

# Habitat Conservation Fund Final Report 2015-2016 (Young Naturalists Club)

## Project Report

### **(1) project goal and objectives;**

The goal of the YNC is to provide positive, educational experiences related to natural history for youth and families. The Club provides natural history knowledge and skills not currently taught in schools—such as wildlife species identification and field guide use. These are fundamental skills for understanding habitat conservation issues. In 2015-2016 with the support of Habitat Conservation Fund, the YNC was able to achieve this goal once again over the year. Specific objectives we were successful in achieving include:

- Organized special event(s) for the tenth anniversary of the YNC (April to March)
- Each YNC chapter hosted monthly meetings
- Each YNC chapter lead guided monthly field trips (September to June)
- Provided opportunities for local adult naturalists to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with the next generation of naturalists at local wildlife areas.
- Made the connection between wildlife observation and conservation.
- Showcased local outdoor opportunities to members and families of YNC chapters.
- Implemented tactics developed in communications strategy.
- Created stronger relationships between YNC chapters and local natural history associations.

### **(2) an outline of the work completed;**

- Chapter meetings and field trips for 5 chapters coordinated and planned (Berwick, Annapolis Valley, Halifax, Pictou County, Sydney Cape Breton)
- Secured funding to support needs of all chapters (purchase of supplies, equipment etc)
- Provided resources to guest speakers and field trip leaders for their presentations and field trips when needed
- Increased capacity for conservation-oriented activities with youth by continuing partnerships CARP, Blomidon Naturalists, Living Shorelines Project EAC, XX SMU project
- Provided Chapter management by provincial YNC coordinator
- Carried out a Youth Nature Writing and Art Contest for youth (8-15) as part of Tenth Year Anniversary Events
- The Halifax YNC Chapter ran a program for older youth (10-14) called Nature Guardians
- Planned and carried out a Family Nature weekend of intergenerational nature programming June 5-7<sup>th</sup> 2015 at the Festival of Nature, a joint event organized between Nature Nova Scotia and Nature New Brunswick. For this years Family Nature weekend on May 27-29<sup>th</sup> 2016 (in Wolfville) we are partnering with Nature Nova Scotia again to deliver a youth program.

### **(3) results**

- Organized another YNC team to run in the **Bluenose Charity Challenge and the Active Living Expo** last May (2015). We were able to get a great amount of exposure to individuals who had not heard of the Club before. We also had a face painter who painted endangered species on kids faces again which is always a big hit!
- Last spring, we partnered with *Nature Canada* on several events including the combined **Nature New Brunswick and Nature Nova Scotia's Festival of Nature** in Sackville NB. Our first event was the **Migratory Bird day event** on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2015 at Wolfville Ridge in Gaspereau NS. *The Nova*

*Scotia Nature Trust* also participated and we held the birding event on one of their protected properties on the Ridge. The day was a lovely spring day and we had a yurt set up with crafts and resources inside including bird taxonomy puzzles and bird mask making. The Nature Trust set up a spotting scope on the ridge and led a guided walk around the property. We also had some great activities for kids with a life size birds nest they could rest their weary wings in, and a Migratory Bird Obstacle Course. We played the Migratory Bird Obstacle Course again at the **Festival of Nature** where *Nature Nova Scotia* and *Nature New Brunswick* joined forces on June 5-7<sup>th</sup>2015 in Sackville NB. We had 11 youth participate in this weekend of nature programming for youth that we planned and delivered. We went to the Tantramar Marsh Wetlands Centre and did a skull identification workshop and did critter dipping. We also went to the Sackville waterfowl park to do birding and had Let's Talk Science do experiments on wetland soil and wetland filtration.

