

**Final Report to the Habitat Conservation Fund
for Nova Scotia Nature Trust project:**

Hog Lake Conservation Area – Protecting Woods & Waters for Wildlife



Photo credit: NSNT

Final Report

February 26, 2018



Project Goal and Objectives

The goal of this project was to work towards protecting more properties of importance for wildlife habitat conservation in three regions of the province: Hog Lake, Hog Lake Meadow Brook, and Barren Meadow. The objectives were:

1. Engage with all private landowners in the 3 regions through outreach.
2. Complete first steps in the securement process for the first parcel to be protected in one of the regions.
3. Conduct site visits to first parcel in order to gather field information necessary for the property's baseline report and stewardship plan.
4. Recruit and train 1 or more Property Guardians to monitor and assist with stewardship for the first protected property.
5. Begin securement process for the second parcel to be protected in one of the regions.
5. Complete final securement steps to secure first property.
6. Announce formal protection of first property.
7. Engage/ re-engage with other landowners in the regions.

Outline of Work Completed

We are pleased to report that all objectives have been reached on this project, and almost all work completed. Outreach letters were sent to each landowner in the focal areas, with follow-up by phone or in-person for some landowners. Site visits and assessments were completed for several properties of interested landowners. We then completed all the securement-related tasks necessary to formally, legally protect **three** properties in the Hog Lake and Barren Meadow area. This work included title work, property value appraisals, and deed transfers for the Barren Meadow (1) Conservation Lands, Hog Lake Conservation Lands, and Barren Meadow (2) Conservation Lands. We conducted the field work necessary to inform a baseline reports for the properties, which documents current conditions on the property and identifies habitats and species present on site. Stewardship plans are in the works for the 3 protected properties. Property Guardians have been recruited and will be trained to monitor the properties annually.

We publicly announced the protection of Barren Meadow Conservation Lands (1) in December 2016 (please see attached press release), and celebrated it at a public event in July 2017. At this event we also celebrated the generous donation of land that became the Hog Lake Conservation Lands, and the second property protected at Barren Meadow (see attached press release). The Habitat Conservation Fund's support was described at the public event in July, and in the press release about Hog Lake. At the public event (in Pleasant River, Queen County), we were not able to lead guided walks into the newly protected properties, but instead lead walks and activities on Conservation Lands in Pleasant River, with similar habitats.

Results

We have formally protected 3 properties in the Hog Lake and Barren Meadow areas through this project, totaling 214 acres. All the securement-related steps for the properties have been completed for these properties. The Nature Trust now legally owns them, and can manage them for wildlife habitat conservation purposes. Baselines studies for the properties have 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 properties, which will guide management action in the future. Three Property Guardians have been recruited for the properties and will be trained to monitor the properties in summer 2018. Their monitoring and reports will alert us to any new threats or other changes at the properties.

The celebration we hosted when the properties were announced as protected was quite successful. We had about 50 people in attendance at the Pleasant River community hall, including the Mayor of the Region of Queens, and 2 of the 3 landowners who chose to protect their properties with us. After the celebration at the community hall we led guided activities at 3 nearby locations, with interpretation about aquatic habitats, bird habitats, and wetland habitats. This event was hosted in partnership with the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute.

The outreach to landowners in 3 areas in southwestern Nova Scotia has increased the awareness about the conservation opportunities in these areas, and the tools available to landowners to work with the Nature Trust. In our experience, this will lead to more private land conservation in these areas in the coming years. We sent outreach letters to 15 landowners in the focal areas. Of these, we proceeded to formal protection with 3 of the properties. We anticipate more positive responses in future years, as long as we continue to reach out and build relationships with landowners in these areas.

The public also learned about the special features of these areas, and the protected properties, through our stories in the media, and our public event. There was strong interest in our stories about these areas. Media reach:

1. Barren Meadow 1 - Nov/Dec. 2016

Social media post reach – 5,800 people

News Media/story coverage reach – 600,000 people

Story covered in: Chronicle Herald, Local Xpress, Global News, CTV Live at 5, Lunenburg Progress Bulletin, CTV Morning Live, Global Morning Show, CBC Mainstreet.

