

Consultation Newsletter

Winter 2010

On October 19, 2009, the province announced its intent to designate Crown lands of the Five Bridge Lakes area of Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*.

This 8,266 hectare (20,425 acre) candidate wilderness area is located on the Chebucto Peninsula, between Highways 103 and 333. These lands are situated in the undeveloped interior of the Chebucto Peninsula, and extend to Blind Bay Provincial Park Reserve on the Atlantic coast (see map on page 4). The area's scenic and rugged landscape includes a mix of forest, barrens, interconnected lakes, and wetlands.

A new wilderness area on these Crown lands will protect valued wildlife habitat and high quality wilderness recreation opportunities, all within minutes of Atlantic Canada's largest urban centre.

Before a candidate wilderness area is designated, the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act* requires a period of public consultation. This ensures that interested parties and individuals can comment on the candidate wilderness area before final decisions are made. A socio-economic study of the effects of designation is also required. Final decisions on a boundary and other matters will be made once all information and comments have been considered.

This newsletter describes the candidate wilderness area, provides background information to support discussion and public comment, and outlines opportunities for your participation during the consultation process.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We wish to ensure a variety of opportunities for public and stakeholder input. Here are several ways you can become informed and involved:

- **visit an information display in a local library**
- **take part in a public open house meeting**
- **mail or email your comments, or phone us**
- **complete our comment sheet**
- **contact us to arrange a meeting**
- **comment on a socio-economic study**

For further details see page 2.



CONSULTATION PROCESS

Government's goal is to carry out the public consultation, finalize boundaries, and designate the new wilderness area by late 2010.

In the coming months, we will meet with individuals and interested parties, including municipal, community, recreation, business, and environmental organizations. During this time, we will also begin formal consultation with the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq.

If you would like to meet with Nova Scotia Environment staff members or submit ideas to the department, please call 902-424-2117 or email us at: protectedareas@gov.ns.ca.

To learn more, visit an information display between March 1 and March 31 at these HRM locations:

- **Alderney Landing Public Library**
- **Tantallon Public Library**
- **Spring Garden Road Memorial Public Library**

You can also discuss your interests with Nova Scotia Environment staff members at one of our public open house meetings:

- **Wednesday, March 10** at Dalhousie University's Student Union Building in Halifax from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm
- **Wednesday, March 24** at the St. Margaret's Centre in Tantallon from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm
- **Saturday, March 27** at St. Timothy's Church in Hatchet Lake from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm

As well, you can write us at any time to contribute your comments. To assist with this, we have posted a comment sheet on our website, which will also be available at information displays and open house meetings. Please share your comments by **April 30, 2010** to ensure that your views are considered. The department will prepare and release a summary of comments received.

Before the candidate area is designated, a socio-economic study on the effects of designation will be completed by an independent consultant. This will take into account results of the public consultation. You will have an opportunity to comment on the findings of this study.

Our goal is to fully understand all concerns and views before final decisions are made on designation. During this time, no new resource extraction, exploration, or development activities will be approved within the candidate wilderness area.

WHY A WILDERNESS AREA?

Establishing Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area will protect near-urban nature and provide exceptional outdoor recreation and education opportunities. It will also help ensure good air quality and watershed protection within HRM.

Protected green spaces are recognized as an important element of good city planning. A new wilderness area will help reduce HRM's footprint of urban development, and contribute to the municipality's 'smart growth' approach. It will complement the 'Western Commons' regional park which HRM wishes to establish on the eastern border of the candidate wilderness area, near Nine Mile River.

A coalition of community groups has advocated for nearly a decade for protection of the area. The coalition represents local residents, naturalists, hikers, conservationists, canoeists, anglers, and organized OHV users, among others.



The new wilderness area will contribute to the Province's goal of protecting 12% of Nova Scotia's landmass by 2015. This goal is outlined in the province's *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act*.

A new wilderness area will help make HRM and Nova Scotia more attractive to live, work, and do business.

BOUNDARY SELECTION

The candidate wilderness area includes Crown lands with significant ecological and wilderness recreation values of the area. No private land is being proposed for protection, nor is any land owned by HRM.

Regional Crown lands not included within the proposed boundary include:

- isolated parcels of land
- lands immediately adjacent to subdivisions
- lands with numerous old roads and off-highway vehicle (OHV) routes

Some of the Crown lands outside the proposed boundary may play an important complementary role to Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area, allowing more flexibility for uses or community needs that cannot be accommodated in a wilderness area.



