



## **Final Report: *Conserving the Pugwash Estuary***

**Habitat Conservation Fund Grant to Nature Conservancy of Canada, Atlantic Region**

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## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has been working to protect intertidal and upland habitats along the Pugwash Estuary, on the northern shore of mainland Nova Scotia for 14 years. This ongoing land assembly project was initiated in 1998 with the donation of two conservation easements. Since then, NCC has protected nearly 1,100 acres of land, making it one of the largest assemblies of privately protected land on Nova Scotia's coastline, and indeed, the largest coastal protected area on the Northumberland Strait coast. This project focused on the addition of acreage to this land assembly, and on supporting land stewardship documentation and partner engagement.

### **1. PROJECT GOALS and OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this project was to secure important upland and estuarine shoreline habitat on the Pugwash Estuary. An area of active and ongoing NCC land assembly, this project involved the protection of a key parcel of land in support of NCC's long term vision of conservation here. This goal was achieved with the successful acquisition of the 177 acre Canfield Creek parcel with 5 kilometres of frontage on the estuary, and a tidal creek. Supporting objectives included working with local partner Friends of the Pugwash Estuary, completing a baseline inventory report for the site, and updating NCC's Property Management Plan for the estuary.

### **2. DESCRIPTION of WORK COMPLETED**

#### **Land Securement**

NCC's standard land securement processes were undertaken. Once satisfactory evidence of clear title was gained, NCC commissioned a legal survey of the property boundaries, producing a registered survey plan. The property was then migrated to the online registry. Ongoing communication with a broker was required throughout the transaction. On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, NCC closed the deal and took title to the property, protecting it for conservation.

#### **Fundraising**

A total of \$555,153 was raised for this project. In addition to the generous \$50,000 contribution by hunters and trappers through the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund, contributions were made by the Government of Canada, under the Natural Areas Conservation Program and the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust. A public appeal in late July 2012 yielded a significant show of public support for this project, with over \$25,000 in private gifts being received. Further private and corporate fundraising rounded out the project budget. A total of \$63,750 was endowed for the future stewardship and management of NCC's land holdings at Pugwash.

## **Land Stewardship**

A baseline inventory of species and ecosystems present on the site has been completed, including professional botanical work. NCC field staff spent three days on site collecting information on the ecosystems and species communities present. The site contains 5 kilometres of shoreline on the estuary, where riparian forest of Hemlock, Yellow Birch and Sugar Maple meets the intertidal mudflats typical of the estuary. The property contains an area of exposed gypsum covered by a closed canopy Hemlock forest. A small pond and seep wetland system are found here as well. NCC property boundary signs were installed, and larger format signage will be installed in spring 2013.

NCC's Property Management Plan for the Pugwash Estuary has been updated to include the Canfield Creek property. There are no major stewardship concerns on land; however, pilot sampling in 2012 for Green Crab in the estuary revealed extremely high numbers of crabs. This poses a major threat to eelgrass and estuarine ecosystem health. NCC will work with the Friends of the Pugwash Estuary and other partners to advance planning for management of this important issue. To this end, a meeting to discuss collaboration was held with Friends of Pugwash on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012. The meeting involved discussion of numerous shared priorities that will serve as the basis for ongoing collaboration.

### **3. RESULTS**

A total of 177 acres of habitat, including 5 kilometres of shoreline on the Pugwash Estuary has been protected for conservation, adding to a significant land assembly now totalling over 1,000 acres (Figure 1). A total of \$555,153 was raised from a wide variety of sources to achieve this result and contribute to NCC's long term vision for conservation at Pugwash, and in northern Nova Scotia. Basic stewardship and management planning documentation including a baseline inventory and management planning have been undertaken to help ensure the biodiversity and conservation values the site possesses remain intact. Public announcement of the acquisition is expected to occur in 2013.

### **4. ACHIEVEMENTS, LESSONS LEARNED, RECOGNITION**

This successful acquisition has pushed NCC conservation lands at Pugwash to over 1,000 acres, making it one of the largest assemblies of private conservation land in the province. It has also spurred a renewed local interest in NCC's work, and furthered an ongoing partnership with Friends of the Pugwash Estuary.

The negotiation of the Agreement to Purchase the property was not easy, and was handled by a broker working on a volunteer basis. This proved to be an extremely effective model, and NCC may seek the assistance of volunteer brokers in other transactions in the future.

