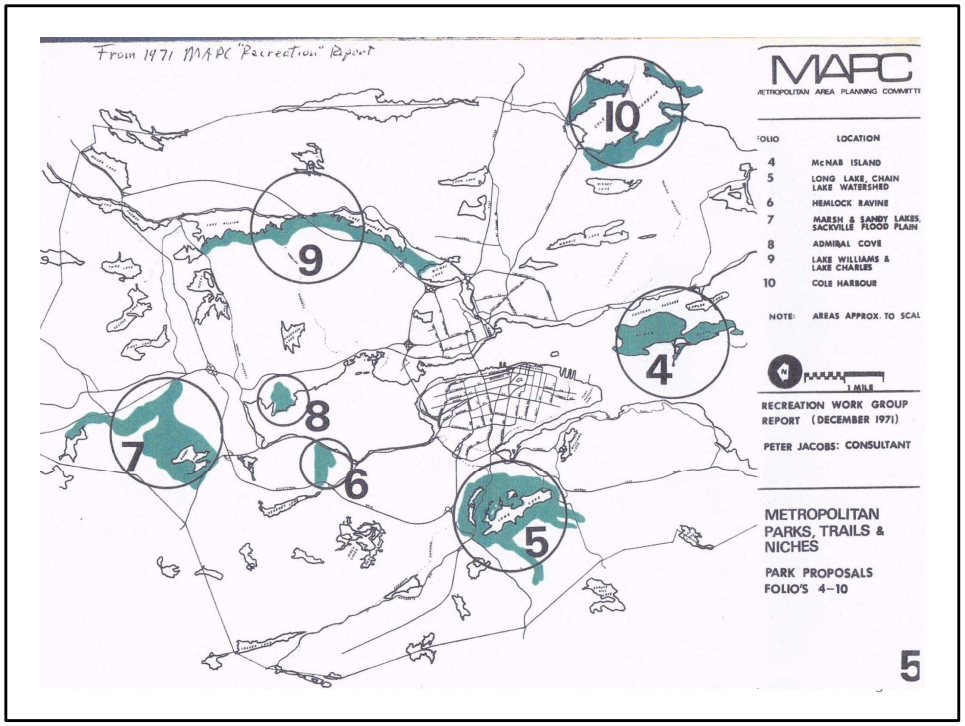
In the face of **the existential threats from Climate Change and Biodiversity loss, w**e are told to **think globally and act locally**. Every gain will accumulate to add the whole.

So thank you for the work that you do as well!

Our **coalition, the Sandy Lake- Sackville River Regional Park Coalition, is comprised of 30** provincial, regional, and local group, each with an interest in preserving this outstandingly biologically diverse area. **But the area's future is at a crossroads.**



Sandy Lake is central to an important subwatershed of the Sackville River, and beside it sits Sandy Lake Regional Park.

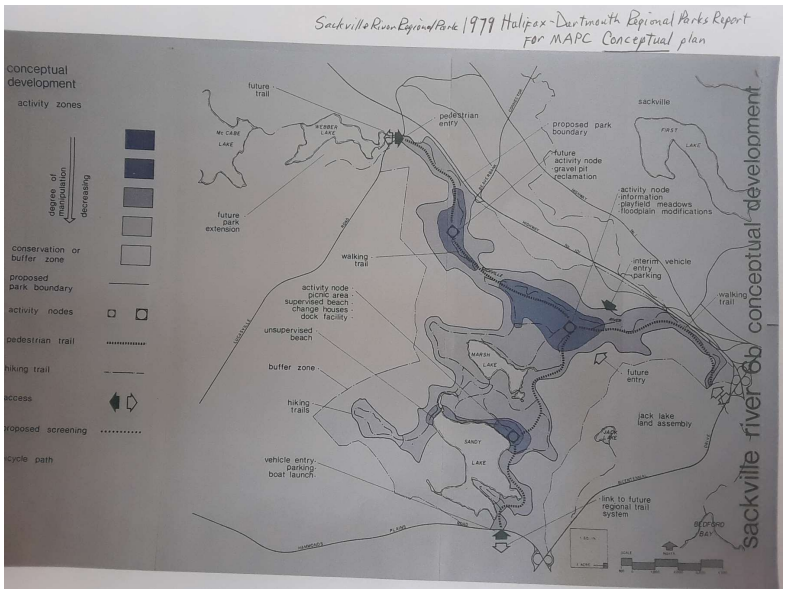
It is in Bedford, just off the Hammonds Plains Rd:

This map shows the 1971 joint Federal, Provincial and Municipal major **park system plan for** priority **places for large parks that could support both recreation and the conservation of natural assets.** Preserve these, and then let the city grow around them.

Note that it used biologists from the **Canadian Wildlife Service**.

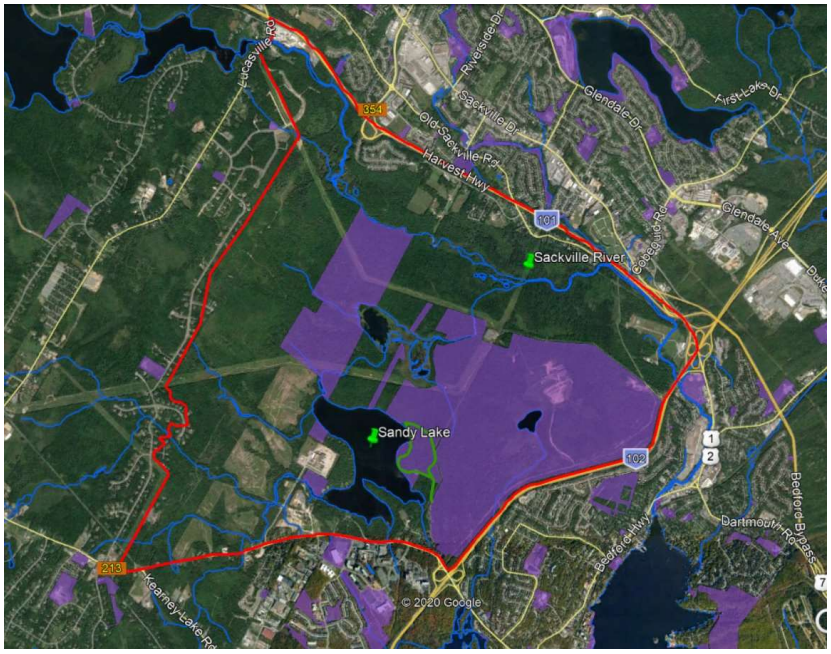
Many of these **parks we love today were still ideas** at this time, including **McNabs Island, Long Lake Provincial Park, Hemlock Ravine, Admirals Cove, Cole Harbour Salt Marshes, and Shubenacadie Canal. Each of these parks has its challenges even now.**

What they found at Sandy Lake-Sackville River was, and remarkably still is, an **astounding ecological unit.**



By 1979 they had a conceptual park map

But in **1982 Bedford Town Council** voted by a close margin to change about half of the park from P-Park zone to residential zoning. **No biologists** were consulted to warn them of the consequences. **The fact is, the half that is left will degrade** without the rest, largely because of the location of the tributaries.



Here is **Sandy Lake Regional Park as it stands now, in purple;** the park is about 1,000 acres now. Our Coalition is **working to expand the boundary to the red line**, a boundary recommended by a professional parks planner and biologists. It is somewhat **larger than the 1970s plan because of today's ecological pressures**. It needs about **1700 more acres, including critical tributaries between Kingswood & the lakes**.

The land waiting to be included is mostly still wild (shown in dark green) and is mostly made up of **Acadian forest stands of all ages, from clearcuts to old-growth**

forest. See the headwaters of Sandy Lake to the west/left.

