

Highlighting the Importance of Salt Marshes in our Community – The Development of an Interpretive Site at the Garden Lots Salt Marsh in Lunenburg Country, Nova Scotia



2015 Report

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Introduction

Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation, with their partners the Bay to Bay Trails Association and High Liner Foods Incorporated, have been successful in creating a 200 metre shared-use recreational interpretative trail leading to a viewing platform overlooking the salt marsh located in Garden Lots, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

Salt marsh habitats have been identified as one of the most biologically productive habitats on earth. They are ecologically important providing habitat for a variety of species including invertebrates, molluscs, birds, mammals, and fish. Species use this habitat for food, shelter, spawning, nursery areas, and refuge from predators giving salt marshes high commercial and recreational value as well. Salt marshes also provide erosion control, protect infrastructure from storm surges, and improve water quality.

Unfortunately, like many salt marshes in Nova Scotia, this area was extensively altered by High Liner Foods Incorporated through dredging activities in the past. However, nature has done a remarkable job in starting to restore the area back to its former condition. Therefore, Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation initiated the creation of the Garden Lots Salt Marsh interpretive trail as it serves as a great place to increase community knowledge and awareness of, as well as respect for, salt marshes and salt marsh habitat through this development. The project also includes the development of three, 3x2 feet interpretive panels, which provide a brief history of the area as well as information regarding the Acadian forest and salt marsh habitats.

The goal of this project was to provide a public outdoor space where members of the community can learn about the value of salt marshes through interpretive panels highlighting species diversity; ecological, recreational, and commercial importance; and threats to salt marsh habitat.

Objectives

1. Provide a public space where members of the community can learn about salt marsh habitat through the development of a 200 metre shared-use recreational trail, viewing platform, and interpretive panels.
2. To develop public education materials and youth activity programs for inclusion in our existing Morton Centre Environmental Education Programs which take place on Heckman's Island, Lunenburg County, NS.
3. To develop an inventory of species, both bird and plant, presently using the Garden Lots salt marsh.

Project Details & Background

Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation has partnered with the Bay to Bay Trails Association and High Liner Foods Incorporated in order to deliver the Salt Marsh Interpretive Trail project. High Liner Foods Incorporated has donated the use of their property and signed a formal land agreement to this effect with the NS Trails Association. Bay to Bay Trails Association has partnered with Coastal Action to cover off any liability concerns as the project is an extension of the existing trail and covered under their provincial trail liability insurance. The land which the trail exists is located off of Battery Point Road, Lunenburg County (see Figure 1 below).

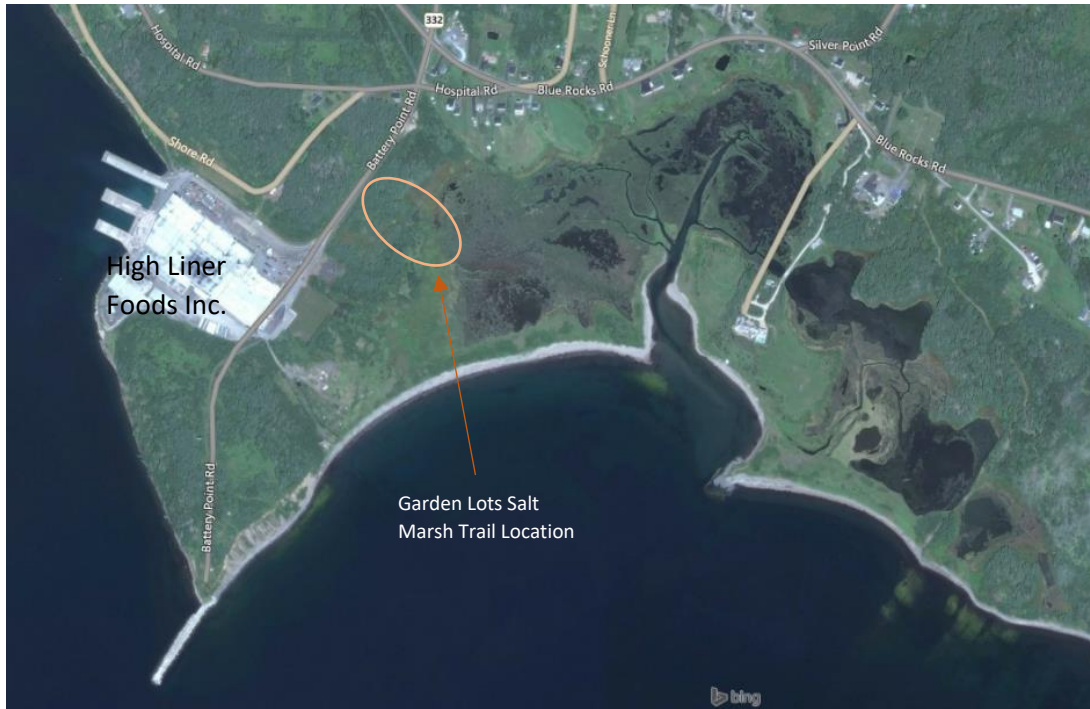


Figure 1. Map of Garden Lots Salt Marsh Trail location off of Battery Point Road and the surrounding area.