TOTAL Reach= 605,800 people

2. Barren Meadow 2 - November 2017

Social media post reach – 1,700 people

News Media/story coverage – 305,000 people

(story covered in Chronicle Herald, Truro Daily News)

TOTAL Reach= 306,400 people

3. Hog Lake - April 2017

Social media post reach – 15,100 people

TOTAL Reach=15,100 people

4. Pleasant River Event - July 2017

Social media post reach – 1,700 people

Event attendees – 50 people

TOTAL Reach= 1,750 people

Lessons Learned

This project went very smoothly, thanks in part to conservation-minded landowners who recognized the special value of their undeveloped, wildlife-rich properties, who were open to working with us to keep those places wild. We also continued to use proven techniques for building relationships in communities. The foundational work achieved through this project with landowners in the 3 focal areas is likely to result in more properties protected in these areas in coming years.

Recommendations

We recommend continued work on building relationships with landowners in the focal areas. Working in partnership with MTRI continues to be mutually beneficial, and the community of Pleasant River continues to be welcoming and good to work with.

Attached Documents

1. Press release about the protection of Barren Meadow Conservation Lands (1):

16-12-21-Barren Meadow website.pdf

2. Press release about the protection of Hog Lake Conservation Lands:

17-04-21-Hog Lake (Website).pdf

3. Map of the new Conservation Lands:

Conservation lands maps.pdf

4. Photos from the property celebration:

Photos related to NSNT project 2016-2017.pdf

We sincerely appreciate the support of the Habitat Conservation Fund (contributions from hunters and trappers) in achieving these conservation successes!

Nova Scotians give Rare Turtles a home: Barren Meadow Sanctuary Protected!

[Halifax] December 21, 2016 – This holiday season, and for many holidays to come, the rare turtles Wink and Atahualpa and their friends will have a home. Thanks to the generous outpouring of support from individuals across the province, the Nova Scotia Nature Trust has secured protection of the Barren Meadow Turtle Sanctuary.

Three weeks ago, the Nature Trust launched a public appeal to help save a critical sanctuary for the endangered Blanding's Turtles. The appeal received an overwhelming response, including several major gifts, and within a week the Nature Trust secured the funds it needed to purchase the property.

The Nature Trust is grateful to all the individuals who stepped up with donations to help protect the sanctuary. Those gifts are being generously matched by the Marguerite Hubbard Charitable Foundation and the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust.



Blanding's Turtle hatchling. Photo: Jeffie McNeil

With the funds in place to purchase the land, further donations are being directed to a stewardship endowment fund which is an essential and critical part of the organization's work. The Nature Trust promises to protect this property forever, and ensuring its ecological integrity requires ongoing monitoring and stewardship.

The Barren Meadow property is located in Lunenburg County and is 36 acres in size. Two branches of Barren Meadow Brook pass through the property before connecting with Pleasant River. The brook is deeply cut, and holds water throughout even the driest summers, ensuring that the turtles can easily forage for food along the side of the brook.

Blanding's Turtles travel great distances away from streams and rivers in search of basking and nesting sites, and this property provides a diversity of habitat types for the turtles. Although mostly forested, the property also includes bogs, the "barrens" that gave the area their name, and unique geological features where bands of rocky outcrops occur in strips throughout the forest. This unusual topography is even visible from an aerial view of the region.

The Barren Meadow sanctuary will build on a growing network of protected Blanding's Turtle habitat in the area. To date, the Nature Trust has protected seven properties near Barren Meadow, encompassing over 270 acres for these endangered turtles. The Barren Meadow site is also surrounded by the proposed Shingle Lake Nature Reserve (pending designation by the Province), which will protect adjoining turtle habitat.



Adult Blanding's Turtle. Photo: Brennan Caverhill

The Blanding's Turtle is, unfortunately, a turtle in trouble in Canada. With less than 1% of hatchlings surviving and expanding cottage development and roads in the areas where these turtles live, Blanding's Turtles are struggling to survive. As a result, they are listed on both the Canadian and Nova Scotian endangered species lists. There are only approximately 350 adult turtles in Nova Scotia, and they are only found in one small area of the southwestern part of the province.

The funds raised to protect this property were matched dollar for dollar with grants from the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust and the Marguerite Hubbard Charitable Foundation. The Nature Trust's endangered species work, including turtle conservation, receives the financial support of the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program and from Banrock Station.

Bonnie Sutherland, Executive Director at the Nature Trust, said the support was overwhelming. "It is heartwarming to know that so many people care so much about the future of this endangered species. The turtles' story touched a lot of people. Now, their habitat will remain protected for future generations of Blanding's turtles and their hatchlings."

The Barren Meadow Sanctuary becomes part of a growing network of over 85 Nature Trust conservation lands, protecting over 10,000 acres of Nova Scotia's coastal wilderness, critical freshwater habitats, old-growth forests, and habitat for species at risk. The lands also provide unique wilderness recreation, nature appreciation, education and research opportunities.

