

**Report to the Habitat Conservation Fund
(Contributions from Hunters and Trappers)**

**Nova Scotia Nature Trust project:
Black Point Beach Conservation Lands**



Photo credit: NSNT

Final Report

November 26, 2014

Project Goal and Objectives

The goal of this project was to protect 310 acres of diverse and significant coastal lands, with habitats used by waterfowl, shorebirds, and migratory birds (including species at risk) at Hemeon's Head (near Lockeport, Nova Scotia). The objectives were: 1) to secure two high priority coastal properties on the peninsula (the Black Point Beach parcel and the Matthews Lake parcel) as conservation lands, through a combination of conservation easement and land purchase, 2) to ensure the natural values of the new conservation lands remain protected, and 3) to increase awareness about conservation and to engage the local community in habitat conservation.

Outline of Work Completed

We are pleased to report that significant progress has been made towards meeting all three objectives of this project. We have completed all the securement-related tasks necessary to formally, legally protect the properties. This work included title work, property value appraisals, deed transfer for the Matthews Lake parcel, and a signed conservation easement between the Nature Trust and Acadia University for the Black Point Beach parcel. We conducted the field work necessary to inform a baseline report for the property, which documents current conditions on the property and identifies habitats and species present on site. This document forms the basis of our management plan for the property (in progress, being done in conjunction with partners). Property Guardians were recruited and trained to monitor the property annually. We hosted a public property celebration when the properties were secured, which included a guided walk. Additionally, we hosted another public guided walk at the property in summer 2014. Both events were carried out in partnership with Bird Studies Canada (BSC).

Results

We have secured 2 properties at Hemeon's Head, totaling 320 acres. All the securement-related steps for the properties have been completed. The Nature Trust now legally owns one property (in the case of the Matthews Lake parcel), and holds a conservation easement over the second property (in the case of the Black Point Beach parcel). The parcels are adjacent to each other and will be managed as one area, named the Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands (see attached map). A baseline study has been completed, which documents the natural features of the site, and indicates any potential threats or management issues. We are developing a stewardship plan for the site, in partnership with Acadia University, BSC, and local people from nearby communities. Three Property Guardians have been recruited and trained to monitor the property, which they will visit annually to monitor it for threats or other changes. The stewardship plan along with the data from Property Guardians informs our management actions on the property. We have coordinated our monitoring efforts with BSC and are in contact with the Piping Plover Guardian for the site. We are working with BSC to determine a more formalized manner in which we will receive and incorporate Piping Plover data from the site into our management actions.

The celebration we hosted when the properties were publically announced as protected was quite successful. We had about 50 people in attendance at the Little Harbour community hall, where we made our announcement, including members of the local community, the local MLA and municipal councillor.

The provincial Minister of Environment, Sterling Belliveau, was in attendance, as was Tom Herman, Vice President Academic of Acadia University. After the celebration at the community hall we went to the protected properties for a guided walk, in partnership with Bird Studies Canada (see attached photos).

The species at risk at the property (Piping Plover, Red Knot, and Harlequin Duck) continue to thrive at the site. BSC volunteers monitored Piping Plovers at the site throughout their breeding season and while chicks were fledged. In 2013, one Piping Plover pair built 2 nests, but both of their nests failed to produce any chicks. A predator was suspected to have caused the nest failure as a Barred Owl had been seen several times on site over the summer. The 2014 breeding season was more successful with one nesting pair producing three fledged chicks. Hemeon's Head was also a banding site for Environment Canada's Piping Plover Banding program. The three fledged chicks along with the adult male were banded this past summer. Harlequin Duck (15 individuals) and flocks of Red Knot (30 – 50 individuals) were seen by birders at the Hemeons' Head Conservation Lands in 2014.

We are excited to be actively participating in another bird conservation project at this site. During the summer of 2014 BSC also installed a small aerial tower on Hemeon's Head as part of the MOTUS flyway project. This tower will be able to pick up signals from passing radio tagged birds during their migration. This will help us better understand bird migration and migratory bird conservation.

Lessons Learned

This project went very smoothly, thanks in part to work with existing partners (Bird Studies Canada and Acadia University), and conservation-minded landowners. We will continue work with these and other partners to produce more conservation results in Nova Scotia.

We did not complete the stewardship plan for the site because we learned that there are management issues that need to be dealt with in an inclusive and sensitive way. There is ATV use at the site, much of it illegal, which we will be approaching delicately. We are working with partners, and the community, to work towards compliance based on education, and cooperation with those currently ATVing at the site. Legal enforcement is a tool we can use, and may have a role in time. Currently, there are locals that are supportive the protection of the lands and like working with the Nature Trust, and we want to build on that.

Recommendations

We recommend continued work on the stewardship plan for the site, including through working with partners at Department of Natural Resources, and from the municipality. We are planning to conduct studies of the impacts of ATV damage at the site, in order to better explain to the local community the impacts this activity has on the local habitat and species who call the site home. This work will also be crucial if on the ground restoration is required in the future.

**We sincerely appreciate the support of the Habitat Conservation Fund -
Contributions from Hunters and Trappers - in achieving this conservation
success!**