The area is different from most city parks because it sits at the place where the city's rocky terrain changes into **rich drumlins and has three distinct lakes that** support a **valuable, diverse ecology**

It is an unassuming place unless you know what you are looking at. It is an area **well-positioned to combat Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss.**

When you visit Niagara Falls it is easy to feel the power. **At Sandy Lake the power is more subtle. You have to know what is there**. But its power is greater than Niagara Falls. **It would be easier to convince the province of its power if we could hear the roar or feel the rumble.**

There are **3 completely different kinds of lakes within walking distance** of each other:
The deep, cold "blue lake", Sandy Lake, a large marshy lake, Marsh Lake, and a boreal forest lake, Jack Lake. **Ideal for, and being used for, research and education programs.**

Marsh Lake was designated a **2021 Provincial Treasured Wetland, but it is owned by, get this, Dept of Municipal Affairs and housing.** We have been **trying for years, with successive governments to have it protected** within the park.

Now, because we are in a housing crisis, the **Province thought it could do a better job if it took over housing from the city**. They chose 9 Special Planning Areas including Sandy Lake to be **a 6K-unit** fast-tracked housing development between Kingswood and Sandy Lake.

The Houston Government wants **shovels in the ground at Sandy Lake** this year. Their pre-development studies, being done by Stantec engineering, are coming this summer, 2024.
Sandy Lake is their priority we have been told multiple

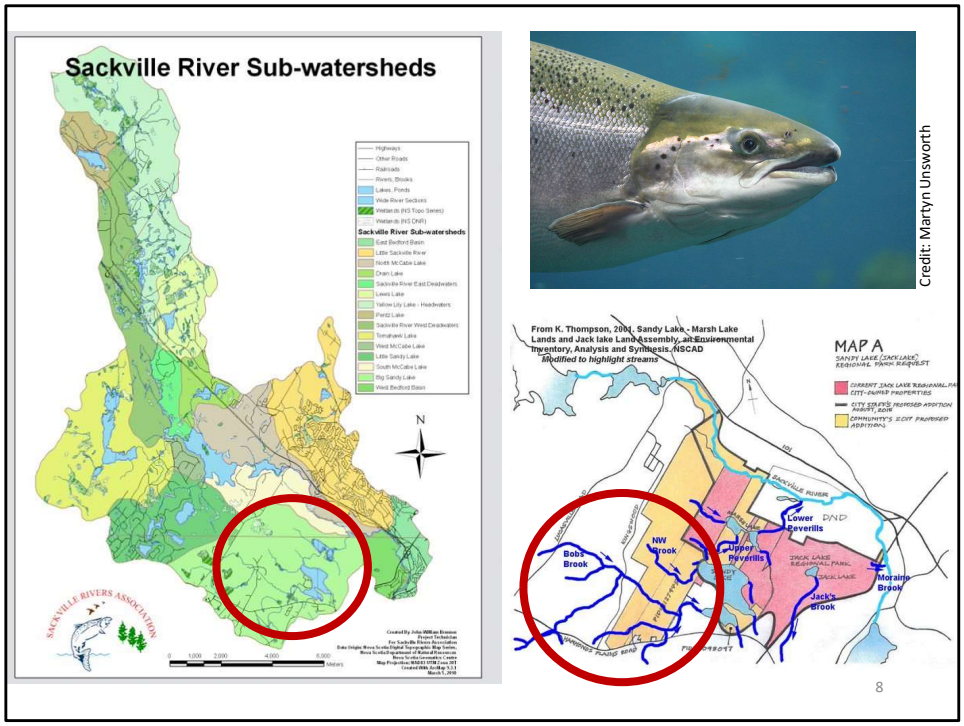
times. **And Friday they released a draft version**. Large amounts of scientific information scientists and our groups have submitted seem to have been disregarded. But we are taking on the task now of telling them **they can't make a good decision unless all factors are included.**

The good news is, the city continues to acquire land for the park. In **2015 the city acquired 160 acres, and since 2021 it acquired another 100 acres** beside Marsh Lake.

But **does the right hand know what the left hand is doing**?

We have to wonder if the **Premier and Housing Minister realize that the park area that the city is preserving will reduce in ecological value** if the watershed to the west and south is not also protected within the park. **How tragic it would be to have all this investment in the park and the beach turn out poorly when algae blooms**, for example, limit the beach's usefulness.