- The YNC Coordinator continued to support the 5 YNC Chapters in 2015-16 who held a variety of engaging field trips and presentations including: the Christmas bird count, winter adaptation, ecosystem restoration, sea turtles, drawing in nature, mushrooms, butterflies, the Kingston Sand Barrens and many more (to see more go to <http://nature1st.net/ync/category/field-trip-reports/>).
- Youth and families continued to attend all chapters, including the newest Chapters: approximately 527 youth were directly involved in YNC activities this year.
- Increased capacity for conservation-oriented activities with youth by developing partnerships CARP and Blomidon Naturalists. This past year activities included beach and natural area clean ups, a session on ecosystem restoration in Sydney, Christmas Bird Counts, participating in the Wood Turtle Monitoring Program with CARP again, building Tree Swallow nesting boxes and installing them in Miners Marsh with Blomidon Naturalists, and participating in the Tree Swallow nest box monitoring program. The Older Youth collected data and planted trees for the Living Shoreline Project with the Ecology Action Centre and collected Bay Berry seeds with a masters student from SMU who grows seedlings with them to replant in coastal areas.
- Pictou County YNC started up again after a year of not running because there was no volunteer leader. However, this past year, *Active Pictou County* approached us to partner with them to hold monthly YNC events and 8-week afterschool programs at 3 different schools throughout the year. We are always willing to work with communities to find situations that work well so this was our first endeavor in partnering with another not for profit to provide leadership for a Chapter. So far the Chapter has been very successful. The first session of after school programming ran for 8 weeks in the fall at Broidy Park in Pictou. The second 8-week spring session was just completed and was held at Trenton Park, Trenton. The after school program runs once a week for 2 and 1/2 hours after school. Throughout the eight weeks, they play games to get the participants moving (ex. Man Hunt, Capture the Flag in the Forest), they go hiking, geocaching, orienteering, talk about safety, survival skills, animal tracks, Mi'kmaq heritage and traditions, make bird feeders, explore plant species, scavenger hunts, etc. The Chapter has two leaders and they bring in volunteer experts when they can. They are also producing a manual for others to follow. AS well as the after school program they have been also holding monthly programming at various locations throughout the county which are open to the public.
- Cape Breton Chapter also got more leaders involved (4 now that share the duties) so they were able to hold events more consistently. The Cobequid Chapter ended its operation.
- In the fall the Halifax YNC Chapter also ran a program for older youth (10-14) called "**Nature Guardians**". We wanted to run this program after we held a pilot program in 2013 because of numerous requests over the years from parents looking for a program for their youth to continue after the out grew the traditional YNC programming which is geared towards 8-12 year olds. The

program consisted of a series of 5, 3-hour field trips to areas of active conservation work or concern in the Halifax area with hands-on activities planned at each site and drawing upon local expertise where possible. We had 14 youth attend the program. Please find enclosed the final report from this particular program. (see attached document).

- Another major project we did this past fall was a **Youth Nature Writing and Art Contest**. The contest was for youth (8-15) from Nova Scotia and invited them to submit a written piece OR an original artwork that is inspired by: native plants or animals of Nova Scotia, an adventure, personal moment, or happy experience, or an injustice that impacts nature in Nova Scotia. In the end we had a great turnout: 39 entries in the Junior Writing category; 40 entries in the Senior Writing category; 167 entries in the Junior Art category; 93 entries in the Senior Art category. We had entries from all around the Province and we had a number of teachers enter their entire class which was also a great thing. The judges had a challenge picking the winners there were a lot of good entries. We partnered with the *Wildland Writers and Nature Nova Scotia* for and it was very successful in raising awareness and getting youth to think about their connection to nature. This spring we plan to have an Art Show/Gala night in the *Art Gallery of NS* as a special 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event. We will have the Art and Writing winners on display and have some of the youth read their winning entries. Several of the Writing winners have also been published in the Blomidon Naturalists Newsletter. We are also working on getting the winning art pieces made into Art Cards (blank note cards) as an 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary project that we can sell as a fundraiser. Please find enclosed an example of some of the Artwork winners that we hope to make into note cards. (see attached document).
- Brochures continue to be widely distributed across the province and we have had several opportunities to have our display at events. We had our display at our booth at the Active Living Expo at the Bluenose Marathon weekend, the Open Streets Festival (Halifax), A Creative Kids Event (Halifax) held by Our Children Magazine, Kids Nature Nights (Wolfville), Citizen Science Expos in Wolfville (fall and spring), The Berwick Extracurricular sign up weekend, and the Homeschooling Expo (Wolfville). We have a great display with lots of pictures of our youth on field trips and a table full of great natural history items such as shells, bird nests, snake skins, fossils and feathers to name a few. Besides sharing what we do through our display, we were also asked to do a presentation to the Halifax Field Naturalists Club in February. It was a great opportunity to show the “adult” naturalists about our programming.
- We have found there is a growing community of organizations in Nova Scotia working on environmental education and especially towards getting youth outside and immersed in nature. This past year, the YNC has been involved in starting up the **NS Environmental Education Caucus again**, which has been inactive for the past four years. There are about thirty people representing over twenty organizations participating in the group since January. The Caucus is working towards raising the profile of environmental and sustainability education in Nova Scotia.
- We have been planning the youth program for the NNS AGM and Family Nature Weekend for the 5<sup>th</sup> year. This May we are just partnering with *Nature Nova Scotia* to provide youth programming for this years Festival of Nature in Wolfville NS May 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>.

