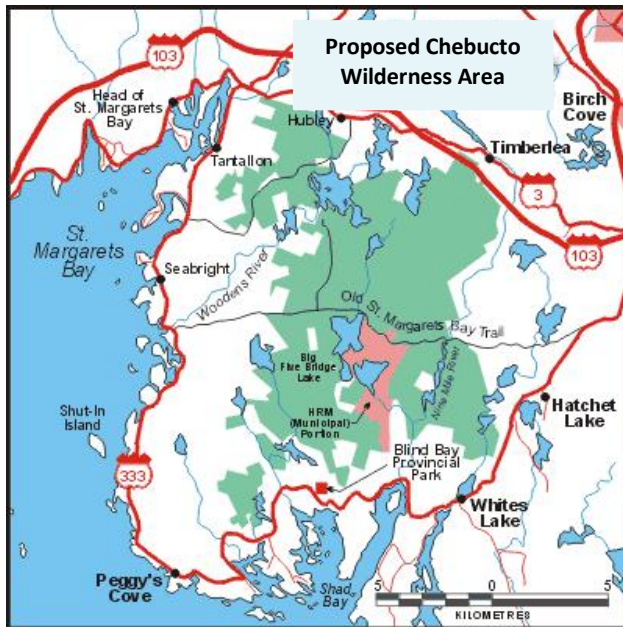


# The Chebucto Wilderness Coalition (CWC) Seeks to Protect 9,800 Hectares of Public Land under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act

March 25, 2009



The proposed Chebucto Wilderness Area includes all unprotected Crown lands between Highway 103 and Route 333 (green), and lands owned by the Halifax Municipality at Big Five Bridge Lake and Moores Lake (pink).

Map Credit: <http://www.publicland.ca/fivebridgelakes.html>

around the Chebucto Peninsula, formed the **Chebucto Wilderness Coalition (CWC)** to protect these lands under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act.

## The Objective of the Coalition

The sole purpose of the **CWC** is to protect the approximately 9,800 hectares of public lands within the boundaries of Highways 103 and 333, in the County of Halifax, Province of Nova Scotia, under the **Wilderness Areas Protection Act, S.N.S., 1998, c. 27** as amended.

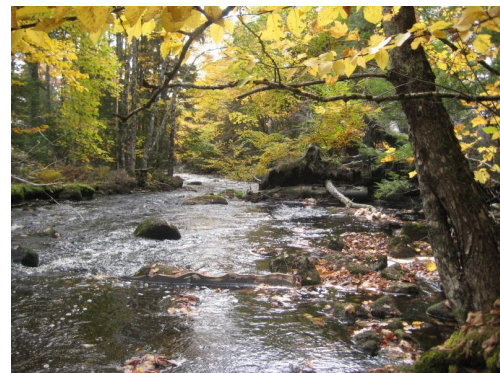
## Supporters of the Coalition

In addition to the **CWC's** founding members, some 35 organizations, and a number of prominent political leaders, have written endorsements. They include major provincial and local environmental and tourism associations, residents' associations on the peninsula, recreational groups for hiking, fishing, canoeing, running, birding, businesses supplying recreational services, developers who understand the importance of green space, and politicians from all three levels of government, including unanimous endorsements from HRM's Western Region Community Council, the full HRM Council, Timberlea-Prospect MLA Bill Estabrooks, Chester-St. Margaret's MLA Judy Streach, the Liberal and NDP caucuses, and Halifax West MP Geoff Regan. Even off highway vehicle (OHV) clubs have supported the WAPA protection. Under the Coalition's proposal, OHV use would be permitted on three hard-packed corridors that would be excluded from the protected lands and waters on either side.

At least ten years ago, the Nova Scotia Public Lands Coalition identified the area bounded by Highways 103 and 333 as an "endangered space" proposed for wilderness protection. (See the site map for "Five Bridge Lakes" at [www.publicland.ca](http://www.publicland.ca).) Because these lands hold great natural, historic, and recreational value, the public has shown considerable support for protecting them.