For those still wishing to be a part of the Barren Meadow success story, charitable donations are welcome. You can donate by giving the Nature Trust a call at 902-425-5263, or visiting www.nsnt.ca and clicking on the Donate Now button. You can also donate by symbolically adopt a turtle. Gift of Nature packages are available for pick up until December 23rd at noon at our new offices at 81 Prince Albert Rd. in Dartmouth. Please call ahead. Alternatively, your Gift of Nature package can be mailed to you in the New Year.

All funds raised will help to build the stewardship endowment fund for Barren Meadow, which is critical for protecting the property, in perpetuity.

For more information or to donate, call (902) 425-LAND or visit www.nsnt.ca/savingturtles.



Barren Meadow. Photo: John Paterson

An Earth Day Gift: Nature Trust Announces New Freshwater Refuge for Wildlife

April 21, 2017 [Halifax] – In celebration of Earth Day, the Nova Scotia Nature Trust announced new conservation lands on Hog Lake in Queen’s County, Nova Scotia. The property was generously donated to the Nature Trust to protect important freshwater habitats and associated wildlife, including three species on Canada’s endangered species list.

The 64 acre property, located about half way between Kejimikujik National Park and Bridgewater, includes shoreline habitat on Hog lake, extensive wetlands covering about 40% of the property, including a riverside fen and brook system, as well as patches of old forest.



*Blanding's Turtle hatchling, Photo by
Brennan Caverhill*

A haven for wetland-dependent wildlife including a family of nesting loons, the property also has potential habitat for the nationally endangered Blanding’s Turtle and Eastern Ribbonsnake. Both are species threatened by increasing habitat loss. Hog Lake also provides important habitat for rare plants including Long’s Bulrush, Common Buttonbush, Virginia Meadow Beauty, Goldencrest, and Redroot.

Halifax resident Peter Freeman grew up enjoying the wilds of Hog Lake and the surrounding forests and wetlands, from his nearby family cottage. He was delighted to entrust this special place to the Nature Trust, knowing they would be good stewards of the land.

He noted, “Recreational properties and development continue to place more and more demands on nature, sensitive lands and species, which if not managed properly will lead to extinction and eventual irreversible changes for future generations. As private landowners my family and I felt we had to do our part to give nature a better chance, so we decided to donate now, to support the efforts of the Nature Trust. Now, the land will always be there

for nature and future generations to come, and we can still gently visit it ourselves.”



Virginia Meadow Beauty

The Hog Land Conservation Lands contribute to a larger assemblage of protected areas in the region, including adjacent lands proposed for protection by the Province (part of the Parks and Protected Areas Plan), and other nearby Nature Trust conservation lands. Protecting corridors of interconnected habitat is critical for the long-term survival of wildlife and the health of the overall ecosystem.



View across the Hog Lake Conservation Lands

Hog Lake is connected to Molega Lake, which like many of the lakes in Southwest Nova Scotia, has been extensively roaded and developed for cottages. Hog Lake remains

virtually undeveloped, with the entire shoreline habitat still intact.

“We hope Mr. Freeman’s generous donation, and growing public awareness of the need to protect critical wildlife habitats like those surrounding Hog Lake, might inspire other area landowners to add their lands to this freshwater legacy project,” said Nature

Trust Conservation Director, Ross Firth.

A financial planner by profession, Mr. Freeman noted that protecting land may make financial sense for landowners as well. Donating ecologically important land or entering into a conservation agreement with the Nature Trust can provide tax benefits.

“A gift of land can eliminate big capital taxes for heirs, eliminate property taxes, and also provide special income tax incentives for donors under the Federal Ecological Gifts program. There is no reason not to donate land today!” noted Mr. Freeman.



Common Buttonbush



View of the fen on Hog Lake Conservation Lands

The Nature Trust will ensure the conservation values of the property are maintained and protected in perpetuity, through its ongoing land stewardship program. Volunteers interested in helping to care for and monitor this site, or any of the Nature Trust’s growing network of 88 conservation lands across the province can contact the Nature Trust for information (902) 425-5263 or nature@nsnt.ca. Donations are also welcome, to support the long-term stewardship of the new protected area.

