

January 2008



Special Report from the Chair

The Trust's Seven-Point Strategy and Framework for Environmental Stewardship

Friends of the Trust:

Some members have been asking about the Trust's Seven Point Strategy wondering how it has been utilised in the past several years. I thought you might find a review of historical events of some help in your understanding of the work undertaken by the Trust since the endorsement of the Seven Point Strategy at the AGM of 2004. This Report will also explain why the Seven Point Strategy was set aside in favour of the Framework for Collaborative Stewardship initiative in 2005.

Background

The Halifax Region Municipality (HRM) is unique in having large tracts of unoccupied natural wilderness within easy commuting distance of the urban core. These lands are home to a variety of wildlife, which include endangered species such as the dwindling herd of indigenous moose and rare lichens on the granite bluffs, as well as a rich variety of native plant and animal species. Traditionally these natural assets have been enjoyed by local hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts, unfortunately, this precious natural habitat is increasingly threatened by encroaching urban development.

Mindful of how generations of local area residents have used and cared for this land, and inspired by the more formally organized work of community groups such as the [Eastern Chebucto Peninsula Community Planning Group](#), the Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization, the Terence Bay and Area C@P Site, and the Beechville, Lakeside, Timberlea Rails to Trails Association, and inspired by the formation of new community organizations such as the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association, in 2004 the Trust developed a Seven-Point Strategy ("the Strategy") to protect the 27,000 acres of public lands bounded by Highways 103 and 333 - land that FBWHT now refers to "The Halifax Urban Wilderness."

In early 2004, the Strategy received solid endorsement from the public at two well-attended, public meetings at the White's Lake Legion on Prospect Road and at the Seabright Legion.

Strategic Direction of the Seven-Point Plan

The Strategy became the central focus of the Trust's Annual General Meeting in the winter of 2004. At this AGM two options were placed before the membership.

Option 1 called for the Trust to submit on behalf of its membership companion "protection and management" proposals to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) to implement seven points of the Strategy.

Option 2 called for the Trust initiate on behalf of its membership legislation to protect the Crown lands bounded by Highways 103 and 333 under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*. This legislation would incorporate the spirit and provisions of the Trust's Strategy. Concurrently, the Trust would send a companion proposal to the Halifax Regional Municipality to protect HRM lands adjacent to the crown lands in the area bounded by Highways 103 and 333 in a manner that is consistent with the proposed provincial legislation

The members voted in favour of Option 1.

HRM Lands Set Aside for Conservation

Following this decision, the Trust sent a letter to HRM Councilor Gary Meade to carry forward discussions that began prior to the 2004 AGM to have the public lands at Big Five Bridges Lake and Moore's Lakes set aside for conservation. HRM acted on the Trust's recommendation, followed its internal procedures, and designated these lands "for conservation".

Expansion of the Trust's Mandate

Shortly after the 2004 AGM, some 20 members attending a COCO meeting at the White's Lake Legion encouraged the Trust to expand its Strategy to the whole of the Chebucto Peninsula. To this end, the Trust modified the Strategy replacing the words "management plan" with the words "stewardship proposal" and presented it to "a community of communities" as a Framework for Collaborative Stewardship ("the Framework"). The Framework was presented to interested local groups and individuals in January 2005 and 14 groups offered to participate in a workshop to vet and refine the plan. Its aim was to establish a process through which various local groups might work with all levels of government to protect and preserve Crown Land on the Chebucto Peninsula for appropriate recreational, educational and scientific use.

The Trust saw its role as initiating, but not leading these groups to work with government. The revised approach came to be known as "a Framework for Collaborative Environmental Stewardship." The new, broader strategy was presented by the Chair at the Trust's 2005 AGM. With expressions of support from Environment Canada (federal) and HRM (municipal), the membership endorsed the broader approach.

Foundation for Collaboration: The June 25 Workshop

The Trust organized a well-attended Workshop on June 25, 2005 to determine if a "community of communities" should be formed to work with three levels of government collaboratively as environmental stewards of public lands. The Workshop endorsed and produced a "framework" for such activities. Representatives of all three levels of government participated in the proceedings as observers. On September 30, 2005, Deputy Minister Peter Underwood formally asked the Trust to assemble community representatives to work on a process that would enable the community to provide input and advice to the Department of Natural Resources for planning the use of Crown lands on the Chebucto Peninsula. Mr. Underwood's letter also invited the participation of other government departments including the Halifax Regional Municipality. The assembly identified itself as a Working Group to carry out Mr. Underwood's request.

The Charter for Environmental Stewardship

The companion to this Report, the January 2008 issue of **The Bridge**, summarizes the initial 14 months achievement of the Working Group and reproduces the principles of a Charter for Environmental Stewardship contained in the supplement *The Chebucto Peninsula Stewardship Charter*.

The Seven-Point Strategy in Relation to the Charter

Although much of the Trust's energy has been put into the activities of the Working Group and the development of the Charter for Environmental Stewardship, the objectives of the Seven-Point Strategy have not been abandoned. The following paragraphs review this work, point for point.