**(4) an assessment of achievements and lessons learned, measured against goals and objectives;**

Our year was very successful, we met all of our objectives and continued to provide youth and families across Nova Scotia with opportunities to learn about conservation and engage with wilderness activities. We are pleased with our place amongst the organizations working to help kids learn about Nova Scotia’s wildlife and flora, the few organizations encouraging kids to participate in

wildlife conservation projects, as well as with many new organizations interested in getting kids outside, being active, exploring out doors and promoting the benefit of time spent in nature. In fact, we were able to accomplish a few things above and beyond what we originally planned because we received funding from other sources including the Older Youth program which was very successful and the Art/Writing Contest. We have also been able to partner on events that are outside our Chapter programming. Some of these partnerships are with other environmental and natural history organizations but some are cross-pollinating with Art Galleries and less typical connections.

This past year we also spent quite a bit of time strengthen our organization by creating Board and Chapter Leader Manuals as well as a Coordinator Manual. These documents will help provide a more comprehensive knowledge about the YNC and direction for recipients of them. Development of the manuals has primarily been a result of researching and undertaking a risk assessment of the organization. As part of this we also developed a volunteer screening policy and hope to have a complete organizational risk assessment in the next six months.

Our volunteer Chapter Leaders are becoming better versed in connecting with presenters and continue to do excellent work organizing, promoting and facilitating activities. As they become more comfortable with all aspects of leadership, Chapter Leaders are building in more in-depth conservation based activities. We don't seem to have any issues finding volunteer presenters to run workshops and presentations for the Chapters and Chapters are now developing relationships with presenters in their communities who come back some times every year to lead field trips.

Our biggest struggle is still to provide seamless transitions in Chapters who have a change of leadership. Volunteer positions are hard to fill and without excellent volunteer leaders we are not able to keep some Chapters going seamlessly. We hope to offer more training and educational opportunities for our Chapter Leaders to build capacity in our organization to have very competent and skilled leaders who are great at organizing and delivering great natural history opportunities. Encouraging more than one leader for a Chapter will also help with times were leadership changes.

Funding sources are also always a challenge and we are increasingly exploring corporate donations and fundraising opportunities as grants are getting more difficult to attain with increased competition for them. We are hoping to be able to secure stable funding to continue to offer a yearly Older Youth program with increasingly challenging options for youth as they grow older so that they can stay engaged in naturalist activities expands.

#### **(5) recommendations for follow-up steps to the project.**

In future years we are hoping to be able to offer consistent increasingly challenging options for our youth as they grow older so that we can stay engaged with them as their interest and involvement with naturalist activities expands. We also are working toward strengthening the YNC as an organization and undertaking an organizational Risk Assessment.