

BON PORTAGE ISLAND CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN



Protecting a Coastal Treasure

FINAL REPORT TO
NOVA SCOTIA HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND
SEPTEMBER 2012



PROTECTION OF BON PORTAGE ISLAND

Over the course of this two-year campaign, the Nature Trust has been working in partnership with Acadia University to protect, forever, the 340 acre Bon Portage Island, one of Nova Scotia's most ecologically important coastal islands. This conservation easement will protect one of the province's highest priority migratory bird sanctuaries, and one of Nova Scotia's last, large undeveloped coastal islands. Moreover this conservation easement will protect Bon Portage Island's significant value as Acadia's premier ecological research and field education site, as well as its value as a treasured community resource.



Lighthouse keepers Evelyn and Morrill Richardson kept watch from the island's shores for 35 years. Evelyn's Governor General's Award winning book, *We Keep a Light*, is a delightful account of the natural history of Bon Portage during the changing seasons. The Richardsons later donated the island to Acadia University as a site for the study of natural history, ecology, and wildlife management.

Found 3 km off Shag Harbour in southwest Nova Scotia, Bon Portage Island is a low lying island that is composed of two drumlins connected by an even lower lying wetland

area in between. A cobblestone barrier beach surrounds the roughly 7 km of shoreline, interspersed with several saline ponds and a large intertidal lagoon. A fen is found near the centre of the island, and coastal forests (dominated by spruce and fir) are present throughout much of the interior.

The island provides regionally, nationally, and globally significant bird habitat, with as many species recorded on this one island as in all of Atlantic Canada. Situated in an ideal location along the Atlantic flyway, the island serves as a resting point and staging area during avian migrations. Because of its importance, Bon Portage has been recognized as a globally Important Bird Area by BirdLife International (<http://www.ibacanada.ca>).

The island is home to one of the world's largest colonies of Leach's Storm Petrel (50,000 pairs), and attracts countless migratory song birds, shorebirds, gulls, and ducks. It also has a small colony of herons.

Over 85 per cent of Nova Scotia's coast is privately owned, and intense development pressures pose unprecedented risks to our coastal lands. In light of the growing vulnerability of islands like Bon Portage, this opportunity to protect such a critical part of our coastal legacy is invaluable.



CAMPAIGN GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this campaign was to address the urgent need to conserve ecologically intact coastal lands in Nova Scotia through the permanent protection of the 340 acre Bon Portage Island, supporting undisturbed, diverse and significant coastal habitats. This campaign also aimed to raise awareness amongst landowners, local community members, and Nova Scotians of the need for the conservation of our most vulnerable coastal areas. The objectives of the Bon Portage Island Campaign were:

Securement

- 1) The negotiation of a conservation easement protecting the island in perpetuity, while still allowing for continued use of the island for education and research purposes by the island owners, Acadia University.
- 2) The permanent protection of 7 kilometres of shoreline, 25 acres of wetlands and 340 acres of coastal habitat.

Stewardship

- 1) The completion of an in-depth baseline study of the island, identifying and incorporating both ecological data and any potential management issues in order to guide the island's long term management.
- 2) The development of a long-term stewardship plan for the island , to ensure its natural values and wildlife are protected in perpetuity. In addition to regular management by the Nature Trust's professional stewardship staff, the stewardship program will include active involvement of Acadia students and faculty in habitat monitoring and stewardship activities, along with recruitment and training of volunteers from the local community.
- 3) Establish a stewardship endowment fund to ensure that necessary resources are in place to protect, steward and enforce the long-term preservation of the island's natural values.

Education/Outreach

- 1) Increased public awareness of the importance of Bon Portage Island, its history and unique habitats, and options for taking action to help the conservation of the island and coastal lands across Nova Scotia.
- 2) The expansion of Acadia's education program to encompass on-the-ground habitat monitoring and stewardship work in support of island protection.
- 3) The promotion of research opportunities on the island and within the scientific community.
- 4) Guided walks, presentations, community events and volunteer stewardship to education and engage the public.



CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Partnership

In September 2011, the Nova Scotia Nature Trust and Acadia University signed a Memorandum of Understanding committing the organizations to work together to permanently protect Bon Portage Island, as well as several other ecologically important coastal lands owned by the university. These lands will remain in Acadia ownership, but the natural values will be permanently protected through conservation easement agreements with the Nature Trust.

Through this voluntary action, initiated by Acadia University and supported by the Nature Trust, permanent restrictions will be put in place to restrict certain activities that could have negative impacts on the biology, ecology, and natural features of the university owned land.

Through this unique, first of its kind conservation partnership between the Nature Trust and Acadia University the land trust community across the country will have yet another mechanism available for protecting ecologically significant lands: a conservation easement with the flexibility to accommodate a dynamic university research facility, and that still protects the natural values of the land.



2. Conservation Easement



In partnership with Acadia University, Bon Portage Island has been protected in perpetuity, through the use of a conservation easement. Over the course of this campaign, the Bon Portage Island committee, consisting of staff from the Nature Trust, Acadia University and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, met regularly to develop and refine the terms and conditions of the conservation easement. This conservation easement, signed on September 8th, 2012 protects 340 acres of at risk coastal habitats, including 7 kilometres of shoreline, over 25 acres of wetlands, and important habitat for breeding birds, as

well as many migrating shorebirds, songbirds, waterfowl and raptors.

