



Report #10 from the Steering Committee

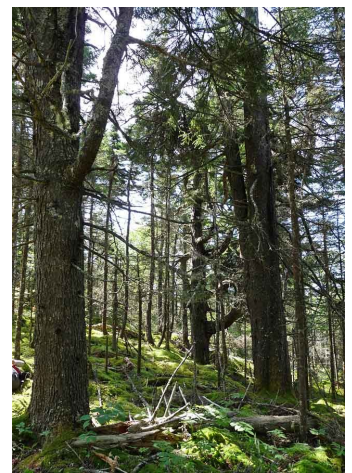
August 17, 2009

CHEBUCTO WILDERNESS COALITION

CWC Steering Committee Reviews the Case for Legislated Protection of the Chebucto Wilderness, known traditionally as the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area (FBLWA)

Five members of the CWC Steering Committee met with Senior Staff of the Department of Environment on July 31, 2009 to review the case for legislated protection of the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area proposed by the Chebucto Wilderness Coalition as a preliminary step to meeting with the Honourable Sterling Belliveau, the new Minister of Environment, Fisheries, and Agriculture. At this meeting, the Steering Committee reviewed the following points.

1. In a recent letter to the CWC, Minister Belliveau confirmed his commitment to protecting 12% of the provinces' land. According to stats Canada,
 - Nova Scotia has 55,284 sq km of land mass
 - The target of 12% of that is 6,634.08 sq km
 - 8.3% or 4,589 sq km of that is already protected
 - 3.7% or 2,046 sq km remains to be protectedThe Five Bridge lands comprise 9,800 hectares = 98 sq km or only 5% of the 2,046 sq km remaining to be protected.
2. Various community groups have been working to conserve and protect this land for the past nine years .
3. The community is organized and communicates regularly.
4. The community has consensus concerning the protection of this land.
5. The community has worked out many of the preliminary issues that must be addressed regarding the use of the land in ways other communities have not. For example, an agreement



Old growth Red Spruce



Barrens

has been reached with the OHV community to exclude the Old St. Margaret's Bay Road and two other roads from protection.

6. Three months ago (before the election), Premier Dexter gave the CWC one of the strongest letters of support that we have.

7. The EAC has recently met with Minister Belliveau and identified the Five Bridge Lakes region as one of the EAC's two top priorities for protection.

8. The area is threatened and stressed by urban development.

9. Dr. David Patriquin, Dalhousie Professor of Biology (retired) and now a member of the CWC steering committee, cited four principal values of the Five Bridge Lakes lands that warrant protection:

Aquatic Habitats/River Systems

The FBLWA encompasses major portions of several major watersheds with many magnificent lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands that remain minimally disturbed. Amongst the species they support are heritage brown water brook trout populations. These trout are highly sensitive to habitat degradation and fragmentation. Further, maintenance of "brown water", which is very important in protecting trout from effects of acid rain, is dependent on the continued integrity of the land-water systems.



Old growth oak



Old Growth Red Oak

Terrestrial Habitats & Wetlands

The FBLWA is a mosaic of habitats. Broadly, these include extensive, spectacular barrens with pockets of forest and wetlands above the Old St. Margaret's Bay Road and, below, largely undisturbed deciduous, mixed and coniferous forest with pockets of barrens, wetlands, and treed bogs. The latter includes significant old growth oak and red spruce stands. An old growth, deciduous, multi-aged red oak stand we investigated has features that make it unique for Nova Scotia and the type appears to be rare within eastern North America.

Special species

(i) Broom crowberry (*Corema conradii*). This coastal plain species is threatened outside of Nova Scotia (Magdalene Islands, PEI, several U.S. States), but even within Nova Scotia is declining rapidly due to loss of habitat. There are extensive, very healthy populations of broom crowberry on the barrens and interspersed elsewhere within the FBLWA. (ii) Mainland Moose. Remarkably, within 20 kilometers of downtown Metropolitan Halifax, a small group of these legally endangered animals resides within the FBLWA's diverse, undisturbed habitats. Undoubtedly, more detailed studies, especially below the Old St. Margaret's Bay Road, will reveal more species of special significance. For example, there are significant populations of *cyano-lichens* that bear investigation, and habitats for many songbirds that are declining, e.g., Canada warbler.



Broom Crowberry (Corema conradii)

Regional Conservation (Relationships)



The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail

While there are now several provincial parks, two provincially protected areas, and at least one area protected under the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, these are smaller, rather isolated areas that will be highly susceptible to species loss in the future, especially given that the area is surrounded by seawater on three sides and by Highway 103 on the other. The FBLWA would be the largest block of protected land. Size is important because larger areas conserve more species over the long term than smaller areas. Further, lying in the centre of the peninsula, it would become the hub for a network of conservation corridors. In short, protection of the FBLWA is essential to realizing a truly significant conservation area on the Chebucto Peninsula.



10. Protection of these public lands would cost nothing. Nothing needs to be purchased.
11. We are aware of the “5-R criteria” for designation of protected areas (Roadless, Representative, Rare, Rich, and Recreational). We believe the Department of Environment should recognize a 6th “R”: **Relationships**. The Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area would not only have a significant relationship to the other protected areas that surround it, its proximity (relationship) to Atlantic Canada’s largest urban centre would make it accessible for recreation, education, and scientific research activities.

In view of all these factors, we hope to meet with Minister Belliveau in the very near future to ask, “When will the Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness area be designated as a candidate for protection?”