1. Work with governments to protect the natural habitat, watersheds and wildlife on the public lands of the Chebucto Peninsula.

During the past three years, the Trust has

- met with HRM staff and various provincial and federal departments to express concerns we have had relative to the protection of natural habitats, watershed and wildlife on the public lands of the Chebucto Peninsula.
- repeatedly expressed concern about the potential for impacts by development to the Woodens River, Nine Mile River, and Prospect River Watersheds (Drysedale Bog)
- written letters to government departments, made presentations at the Western Region Community Council, participated in public consultations.
- taken part in consultation concerning the development of the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Protected Area
- attended each consultation held with respect to the HRM Regional Planning activities.

- held numerous meetings with D of T&PW around water quality and loss of habitat issues related to the twinning of Hwy 103 at Cranberry Lake.
- collaborated with Inland Fisheries around fish studies undertaken at Big Five Bridges Lake and Moores Lake, and more recently with monitoring projects on both the Woodens River and Prospect River systems to ensure that health issues of these water systems are addressed. These projects are ongoing and being undertaken in collaboration with the Community Environmental Monitoring Network at SMU and other community groups.
- supported DNR 's efforts to monitor the moose population on the CP when there were GPS collared moose with data collection from 2004-2006.
- supported the Moose Recovery program Our members provide ongoing information about moose activity and sightings to Jenny Costello at DNR .
- helped to broker and monitor an agreement among environmental and OHV groups to limit OHV riding to hard-packed roads and not build any new trails on Public Lands. (See Strategy #3)
- collaborated with the Safety Minded ATV Club and the Jeep Club to complete a number of clean-ups of old cars and other refuse left along the three roads in the Crown Land block.
- worked to develop a model that would provide a legitimate forum for the legal stewards and the registered community groups to work together to develop and implement a long term management plan for the public land of the Chebucto Peninsula. Members of the Trust have sat as community members of the Working Group from January 2006 to March 2007 (See the January 2008 issue of The Bridge). In addition, numerous meetings have been held with officers of NSEL, DNR, and HRM. (Also see Strategy #7)

2. Promote low impact activities

The Trust has been instrumental in promoting various low-impact activities through our collaborations with other community groups. More specifically, it has

- promoted canoeing activities through articles in The Bridge.
- supported Canoe Kayak NS in its efforts to produce a brochure of canoe routes on the CP.
- worked with the Safety Minded ATV Club and WRWEO to ensure that the Bluff Trail remains a non-motorized trail.
- served on the Bluff Trail Committee.
- supported the Rails to Trails system by promoting and attending events on Trails day, attending AGM's and sharing ideas at COCO Meetings.
- promoted hiking and other low-impact activities as we begin work on a trail map for the Old St. Margaret's Bay Road.
- produced a Flora Brochure and are about to issue a new Lichens Brochure to provide education and draw interest in and visits to the Bluff Trail by persons wishing to know more about the flora of the area.
- coordinated our activities with the geocaching community, the Visitor Information Centre at Tantallon, and other tourism businesses by providing information about hiking in the area. Our Flora brochure is well received and in high demand.

3. Promote responsible off-road vehicle use, but restrict use on lands with wilderness values. |

In 2001, the Trust signed an agreement with the Safety Minded ATV Club and WRWEO to preserve the Bluff Trail as a non-motorized trail under Letter of Authority with DNR and WRWEO. Members of the Safety Minded ATV Club also agreed to ride on the hard-packed roads already in existence, namely Joshua Slocum Trail (DNR's fire road), the Old Halifax Road (Glen Haven to Hubley) and the Old St. Margaret's Bay Road (Glen Margaret to Goodwood). In exchange the Trust and WRWEO were to help the ATV Community find a connector route that would get them to the Joshua Slocum Trail (DNR's Fire Road) and access to the above roads that exist in the public lands of DNR and HRM.

- Working together since 2004, the Trust and Safety Minded ATV Club worked together with DNR to find a connector route from the rail bed adjacent to Hwy 3 across a narrow strip of Crown Land to the Joshua Slocum Trail (DNR's Fire Road). The ATV community has since compiled and submitted a Business Plan to DNR for the building of this trail.
- During the OHV Voluntary Planning process, the Trust presented a submission to the VP Committee. Following the release of the 48 recommendations of the VP, members of the Trust, Safety Minded ATV Club, BLT Rails to Trails, and St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails met to review the recommendations and produced a composite report back to the VP committee.

4. Encourage study of the land so we can help maintain its ecological integrity

The Trust has undertaken environmental monitoring projects in the Prospect River system and on the Woodens River system to establish base line information that will be studied and compared over time to monitor the effects of urbanization and climate change.

- University students who conducted the Flora survey were surprised to find so many plant species so close to the urban centre.
- The Trust's lichens survey has been helpful in augmenting our knowledge about climate change and urbanization.
- The Trust works closely with the SMU Environmental Monitoring Network, and has worked with the staff at the Biology Department at Dalhousie and with the NS Youth Conservation Corps at DoE&L. Many students continue to utilise the area to study a variety of flora and fauna subjects.
- The Trust has developed a GIS Mapping database into which information had been placed about water quality studies undertaken by others as well as location of plant species. The Trust will soon upload its locations of lichens species. The Trust has documented hard-packed roads with GPS co-ordinates including intersections of trails from other lands.