Development to serve the Housing crisis will have huge impacts on the areas' ability to address the other two crises: Climate Change and Biodiversity -Loss.



Sandy Lake subwatershed is within the Sackville River Watershed - circled in red in the picture on the left.

Sackville River is famous for the restoration work to bring Wild Atlantic Salmon back to the system, including to Sandy Lake.

Fishers in Sandy Lake are catching grilse again in recent summers. In 2019, **a mature Atlantic Salmon jumped right out of the lake in that classic pose!**

This is a conservation success! 35 years of work by the Sackville Rivers Association. But **we must maintain these Sandy Lake headwaters if we want salmon to stay.**

The **tributaries in the red circle** on the lower right is where, tragically, in **2013, 300 acres were clear cut by the developer who owned them at the time**. **The cutover area is recovering and already functioning again to protect the lake**, although it will take time for the full functioning to reactivate.
However, it is also **where the Province wants houses**!

The clear-cut did **demonstrate that what happens in a watershed has impacts**.

In 2013, 300 acres of Acadian Forests beside Sandy Lake went from looking like this…

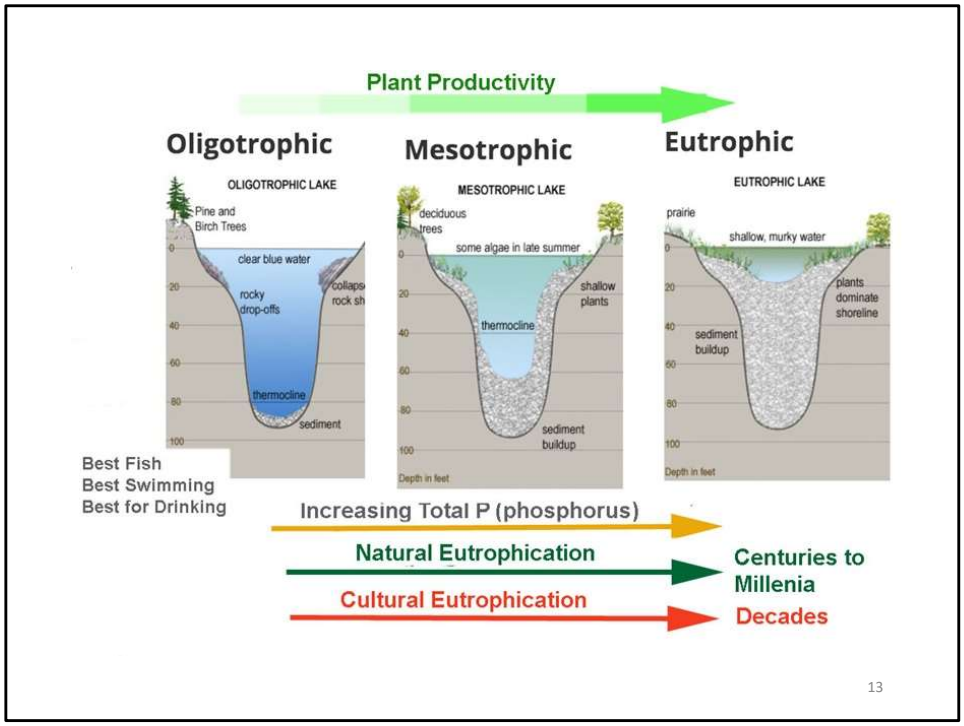
To this…

These are some of the old growth trees that were lost.

And this **rotting mass of woodchips** is still visible where the tributaries enter the lake. 10 summers later and the human-created disruption is still visible and still impacting the lake and ultimately the system through to the Sackville River**. It is a stunning visual example of how sensitive our waterways are to what we do in and around them**.