A design for trail was created by Coastal Action with help from Cobequid Trail Consulting, interpretive trail building experts, and was completed in the spring of 2015. Trail construction occurred with support from some of Coastal Action board members and staff, volunteers, and Cobequid Trail Consulting, and was completed over the week of June 21st, 2015. The trail building consisted of clearing a pathway, grubbing, placement of gravel material, constructing a boardwalk over wet area of trail, and construction of the viewing platform. Photos below (Figure 2) show staff and volunteers helping to build the trail by raking out the gravel material and carrying in wood supplies for board walk and platform construction.



Figure 2. Coastal Action Staff and volunteers constructing Garden Lots Salt Marsh interpretive trail on June 23rd, 2015.

Coastal Action staff conducted habitat surveys to determine the various flora and fauna species present at the site location. Consultation with members of the Nova Scotia Bird Society, NS Department of Natural

Resources (NS DNR), as well as native plants expert Professor Ruth Newell (Acadia University) was also conducted to determine species present at Garden Lots salt marsh. With results from the habitat surveys and consultations with ecological and biological experts, Coastal Action staff were able to provide content for interpretive panels. Photos below (Figure 3) highlight a habitat survey that was conducted by Coastal Action staff along with DNR's Stewardship Coordinator, Reg Newell, and Acadia University Professor, Ruth Newell.



Figure 3. *Habitat survey conducted by Coastal Action staff along with Department of Natural Resources' Stewardship Coordinator, Reg Newell, and Acadia University Professor, Ruth Newell, in summer of 2015 reveals the unique vegetation types of a salt marsh and identifies species that use the Garden Lots salt marsh habitat; the great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), right.*

Content for the interpretive panels was provided to Kinley Graphic Design who designed three 3x2 feet interpretive panels to be placed along the trail. The first panel (Figure 4), situated at the start of the trail, serves as an introduction. This panel shows a map of the trail and surrounding area along with a brief history of the area and information about some of the wildlife that might be observed along the trail. The second panel (Figure 5), situated more than half way along the trail, provides a description of the Acadian forest habitat and information about the wildlife that can be found within this type of forest. The third panel (Figure 6), situated near the end of the trail, contains information on the ecologically important salt marsh habitat as well as information about the wildlife that live and use this unique habitat. See figures below for copies of the three interpretive panels. Note these panels are in initial draft stages and will be finalized over the winter for installation in the spring.



Figure 4. Introduction panel outlining map of trail and surrounding area, site history, information on wildlife, and sponsor recognition.