5. Establish educational and interpretative programs for school children, residents and tourists

In the area of educational and interpretative programs, the Trust has

- made various overtures to the 13 area schools to garner interest and participation in Environment Canada's Naturewatch and Thousand Eyes programs. Most regrettably formal partnerships and activities with the schools have not materialized due to time and curriculum restrictions.
- established contact with youth groups to make them aware of the Naturewatch and Thousand Eyes programs.
- supported the Learn to Fish program as it teaches young people respect for fish, fish habitat, and good fishing practices.
- supported the new Five Bridges Junior High School in Hubley by providing history and written information to assist them in their learning more about the wilderness areas south of the school.

- collaborated with WRWEO to promote educational walks on International Trails Day on the Bluff Trail.
- sponsored a Flora Walk when the Flora Brochure was published and plan to sponsor a Lichens Walk in 2008 following the March 4 public launch of the Lichens Brochure.
- held two successful May Fair In the Park gatherings in 2006 and 2007 to publicly highlight the ecological attributes of the area. These activities are designed for families to come together at the Gerry Lawrence Park at Lewis Lake to learn about the attributes of the area.
- served as a clearing house of printed materials and community resource people to provide information about the area and hands on activities like bird watching.
- shared information with government departments, the Western Region Community Council, COCO.
- published **The Bridge**, the Trust's newsletter, and wrote newspaper articles to help make people aware of the attributes of the area and to raise awareness about impacts to the ecological integrity of the lands.
- sponsored a Warbler Walk at the Gerry Lewis Provincial Park in May /June to highlight the presence of the 14 nesting species of the 21 nesting species of warblers found in NS.
- plan to publish a brochure about the Warblers of the Gerry Lawrence Provincial Park authored and illustrated by Hans Toom in concert with DNR, the NS Bird Society, and private benefactors.

6. Encourage and support preservation of special places that have natural, historical or cultural significance.

- Over the past several years, Trust members and friends have provided access to a number of old graveyards that were blocked by trees that fell during Hurricane Juan and subsequent storms. They then marked the locations with signs, took pictures, recorded tombstone inscriptions, and established GPS coordinates. This information has been shared with HRM Planning, and other members of government. The public has been made aware of these sites through articles in **The Bridge** and the **Masthead News**. The information has also been placed in our GIS data base.
- Possible locations of other special places have been identified and visited with Roger Lewis, Native Archaeologist for the province of NS.
- The Trust plans to record the locations of old farms, and other places of natural, historical and cultural significance located along the Old St. Margaret's Bay from Spryfield through to Glen Margaret through the publication of a brochure. Discussions with other groups who share this interest are ongoing as the Trust continues to gather information about this once significant road.

7. Implement and co-ordinate a community based Management Plan so those who use the land can become stewards of the land.

Since its inception in 2001 the Trust has devoted considerable time and energies to consult with the public and with governments to develop a model for collaborative stewardship. The model is intended to provide significant community input into the planning and management of public lands.

The Trust recognizes that government (more specifically DNR) is the legal steward of Crown lands and has responsibilities that do not allow them to relinquish their authority. At the same time, this authority is given government in the public interest and the Trust believes that the public can play a meaningful role in planning and managing public lands through an open, transparent, and consensual process. The Trust has used the words "collaborative stewardship" to describe this model.

Formal work on this model with government has been suspended in favour of testing a list of guiding principles in an initial "connectivity" project that will review the challenges and opportunities for

maintaining the ecological, cultural, and recreational integrity of the Peninsula's wilderness areas. The Trust disagrees with this course of action and believes that mere guiding principles are insufficient without a framework of agreed upon procedures to implement the principles.

On November 2, 2007, the Deputy Minister of DNR sent a letter to the members of the Working Group to thank them for their time and talents suggesting that their objectives were accomplished. The Trust takes the position that much remains to be done and responded to Deputy Minister's letter with a list of questions about how the work of the Working Group will be utilised in future work around the planning and management of Public Lands. The Trust will plan its future activities in light of the Deputy Minister's answers.

Conclusion

An overview of the Trust's work of the past three years clearly indicates a steadfast commitment to its founding principles and the substance of its 2004 Seven-Point Strategy. Work on a Charter for Environmental Stewardship has been a principal occupation, but certainly not at the expense of the Trust's broader commitments.

However the Deputy Minister answers the Trust's questions regarding the unfinished work of the Working Group, the Trust will continue to work towards its goal of ensuring that public land on the Chebucto Peninsula remains available for appropriate public use. We sincerely hope that DNR and HRM will see merit in continuing to work with the Trust to develop a structured framework for planning and managing public lands in collaboration with registered community groups and other stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Beth McGee, Chair
Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust

The Trust welcomes your comments on this Report from the Chair. Please address you comments to jemcgee@hfx.eastlink.ca.