Developers **tell us they know how to build without hurting** lakes. Really?
Three weeks ago, March 22, significant brook silting was photographed in one of the 3 tributaries that enters

Sandy Lake. It was **caused by blasting for the Province's SPA Subarea 12, just south of Sandy Lake,** across Hammonds Plains Road. ECC was notified, is now requiring better barriers and is monitoring the situation. But **how could this still be happening in 2024?**



Sandy Lake, unlike most lakes on the Halifax Peninsula, which are more **shallow "tea lakes", is a deep, blue lake**, encircled by drumlins **Drumlins** are one of the sources of the water chemistry of the lake. Sandy Lake is naturally oligotrophic.

Looking at the **first diagram** in this slide we get a **reminder of what oligotrophic means for lakes – that they are relatively low in nutrients, like phosphorus**. They tend to be deep, cold, clear and have good water quality.

Mesotrophic lakes have more plant growth, more algal growth, and are starting to lose their ability to turn over, which many lakes do twice a year.

And **finally, too much phosphorus or nitrogen leads to eutrophication**, a state in which lakes have **excessive plant and algal growth, become toxic to many fish species, and can become unsafe for swimming or drinking water**

FROM AECOM (2014)

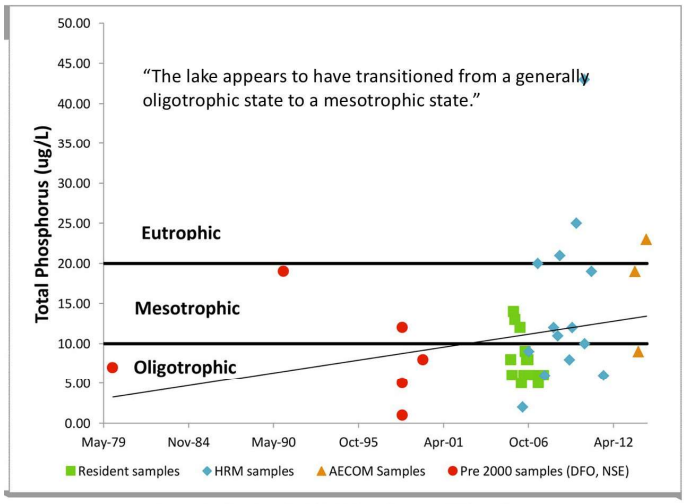


Figure 9: Sandy Lake Total Phosphorus - All Samples

14

Here is the water testing graph which indicates how Sandy Lake is changing.

Water quality testing of the lake started in the 1970s and continues today. Under Dr. Patriquin's guidance, our organization is **testing monthly, and annually** testing deep waters. The **city has reinstated the Lakewatchers Program** where communities like ours assist with water monitoring.

Sandy Lake is getting uncomfortably close to Mesotrophic, although it is **still turning over twice a year, is supporting Salmon again, and it does not yet**

have algal blooms that close many Halifax beaches each summer.

An algae bloom was reported at Sandy Lake Beach Park on the morning of Aug 6, 2019, The beach area was inundated with an “unpleasant suspended, reddish, soapy material”. The bloom came up quickly, lasted only a few days and then dissipated quickly. **Fortunately, tests done on the algae revealed it was not Blue-green** algae.

However this is an early warning sign that Sandy Lake is near a tipping point.

These habitats and species make the area a frequent site of scientific studies.

A **huge amount of recent work here has been done by retired Dalhousie professor Dr. David Patriquin**, who will be part of next Saturday's on-site event at Sandy Lake. This is not to be missed! His findings are hosted on his website: http://www.versicolor.ca/sandylakebedford

In addition to his work, *Natural Wonders Consulting* **completed a report on the birds species and Species At**

Risk (SAR) of the area. *Avian Species report:* *http://sandylake.org/avian-and-species-at-risk/*

Between 16 and 24 Species of Interest and an astounding 11 habitats, including an amazing number of old growth forest stands, part of the less than 1% still remaining in the province.