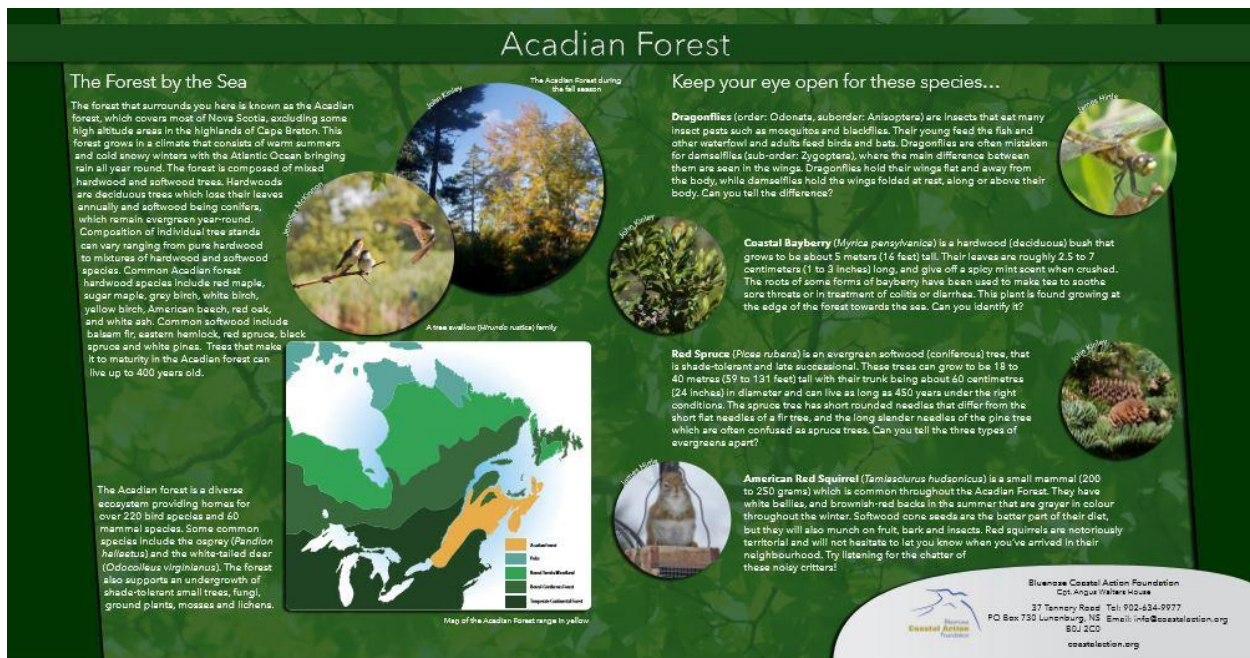


Figure 5. Acadian forest panel containing information on the type of habitat along with the wildlife that is found within this type of habitat.

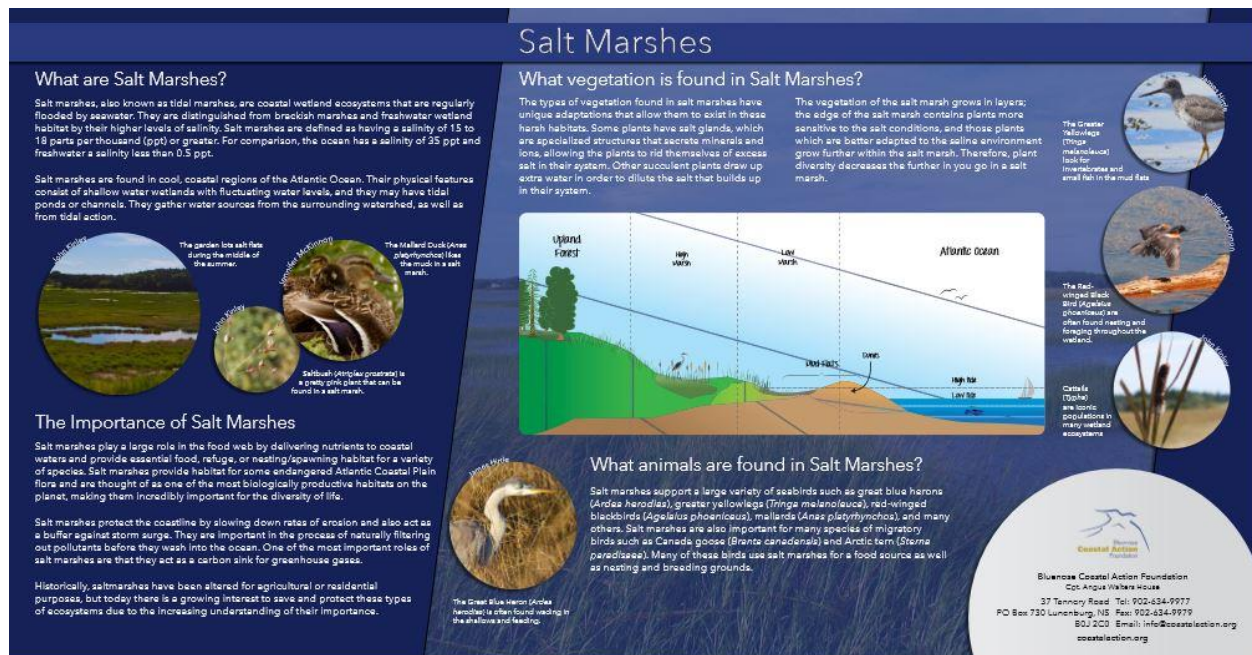


Figure 6. Salt Marsh panel highlighting information on these very ecologically important and biologically productive habitats as well as the wildlife that is found within them.

Project Highlights & Results

Coastal Action, along with their partners the Bay to Bay Trails Association and High Liner Foods Incorporated, have been successful in creating a 200 metre shared-use recreational interpretative trail leading to a viewing platform overlooking the salt marsh located in Garden Lots, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. This trail was constructed in the summer of 2015 and has already been used by local residents, High Liner Foods Inc. staff members, as well as local birders. Below are photos (Figure 7 and 8) illustrating the completed trail with constructed boardwalk and viewing platform.

