to work towards having Property Guardians for all SAR properties.



- This year, the Nature Trust continued to work with landowners on conservation options for their land including permanent, legal protection of SAR habitat. We were in negotiations with 16 landowners about protecting their SAR habitat. In this fiscal year, we protected one property with species at risk habitat, the Crow Neck Beach Conservation Lands. This 33 acre property, an important breeding ground for the endangered piping plover, is now protected forever. Ultimately, the outreach, education and landowner contact work that we do has a proven track record of leading to permanent protection of high priority SAR habitat on private lands.

ASSESSMENT OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

These results for the Saving Spaces for Species project have been achieved through a great deal of outreach to landowners, volunteers and experts on SAR. As well, we have been successful in engaging communities and the general public through external communication, events and training opportunities. Each project activity was successfully completed or continues to be ongoing, as is the nature of our work. Each year that we focus on increasing the knowledge of Nova Scotians about SAR in the province and increasing good stewardship practices on properties with SAR habitat leads to further successes. These successes are demonstrated by members of the public engaged in our outreach activities, landowners receiving information on how to responsibly steward their properties, volunteers participating in our monitoring programs, and landowners permanently protecting their SAR habitat.

In 2010/11 we began the transition from our Rare Plant Monitoring program to the Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora Volunteer Monitoring Program, a revamped program in partnership with the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and Kejimikujik National Park and Historic Site. This partnership and program revamp was designed to streamline existing similar programs, to utilize common resources, and to access a broader base of volunteers. We continued to offer the Nature Trust's Rare Plant Monitoring program in the 2010/11 summer

season, while soliciting input from experts and volunteer monitors for suggested improvements. We anticipate launching the new ACPF Volunteer Monitoring Program in 2012.

The Nature Trust has accomplished a lot in its 16 years – over 6,000 acres protected in Nova Scotia, with 15 properties providing important habitat for SAR. These achievements are possible due to support from interested landowners, volunteers, and our partners in conservation – including other organizations doing on-the-ground work, and those who provide us with essential funding, such as the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund. We are proud of the achievements the Saving Spaces for Species project has made in the 2010/11 year, but there is still more to do...

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

The Nature Trust will continue its land securement and public outreach activities as part of the Endangered Species Campaign. We will continue to:

- 1) Identify and prioritize additional sites for permanent protection.
- 2) Work with landowners to protect priority habitat for species at risk, particularly those landowners whose properties are “in the pipeline” towards permanent protection.
- 3) Work with the Province of Nova Scotia to encourage the protection of strategic Crown lands which provide habitat for species at risk.
- 4) Increase support for private land conservation and stewardship of habitat with key landowners.
- 5) Raise awareness of Nova Scotia’s at risk and rare habitats and wildlife through community events, distribution of interpretive materials, public celebrations marking project achievements, and training and supporting new and existing volunteer Property Guardians and ACPF volunteer monitors.
- 6) Work with SAR Recovery Teams, partner organizations (such as the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute, Parks Canada, and Acadia University) and others, toward our common goal of conserving Nova Scotia’s SAR species and habitat.