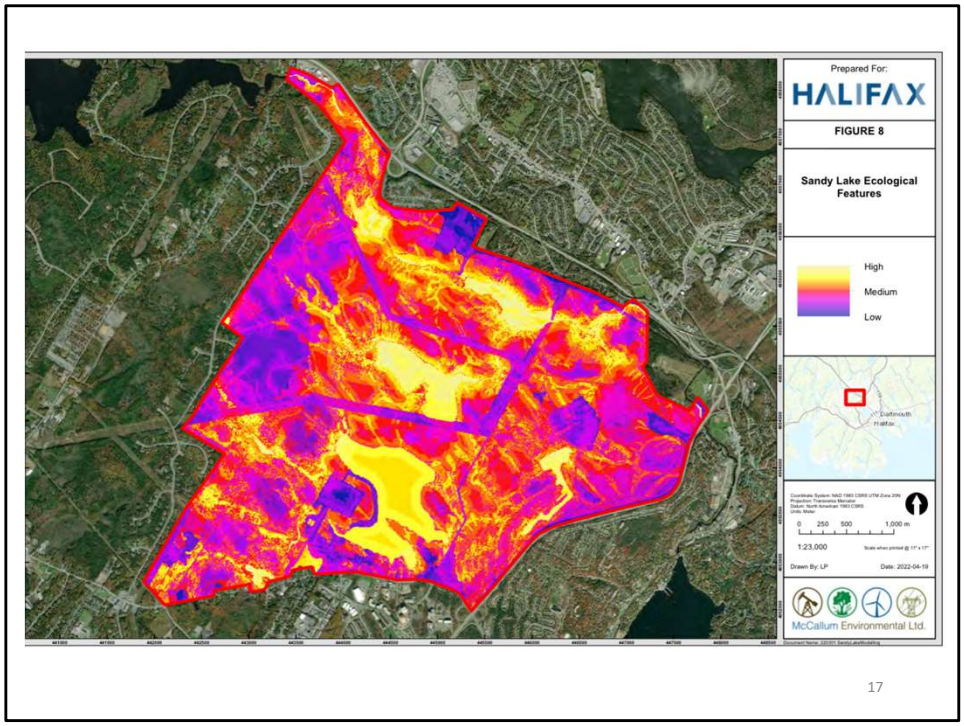
Biologist Karen McKendry, worked 11 years for the Nature Trust, and traveled all over NS to see properties with rare species and ecosystems, and evaluate if they were worth of protection. She tells us **this place has more SAR than any of the places she assessed across NS. Which makes sense, given why it was selected in the first place in 1971.** And it is a major reason she chooses to work so hard to help us save the area.

Dr. Patriquin asks "Is there any other equivalent area in HRM?"

In 1971 the biologists knew that too!

It is a hidden gem… **the swimming in Sandy Lake is glorious**, the **trails through old growth forests are awe-inspiring**. People also hike, trail run, bird watch, fish, canoe, ski, and snowshoe in the park. This park has many established, wonderful features, but is also a work in progress….

It has no comprehensive park plan yet, however, a long-planned-for beginning, a **study of the ecological assets of the area was completed this year, 2022,** by McCallum Environmental commissioned by HRM.