3. Baseline Study & Management Plan

As part of the Bon Portage Island Conservation Campaign, the Nature Trust, in partnership with Acadia University biology department has prepared an in-depth baseline study and stewardship plan for the island during the summer of 2012. The preparation of these documents involved the collection of ecological and biological data, as well as the identification of potential management issues to help guide the island's long-term management.



Towards this goal the Nature Trust, with the cooperation and support of Acadia, undertook a historical compilation of past activities and ecological surveys of Bon Portage Island. The Nature Trust hired ecologist Dr. Nick Hill to complete this background research during the winter of 2012. Dr. Hill then incorporated the information gathered during this initial phase, along with the data collected during an ecological survey of the island into a comprehensive baseline report. The Nature Trust is also partnering with the Bird Society of NS to bring together

information from their annual surveys on the island. With much of the field work undertaken during this past June, the final baseline study document is now complete. This report describes the present and past uses of the island, the island's ecological processes, and the current state of habitats and species on the island.

Building upon the baseline study, and the terms and conditions of the conservation easement, the Nature Trust and Acadia University are working to complete a long-term management plan for the island, to ensure its natural values are protected, forever. In addition to ongoing management by the Nature Trust's professional staff, the stewardship program will include active involvement of Acadia students and faculty in habitat monitoring and stewardship activities, along with recruitment and training of property guardian volunteers from the local community.

As part of the ongoing stewardship and monitoring of the island the Nature Trust, in partnership with Acadia and other community partners and volunteers will undertake annual monitoring of the island and address any stewardship issues that arise. This monitoring and stewardship is a standard procedure for the Nature Trust on all of our protected lands. As this project is a component of a new partnership with Acadia, the Nature Trust will work with faculty and students to perform monitoring activities. We will further take advantage of this partnership and use it as a teaching opportunity to educate students about land conservation in Nova Scotia.

4. Outreach & Education

The Bon Portage Island campaign involved one of the Nature Trust's most extensive public education and outreach campaign's to date. This outreach and education campaign has been designed to engage the local community, build greater awareness of, and support for the protection of the island, while enhancing appreciation for the island's unique natural history. On this front the Nature Trust has hosted several well attended events on Bon Portage Island, throughout the local communities of southwest Nova Scotia, and in Halifax. These events include:



- **August 2011** - A Bon Portage Island trip offered in August 2011 for Nature Trust members.

- **September 8 2011** - Official announcement of the Bon Portage Island Campaign and Acadia University partnership at the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, Halifax, September 2011.
- **February 26 2012** - A guided walk and presentation for the local community, hosted in cooperation with the Barrington Municipality recreation department in March 2012.
- **September 8, 2012** - Public celebration announcing the permanent protection of Bon Portage Island. Hosted by the Nature Trust and Acadia University in the community of Woods Harbour.

During this campaign we also undertook outreach with media, and achieved extensive coverage across the province on television, radio and print (examples enclosed). We also produced both video and print educational materials, and web-based media (see links below).

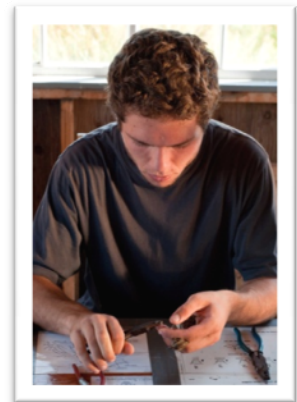
- Bon Portage website: www.nsnt.ca/bonportage
- Educational campaign video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyMeHQ3xVpI>
- Eastlink TV documentary: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF49G4cdhK0&>

5. Research Opportunities

Bon Portage Island also provides irreplaceable opportunities for research and education on the flora, fauna, and ecology of coastal islands. The island, with its field stations (including labs and accommodations) has been used by generations of biology students and faculty at Acadia University, and by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources for bird banding and tracking, wildlife research, and field schools and courses.

Some of the highlights of the research opportunities on Bon Portage Island include:

- A unique place providing field experience and study for generations of students at Acadia University.
- Home to the Atlantic Bird Observatory, and the Evelyn and Morrill Richardson Field Station, named to honour former lighthouse keepers Evelyn and Morrill Richardson.
- An important wildlife research site used by government, community, and academic partners.
- Opportunities for tying educational activities/research at Acadia into habitat stewardship of Bon Portage, sharing of data, and hosting of joint education events.



The Bon Portage Island conservation easement will ensure that the unique education and research opportunities provided on the island will not only be maintained, but can in the future be enhanced, in partnership with the Nature Trust.

6. Signage

The Nature Trust, in partnership with Acadia University, is currently in the process of designing three interpretive panels that will be placed on the island to inform visitors about the islands natural and cultural history. Text and images for the signage are currently being compiled to portray the ecological and cultural history of the island. Signage design shall be completed by the end of 2012.