WILDERNESS AREA VALUES

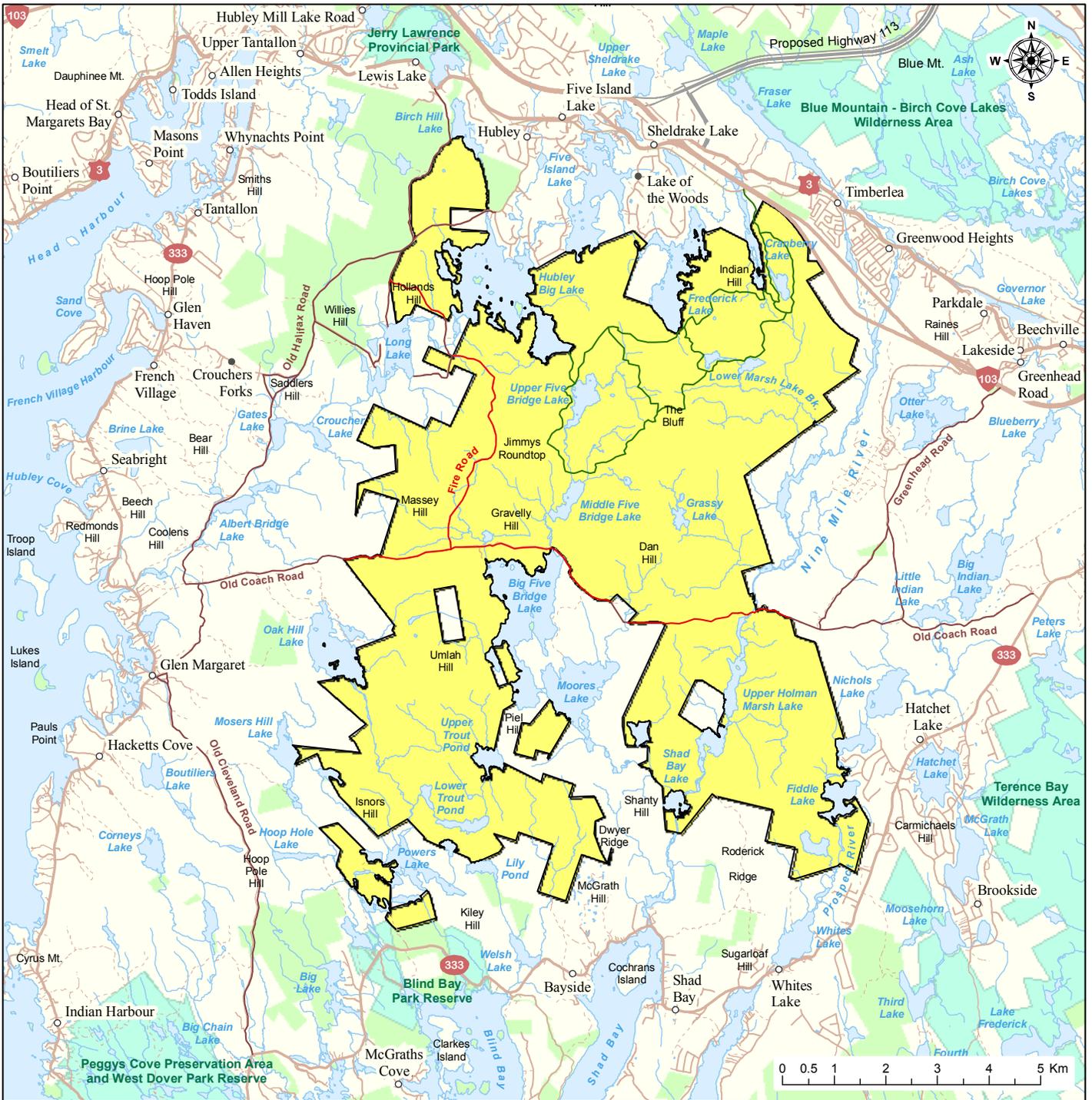
Natural Features

This 8,266 hectare (20,425 acre) candidate wilderness area encompasses a diverse mosaic of ecosystems. Granite bedrock gives rugged character to the area's lakes, waterways and wetlands; and accounts for the generally shallow and stony soils, or exposed bedrock. Scattered, egg-shaped hills, known as drumlins, are formed by thick deposits of glacial debris (till). With their smooth contours and unique red oak - yellow birch - red maple forest, these drumlins stand out within the otherwise rugged landscape.

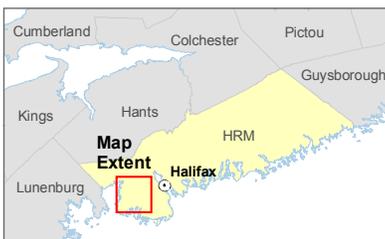
About two-thirds of the land area is forested, primarily with coniferous and mixed forest, except on drumlins. Extensive barrens and semi-barrens occupy much of the remainder, along with some wetlands. The character of these ecosystems is shaped by the near-coastal climate and especially by the rugged terrain and soils.

One patch of roadless habitat in the area is larger than 3,000 hectares (7,500 acres), and two others are larger than 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres). Small pockets of regionally uncommon old red oak and old red spruce have been documented. Some oak trees are as old as 200 years. Most of the forest has developed after forest fires or logging, and includes red maple, white birch, aspen, red oak, yellow birch, balsam fir, black spruce, red spruce, and pine. Some pine stands were planted.





Five Bridge Lakes Candidate Wilderness Area



-  The Bluff Hiking Trail System
-  Potential Trail Management Agreement on OHV Route
-  OHV Routes on Existing Old Roads
-  Provincial Park or Protected Area
-  Crown Land

Map produced by the Protected Areas Branch of NS Environment, August, 2009.