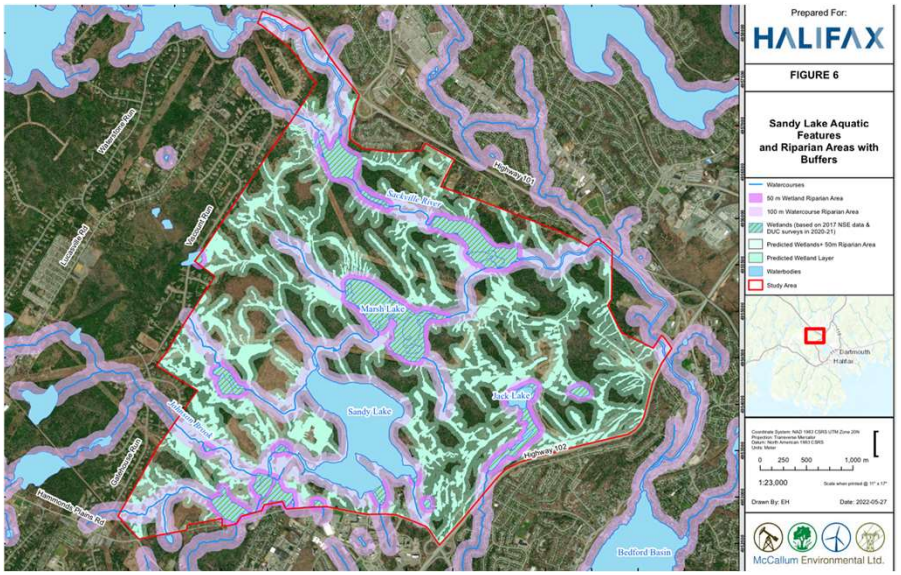


This is the Heatmap of ecological values from **the Sandy Lake Ecological Features Assessment**, July 2022, https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/220712rc15110.pdf

The highest scoring areas in McCallum's analysis (shown in bright yellow) are associated with lakes, streams, wetlands and riparian areas, and are all over the study area.
Also, McCallum stated at least twice that *"The medium (orange) values represent areas of mature forest and habitat that are important to avian species at risk as well*

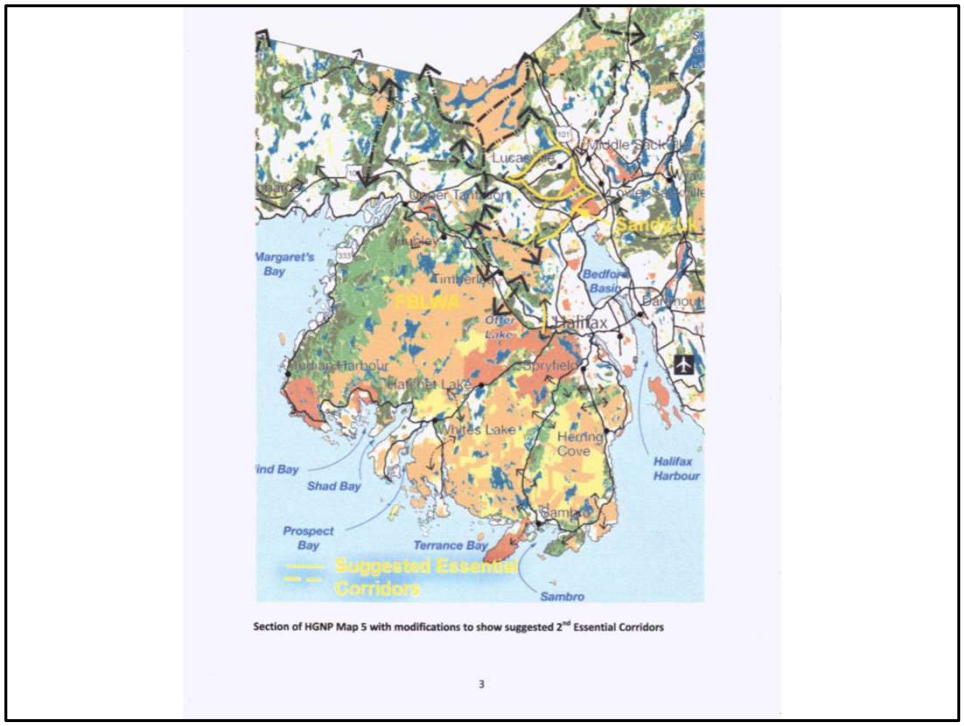
*as important corridor areas…" **I*t's not just the highest scoring areas that are important to protect**.

I want to underline that every biological study that has been done on this entire area over 50 years has concluded that this is a very ecologically valuable area.



McCallum recommended a **50 metre buffer for wetlands and 100 metre buffers for watercourses** because the stakes are high at Sandy Lake.