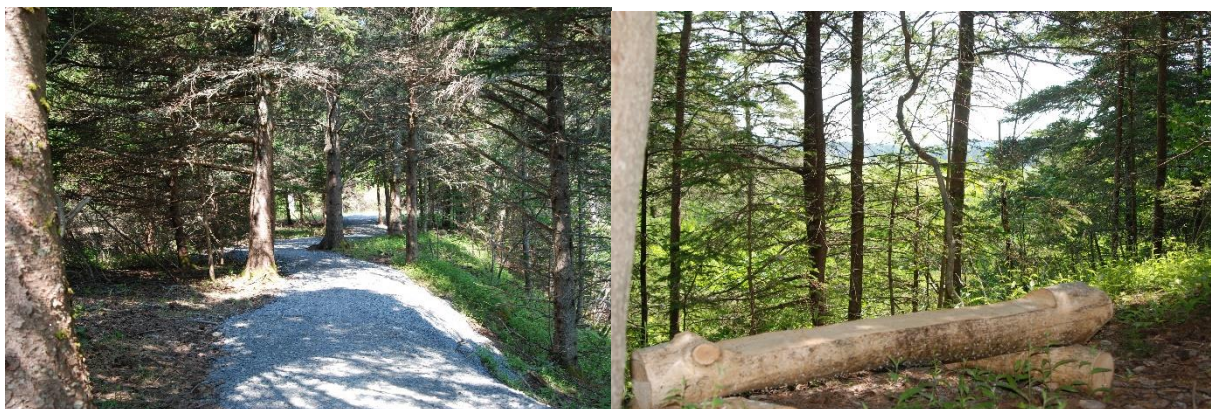


Figure 7. Completed Garden Lots Salt Marsh Trail through the forest to the salt marsh with bench resting spot along the way.

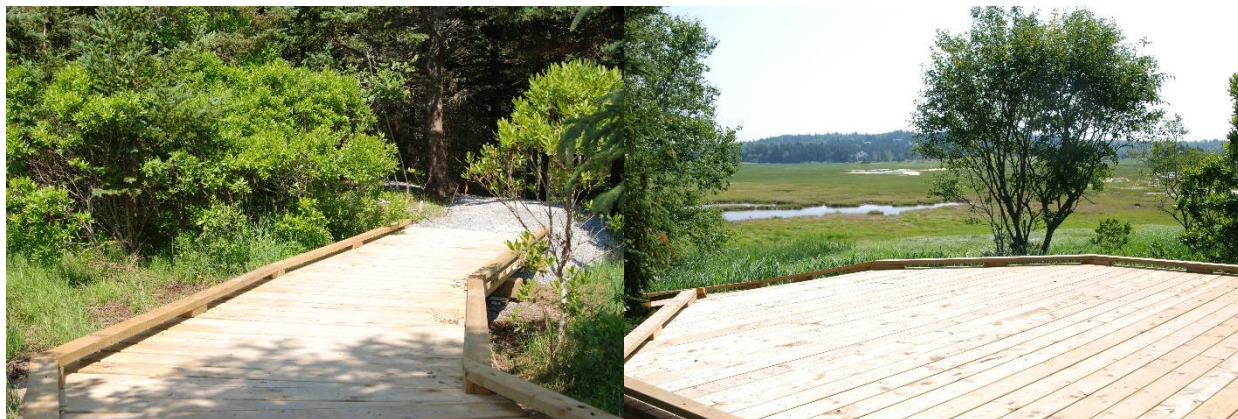


Figure 8. Completed boardwalk along Garden Lots Salt Marsh Trail and viewing platform overlooking the beautiful salt marsh habitat.

Coastal Action was successful in organizing groups of volunteers to help with trail building, creating community involvement and awareness of the importance of salt marsh habitats. Coastal Action also hosted a community outreach event, an Educational Forest & Salt Marsh Walk utilizing the newly constructed interpretative trail. There were a total of ten volunteers involved in the trail construction and five individuals who participated in the Educational Forest & Salt Marsh Walk. Coastal Action incorporated the use of the interpretative trail and information on salt marshes in their existing Morton Centre Environmental Education Programs. Two summer day camp programs, Pirates' Cove (ages 6-9) and Wild Adventurers (ages 9-12) were run during the summer of 2015. A total of 17 youth were involved in these two camps. Coastal Action also hosted a volunteer appreciation event and open house at the Morton Centre to celebrate the completion of the salt marsh trail on July 18. There were over 40 people in attendance at the event. In the future, Coastal Action would like to further develop and promote the use of the salt marsh trail by involving local elementary and junior high schools in class trips to the site as well as hosting girl guide / boy scout groups on site.



Figure 9. Volunteer and local teacher with Pirates' Cove camper taking in the beauty of the salt marsh.



Figure 10. Volunteer appreciation event and open house at the Morton Centre.

Future work at the site will include ongoing trail maintenance such as removal of vegetation growing up through the gravel pathways, cutting back of any overgrowth impeding the trail, and monitoring the state

of interpretative panels. Recommendations to improve the site would include construction of rails on the sides of the viewing platform and the installation of additional benches for salt marsh visitors to comfortably sit and enjoy nature. The request for additional benches came from some of the frequent users of the trail and the addition of the railing will be included to indicate the end of the trail and ensure visitors do not venture into more sensitive and privately owned areas.