

# Habitat Conservation Fund Final Report 2016-2017 (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 2016-2017 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 4 Chapters coordinated and planned (Berwick, Halifax, Musquodoboit Valley and Nature Guardians)
- 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 Blomidon Naturalists, Living Shorelines Project EAC, Common Roots Urban Farm, Friends of the Acadian Forest (Wolfville), CLEAN NS, Nature Canada among others.
- Provided Chapter management by provincial YNC coordinator
- Planned and carried out a Family Nature weekend of intergenerational nature programming with Nature Nova Scotia, May 27 – May 29 2016 in Wolfville, NS.

### **(3) results**

- Last spring, we once again ran the youth program at the Nature Nova Scotia AGM weekend which was held in Wolfville. We had a variety of activities for youth in the mornings including a visit from a honeybee keeper, a tour of the Acadian forest at the Irving Centre, a tour of the mudflats looking for *corophium* and dissecting owl pellets and we learned about raptors. We joined up with the adults in the afternoon and went on a variety of field trips in the area.
- The YNC Coordinator continued to support the 4 YNC Chapters in 2016-17 who held a variety of engaging field trips and presentations including: Christmas bird counts, a field trip to the Backlands in Halifax, Shelter building, winter animal tracking, meteorology, star gazing, frogs and salamanders etc. (to see more go to <http://nature1st.net/ync/category/field-trip-reports/>).
- Youth and families continued to attend all chapters, including the newest Chapter – the Nature Guardians Program (we don't gather full attendance until the end of the year)

- We continue to hold several conservation-oriented activities with youth each year. This past year activities included beach and natural area clean ups, Christmas Bird Counts, The Nature Guardians/Older Youth program collected data again for the Living Shoreline Project with the Ecology Action Centre, built a solitary bee pollinator hotel at Common Roots Urban Farm and monitored trees planted at Sir Sanford Fleming Park which were planted by CLEAN NS.
- In the fall the Halifax YNC Chapter also ran another 5 week session of the older youth program **“Nature Guardians”**. By the winter we secured a full time leader for the program and they been holding monthly field trips since then. They average attendance is about 15 youth each field trip.
- Brochures continue to be widely distributed across the province with a focus on getting them to groups that have been underserved in the past including the Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers and Sisters, The Mi’kmaq Cultural Centre and the Black Educators Association.
- We had several opportunities to have our display at events. We had our display at the Atlantic Science Teachers Conference and the screening of the film **“Nature Play”** which we cohosted with the Shambhala School. 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.
- The Fall also saw our second ever Organizational Strategic Planning Session and we were able to create some good direction for the future. We also launched our **“Grow a Nature Nut” Endowment Fund** in the fall.
- As a follow up to our Youth Nature Art Contest we made blank note cards from 36 of the winning entries and have been selling them as a fundraiser for the Club.
- There continues to be a growing community of organizations in Nova Scotia working on environmental education and especially towards getting youth outside and immersed in nature. The YNC continues to be involved in the **NS Environmental Education Caucus**. There are about 40 people representing over 30 organizations participating in the group. The Caucus is working towards raising the profile of environmental and sustainability education in Nova Scotia. With this group, we have been busy planning for the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication Conference which is being held in Wolfville this May.
- We have worked on a couple of projects this year in partnership with Nature Canada including a **“Grab and Go Kit”** for our Chapter Leaders on Butterflies, a regional update to an Arabic brochure **“15 ways to be a good neighbor in your NatureHood”**, and a series of Maritime Species at Risk Trading Cards. We will have 28 species represented on colourful cards with lots of great information to help raise their profiles. 20 of these species will also be translated into French.
- We have been planning the youth program for the NNS AGM and Family Nature Weekend for the 6<sup>th</sup> year. This May we are partnering with *Nature Nova Scotia* to provide youth programming for this years Nova Scotia Celebration of Nature at Milford House NS, May 26<sup>th</sup>-28<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 continued to be 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. We see this group of organizations continue to grow and we feel very much a part of it yet we

are unique with our focus on educating about natural history. Again, 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 again with Art Galleries, schools and Urban Farms.

We also held a Strategic Planning session for the organization this fall and had a very powerful and positive experience. We learned we have a passionate group of volunteer board members and staff who see the importance of the YNC in today's world and are working very hard and providing excellent, free, opportunities to get youth connected with the natural world. We were able to narrow in on a few things we really want to spend time on in the future including: Leader naturalists training and quality control, improve communication and outreach to more people, and involved more newcomers and disenfranchised populations in our programming.

From an organizational development perspective, we continued the work begun last year to do a risk assessment of our volunteer program. This year, we have completed this process, and as a result we have put in place a new policy and some associated procedures on Volunteer Screening. We have a much better understanding of which laws apply to the YNC as a non-profit in Nova Scotia, and have communicated this information, and more, in our new Board and Volunteer Manual that all Board members and Chapter Leaders now have.

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 have been selling our Youth Nature Art Cards as a fundraiser and started an Endowment Fund with an eye to the future.

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

In future years we are hoping to be able to continue to offer consistent Chapter level programming and take on a few special projects each year such as the Art Contest or Species at Risk Trading Cards. We also want to focus on providing unique and appropriate fundraising opportunities for the Club each year in order to increase our Endowment fund and become more and more self sufficient as time goes on.