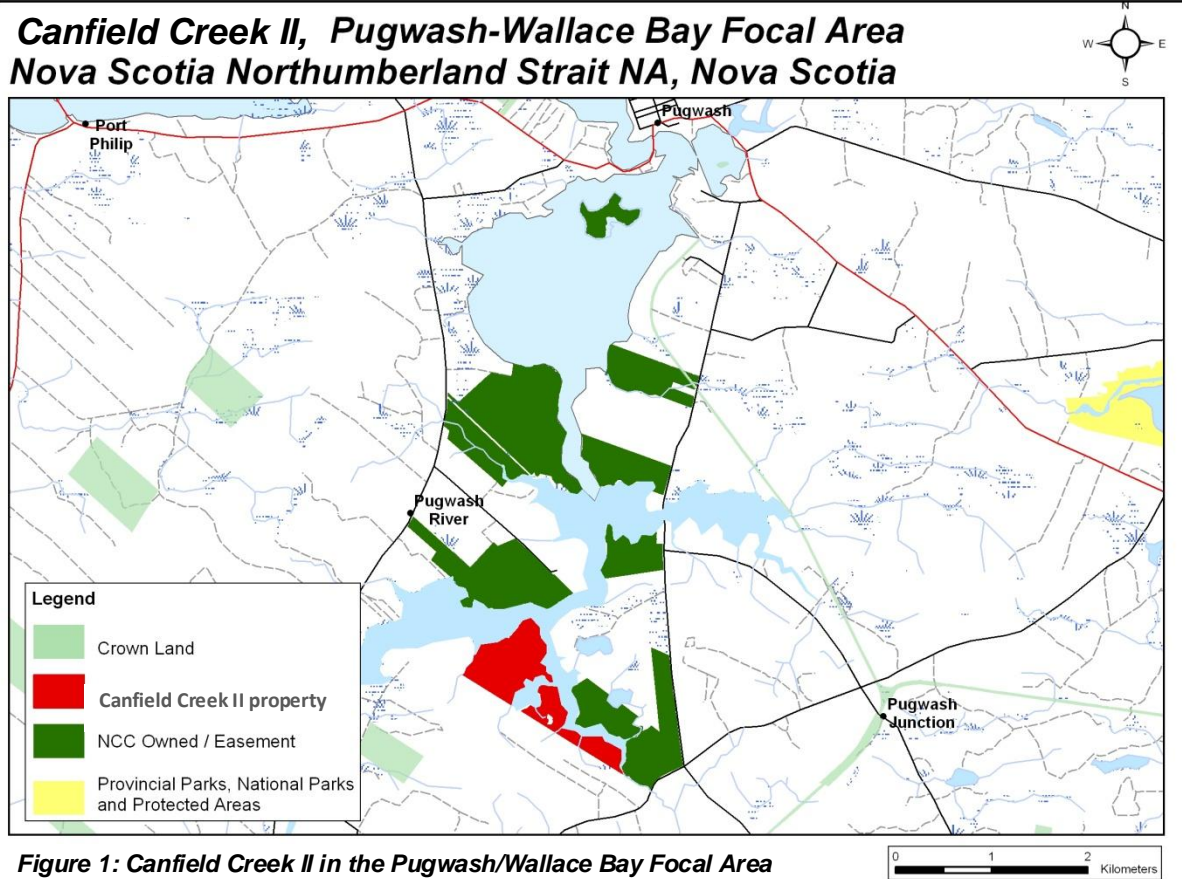
The generous contribution from the Habitat Conservation Fund, Contributions from Hunters and Trappers helped leverage other contributions from the Federal Government and the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust. All contributions are appreciated.

## 5. Next Steps

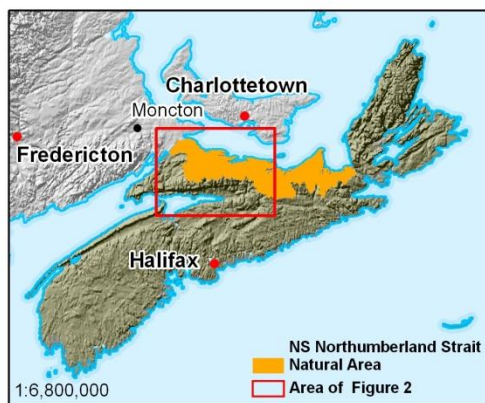
NCC will continue land protection efforts at Pugwash to solidify current conservation land holdings including acquisition of adjacent parcels and other high priority parcels as identified in NCC's Natural Area Conservation Plan for the region. This plan will be updated in winter 2013, posing opportunity to re-examine and identify important conservation action at Pugwash. This planning will involve extensive outreach to, and collaboration with partners. A sign will be erected on the Canfield Creek property, indicating NCC's ownership and management, and recognizing the contributors to the project. Announcement of the acquisition, including recognition of the Habitat Conservation Fund, Contributions from Hunters and Trappers is planned for 2013.

The recent explosion of Green Crab in the estuary threatens to degrade the health of the estuarine system, and NCC will work to better understand this population increase and evaluate potential control methods and management strategies. NCC's standard stewardship programming will continue to be undertaken, including annual site visits, liaising with local partners and land stewards, updating of the management plan every 5 years, and dealing with issues as they arise.





**Figure 1: Canfield Creek II in the Pugwash/Wallace Bay Focal Area**



**Figure 3: Nova Scotia**



**Figure 2: Location of the Pugwash - Wallace Bay Focal Area**

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 Projection: UTM, Zone 20, meter (North American Datum 1983)

For further information contact Nature Conservancy  
 of Canada at 1-877-251-4400.



**Figure 1: Map of NCC Conservation Lands along the Pugwash River Estuary.**



## Photos



DeWolfe 'Lake' – A small pond ecosystem found on the property.



Undulating forest floor composed of gypsum with mature hemlock canopy above.