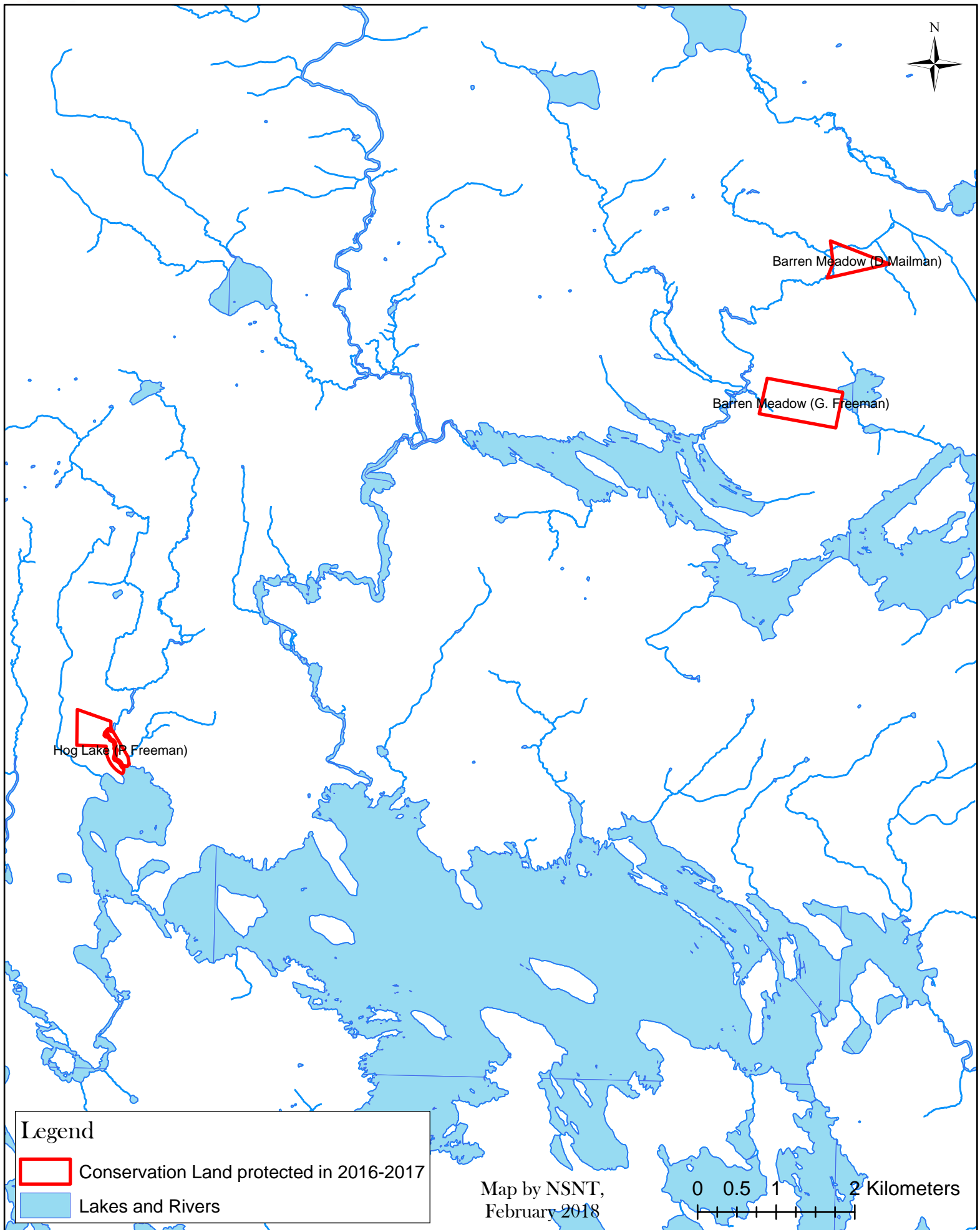
On July 22 the Nature Trust will hold a community celebration in Pleasant River in partnership with the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute. The “Going Wild” event will celebrate this and two other new protected areas, and offer nature-based activities to discover and learn about the unique wildlife and natural history of the area.

The Nature Trust’s Endangered Species and Freshwater Legacy programs are supported by the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust, the Marguerite Hubbard Charitable Foundation, the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund (contributions from hunters and trappers), Environment and Climate Change Canada’s EcoAction program, Sage Environmental Program, Bend Beauty and Nature’s Way Canada, as well as many generous individual donors.

Thanks to ongoing community support and generous landowners like Mr. Freeman, the Nature Trust has protected over 10,000 acres of Nova Scotia’s unique and imperiled wild spaces. The Nature Trust is dedicated to ensuring these lands remain forever wild, for nature and for people too.