Council made a motion to strengthen the McCallum buffer sizes, the wildlife corridors and protection for the old growth forests – but so far, it seems that the province is listening to **"Build at all costs",** and t**he costs here will be severe.**



Section of HGNP Map 5 with modifications to show suggested 2nd Essential Corridors

3

This is a map of the **Wildlife Corridors identified in the Halifax Green Network Plan**. The HGNP is a very progressive plan that has the ability help guide the city's development plans with more security and potentially less opposition. Council passed it in 2018 but only now, April 2024, has a **staffer** been hired to be in charge of the HGNP. Yet, HalifAct received over 20 new staff when it was passed last year. Both are important documents yet, HGNP is way behind.

Preserving the few remaining wildlife **corridors is a priority in the Plan** because the wildlife in the

Chebucto Peninsula will not survive unless they can mix and breed with wildlife in the rest of the province. **The Nova Scotia Crown Share and Legacy Trust Wildlife Corridor Charette** Report followed up with more detail, and the City joined it with the HGNP: http://sandylake.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WildlifeCorridorCharretteReport.pdf

The area has the **last remaining links between Sackville River area to Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes and Chebucto Peninsula** - routes used by a variety of wildlife from Mainland Moose and black bear to the full range of smaller creatures including turtles and porcupines, hares and the like.

This is a priority area, yet this past summer, the Development Agreement for SPA Subarea 12 was signed **without regard for the needed corridors**. Only a small section is still possible. We continue to work hard for it.

20

And there are other factors:
When the **2017 Sackville River Phase 2 floodplain study** was released, the authors were asked **why development at Sandy Lake was not included in the modelling.** The answer was that the city provided the scope of the study, and not including Sandy Lake means that they **must not plan to develop at Sandy Lake for at least 100 years.**

Really? Again, It **does** look as if the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing.

Climate Change is increasing the risk of flooding in Bedford-Sackville, but will the Province still put housing at Sandy Lake?

The Heart of the Area

This map shows the communities surrounding this park and how a park that functions as an ecological unit, would sit as the heart of the area. The Central Park, so to speak, of the area.

Cities of course need places to put homes, yes, but using the essential watershed of a valuable natural unit for housing does not make sense.

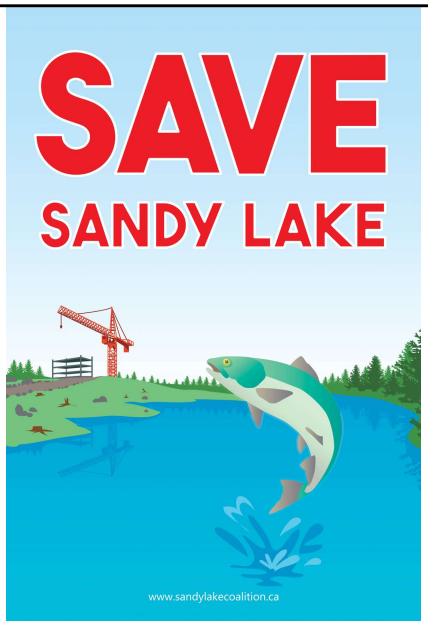
22

All of this plus 5-decades of community and municipal investment are at risk if we fail to return to viewing the watershed as a biological unit and change direction regarding housing on Sandy Lake's essential watershed.

This slide shows a part of the clear-cut as visible across from Sandy Lake Park Beach.

Most importantly, **the area is still intact and functioning**, and is **even more valuable now because it helps with the Climate Change crisis and Biodiversity crisis**.

It is not too late. The Province can still see the light.



Sandy Lake needs your help:
https://www.sandylakecoalition.ca/copy-of-about

As the Province's Auditor General has said of the current provincial government's approach to several things,
"Haste makes waste"

We all mourn the loss of Eisner Cove Wetland.

And time is running out for Sandy Lake.

As with **Owls Head and West Mabou Beach, it took voices from across the province** to have them protected.

We have a **Save Sandy Lake lawn sign campaign** going on across the province now. If you haven't yet, **please put a sign on your property and also send a letter to the Premier and Mr. Lohr.**

Thank you for this opportunity to present to you.

We need your help.

TAKE ACTION for Sandy Lake, draft letter, order a sign(s) and printable pdf sign:
https://www.sandylakecoalition.ca/copy-of-about