In 1995, the Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization ("WRWEO") began to conserve and protect the lands and waters in this area. In 2001, the Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust ("The Trust") was formed for the principal purpose of protecting these lands for appropriate recreational, educational, and scientific use. Later, in 2005, WRWEO completed The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail, a popular and nationally ranked trail at the center of these lands.

In the spring of 2008, WRWEO and The Trust, in consort with the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association, the BLT Rails to Trails Association, the Safety-Minded ATV Club, the Resource Opportunities Centre, and over 35 other community organizations



Woodens River in September



Minister Parent gives Dr. Creighton the seat of honour behind former Premier Robert Standfield's desk at the Coalition's presentation to the Department of Environment. Standing from left to right are Beth McGee, Mark Parent, Tom Musial, Mike Marriott, and Richmond Campbell.

### **Formal Petition to the Minister**

On June 2, 2008, at the age of 104, the late Dr. Wilfrid Creighton, presented the **CWC's** proposal for wilderness protection to Minister Parent, Nova Scotia Department of Environment, who administers the Act. The presentation was one of Dr. Creighton's last official acts following a distinguished career as the former Deputy Minister of the N.S. Department of Lands and Forests (1949-69). Dr. Creighton, holder of two honorary doctoral degrees and Member of the Forestry Hall of Fame, supported the **CWC** on the basis of a wealth of experience and steadfast dedication to preserving the health of the Province's natural environment.

### **Rationale for Protection under the Act**

The **CWC** cites six main reasons for seeking protection of these lands under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act.

**First**, these public lands provide the Halifax Regional Municipality with a large pristine wilderness area within a 15 minute commute from downtown Halifax that if preserved from development and other threats would make this urban centre of nearly a half-million people unique in North America in having immediate access to a wilderness area of this size. Adjacent protected areas, with the possibility of future links among them, would represent a commitment to their inherent values that would be the envy of any urban population who cares about their environment.

**Second**, these public lands have assets of great natural and historical value, such as the endangered mainland moose, the rare Mountain Sandwort (*Arenaria groenlandica*), pockets of old growth forest, a large stand of jack pine on The Bluff, and over one hundred species of lichen on the first loop of The Bluff Trail alone. Please see the attached summary of the work already done to explore and document these valuable parts of our heritage. ["Report from the Chair", January 2008 issue of *The Bridge* (<http://www.fivebridgestrust.ca/newsletter/Bridge0108.pdf>).

**Third**, because of these assets and the research now begun these public lands provide enormous opportunity for public education and scientific study.

**Fourth**, these public lands offer unique opportunities for recreation and eco-tourism within an urban context, including: (a) The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail, (b) a large network of canoe/kayak routes consisting of some twenty lakes, streams, and rivers, and (3) traditional hunting and fishing.



Cranberry Lake as seen from The Bluff Trail

**Fifth**, various stresses on the aquatic habitat, such as acid rain/low buffering capacity, salty runoff from roads, and climate change with increasing temperatures and storm intensity, combine to make it important to protect the integrity of the land as a contiguous whole. Without this integrity that protection would preserve, the biological diversity and health of the aquatic habitat would decline precipitously.

**Sixth**, the combination of candidate and proposed protected areas surrounding the urban core of Halifax-Dartmouth, including Ship Harbour Long Lake Wilderness Area to the east, Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area to the north, the Western Commons Wilderness Area connected to the Chebucto Peninsula Wilderness Area to the west, presents a green belt of protected wilderness areas within reach of residents and visitors within the largest urban centre in Eastern Canada. The ecological significance of this vision and its powerful economic benefits would make HRM unique and a model for the world.

### **Benefits of Protection under the Act**



**Chestnut Sided Warbler at  
Jerry Lawrence Park**

By including these public lands under the protection of the Wilderness Areas Protection Act, the province will move closer to its commitment to protect 12% of Nova Scotia's land mass with little or no loss of potential forestry or mineral development and economic activity, since there are no valuable forestry or mineral resources in this area. More important, the province can establish itself as world leader in environmental sustainability for urban

centres experiencing rapid expansion and at the same time reap the economic benefits of increasing the value of development along the ring of Routes 103 and 333 and of the eco-tourism that this leadership would inevitably attract. In fact, when this area is combined with the other candidates for wilderness protection in HRM what emerges is the vision of the largest urban center in Eastern Canada surrounded by a green belt of protected wilderness, making it unique in North America and a model for the world with all the economic benefits that the realization of this vision would entail.