Hog Lake Conservation Lands





**Photos related to NSNT project 2016-2017: “Hog Lake Conservation Area
– Protecting Woods & Waters for Wildlife”**



Photo 1 – Gathering at Pleasant River Community Hall for property celebrations and hikes, July 22, 2017.

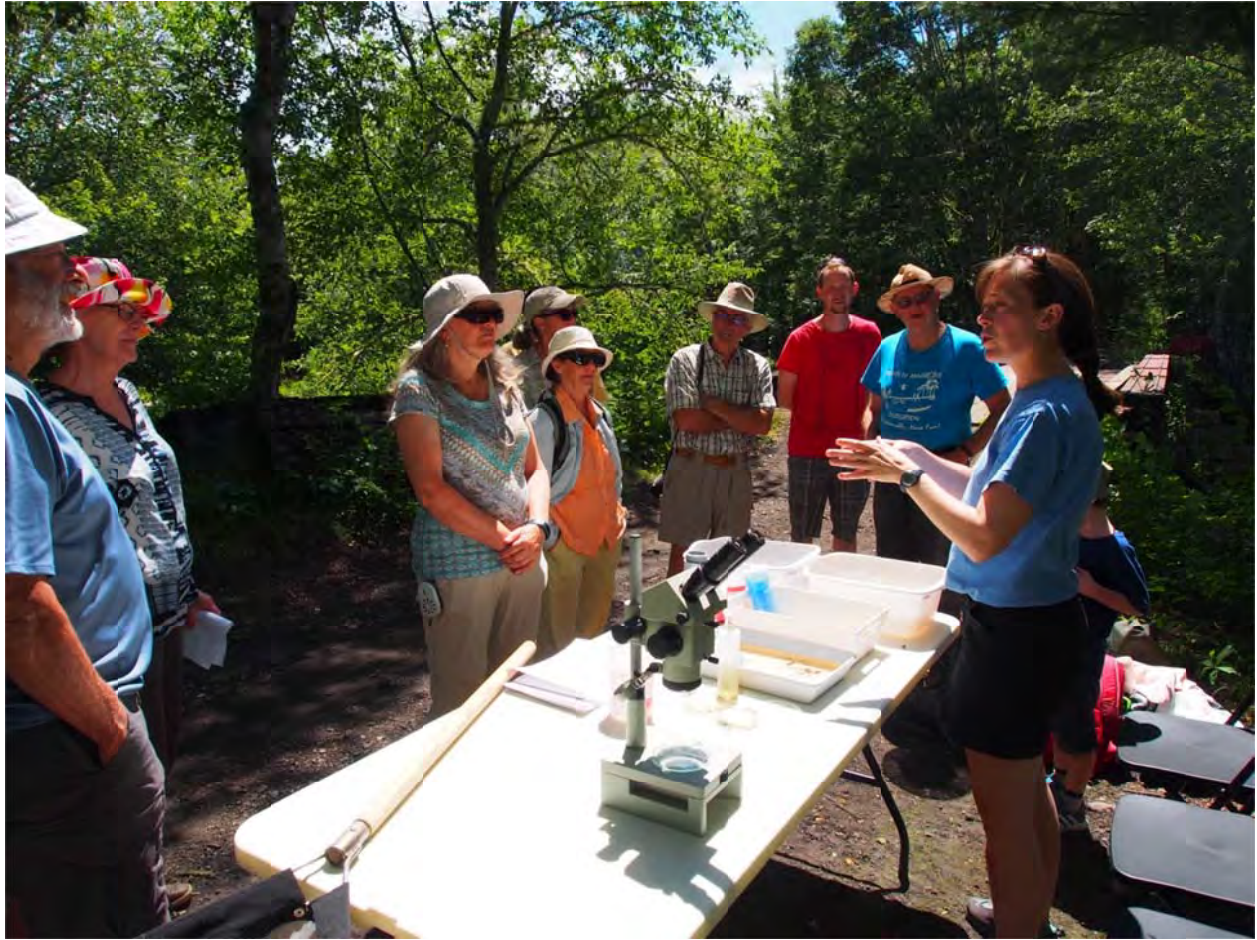


Photo 2 – Interpretive presentation (with microscope!) about aquatic invertebrates in Pleasant River, July 22, 2017.



Photo 3 – Hog Lake Meadow Brook, section on Hog Land Conservation Lands, photo taken fall 2016.



Photo 4 – Barren Meadow Brook, section on Barren Meadow Conservation Lands (1), photo taken summer 2016.



Photo 5 – Bog along Barren Meadow Brook, section on Barren Meadow Conservation Lands (2), photo taken summer 2016.