**Mountain sandwort (*Arenaria  
groenlandica*) along The Bluff Trail.**

### **Combating Imminent Threats**

Unfortunately, these values and the vision of the future that they make possible are in jeopardy because of the great pressure for residential and commercial development and the current lack of effective protection for this valuable area, which can best be provided through the Wilderness Areas Protection Act. The recent swap of Crown land to permit development of Moody Lake demonstrates that DNR policy that restricts such land swaps does not provide any assurance of protection against piecemeal encroachment by developers.



**Spring flow on the Woodens River**

### **Unique Opportunity**

The Province now has an excellent opportunity to provide major reinforcement of the Province's new Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act and make a high profile addition towards the protection of 12% of the Province that would constitute a powerful public demonstration of international leadership in environmental stewardship.

### **Next Steps**

**CWC** representatives have met with David Morse, then Minister of the Department of Natural Resources, and have established a cooperative working relationship with his staff. The **CWC** Steering Committee has given assistance to the Western Common Wilderness Advisory Committee and the Environmental Design and Management group (EDM) in their work to develop a Master Plan for the adjacent Western Common Wilderness area. In response to former Minister Mark Parent's request, the **CWC** continues "to work closely with a wide range of organizations of diverse interests to further develop a vision and support for conservation of Crown and other public lands of the Chebucto Peninsula." Concurrent with these activities, the **CWC** solicits the support of additional individuals and community groups, expanding its supporting members, and keeping the community informed of developments. The matter is now before David Morse, Minister of the Department of Environment, and Minister Morse has asked his staff to prepare a preliminary report on the designated lands for the information and assessment needed to make informed decisions on further steps.

### **Your Expression of Support**

If you would like to volunteer some time to help the **CWC** achieve its sole objective, express your support for its work, or provide your name and email address to receive future mailings, please address your correspondence to Jim Muir ([jwmuir@eastlink.ca](mailto:jwmuir@eastlink.ca)).

## Supporting Groups and Individuals

### Political

- HRM Western Region Council (Rankin, Meade, Adams)
- HRM Regional Council (reported in letter from Municipal Clerk dated June 30, 2008)
- Bill Estabrooks, MLA, Timberlea-Prospect
- Judy Streach, MLA, Chester-St. Margaret's Bay
- Department of Natural Resources (in principle, based on preliminary assessment)
- Department of Environment (in principle, now conducting thorough assessment)
- Stephen McNeil on behalf of the Liberal Caucus
- Darrell Dexter on behalf of the NDP Caucus
- Geoff Regan, MP

### Environmental

- Blue Mountain Birch Cove Wilderness Society
- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
- Ecology Action Centre
- Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust
- Halifax Field Naturalists
- Halifax Regional Trails Association
- Nova Scotia Environmental Network
- SMU Community-Based Monitoring Network
- St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association
- Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization

### Residents

- Cambrian's Cove Homeowners' Assoc
- Juniper Silver Birch Property Owner's Association
- Lake of the Woods Homeowners Association
- Prospect Peninsula Residents' Association
- Sheldrake Lake Residents' Association
- Three Brooks Homeowners Association

### Recreational

- ATVANS
- BLT R2T
- Canoe/Kayak NS
- Halifax Trail Runners
- Safety Minded ATV Association
- St Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails
- Trout Nova Scotia

### Other

- Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Halifax-Dartmouth
- Hinterlands Development Limited
- Mainland South Heritage Society
- Mountain Equipment Co-op
- St. Margaret's Bay Regional Tourism and Development Association
- Ralph Weadon
- Resource Opportunities Centre
- Three Brooks Development Corporation Limited
- The Trail Shop
- (Dr.) Wilfrid Creighton