The information shown here was obtained courtesy of the NS Geomatics Centre (SNSMR) and the NS Department of Natural Resources.

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This map is a geographic representation only. NS Environment accepts no responsibility for any errors or omissions contained herein.



Connected Waterways

The candidate wilderness area contains numerous lakes, wetlands, and stretches of small rivers and still-waters. Portions of the Nine Mile, Scotts River and Woodens River watersheds are within the boundary, including frontage on at least 30 lakes and ponds. These undeveloped waterways are important habitat for fish, waterfowl, and other water dependent species.

Rare and Uncommon Species

Approximately 25 moose reside in and near the candidate wilderness area. Moose are endangered in mainland Nova Scotia and are easily disturbed by humans. Moose tracks, scat, and evidence of browsing can be found.



One recent record for both the Canada warbler and olive-sided flycatcher suggests probable nesting in the area (source: Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas). These birds are sensitive to human activities. Mountain sandwort, a rare plant of rock barrens has also been reported, and broom crowberry is abundant on exposed bedrock ridges.

Records exist for Atlantic salmon in Nine Mile River and in Woodens River, downstream of the candidate area (source: Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre). This would ideally be confirmed with more recent surveys.

Landscape Representation & Connections

A new wilderness area will protect a representative portion of Nova Scotia's largest natural landscape, known as 'South Mountain Rolling Plain'. These lands will join other parks and protected areas in the vicinity to provide a network of near-urban green space in western HRM.

Near-Urban Wilderness Activities

The candidate wilderness area is uniquely positioned to connect people with nature. With its scenic beauty, wildlife and natural setting, the area offers exceptional outdoor education and wilderness recreation opportunities. Activities such as hiking, camping, canoeing, swimming, trail-running, birdwatching, and cross-country skiing can all be enjoyed within a short distance from downtown Halifax.

Others enjoy sport fishing, hunting, and trapping. These activities are also permitted in wilderness areas.

Given the area's scenic beauty and iconic creatures such as bear, moose, loons and eagles, outdoor recreation there can leave a lasting impression.



Cultural Heritage

Traces of past settlement, old roads, and resource use hint at the importance of the area in earlier days. These patterns of human use were knit together by the Old Coach and Old Halifax roads, now used primarily for recreation access.

The Old Coach Road was once an important route connecting the villages of St. Margaret's Bay to Halifax. It was used by people traveling by horse and buggy and for transporting goods between Glen Margaret and Goodwood.

Homesteads were established along the road on lands granted from the Crown. The Bennett farm was a traditional stopping point known as the old Halfway House. Evidence of it, and other homesteads, remain today as rock walls, foundations, and small apple orchards.

Once known as Price's Lake, Five Bridge Lake was named after four small pole bridges over the divided brooks, and one larger bridge over the outflow of Five Mile Pond. These bridges on Old Coach Road are all at the head of Five Bridge Lake.

Since 1955, the Department of Lands & Forests (now Natural Resources), has maintained an important presence in the area, with a base at Lewis Lake. Forestry activities have included plantation research and firewood harvest. Some road improvement provided better access, for fighting forest fires and other purposes.



Old Coach Road

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Vehicle Access

Many people enjoy wilderness areas as places to visit or camp in a natural setting, without the distraction of vehicle trails and sounds. Others value vehicle access on old roads and routes, perhaps to reach a favourite lake or to enjoy an afternoon outdoors with family and friends.

Vehicle access in wilderness areas is generally prohibited; however, some vehicle use can be authorized under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act* in certain situations.

In new wilderness areas, certain routes or trails can be designated for continued vehicle use through an agreement with a group or organization if the route is an important link within a regional trail network.

Nova Scotia Environment is prepared to consider trail management agreements for the sections of the Old Coach Road and the Fire Road, also known as the Five Bridges Lake Road, which are within the candidate wilderness area.

In addition, limited vehicle access licences can be issued for specific uses such as reaching private land or an existing legal interest, such as a campsite lease.



Old Coach Road

Motorboats are treated as vehicles in wilderness areas. However, environmental impacts from motorboat use are generally minimal. Current policy permits the use of motorboats for sport fishing on lakes in wilderness areas, provided you carry a valid fishing licence. In addition, some lakes are outside of the proposed boundary, where they will not be affected by new rules. This includes: Powers Lake, Moores Lake, Big Five Bridge Lake, and Hubley Big Lake.

To identify and solve vehicle use issues, riders and others need to share their interests and concerns. This means knowing where and why people travel. It also means finding ways to minimize impacts on the environment and other users. Nova Scotia Environment will be discussing this with local OHV groups and others.

Bicycle Use

Bicycle use is generally prohibited in wilderness areas but can be authorized on specific routes through a trail management agreement with a group or organization. Bicycle use can also be authorized by individual licence for specific uses such as reaching private land or existing legal interests, such as campsite leases.

Trails for Recreation

Trails are important to wilderness recreation in wilderness areas. Existing trails include the popular Bluff hiking trail system, several old roads, and a network of canoe routes.



The Bluff hiking trail offers more than 30 kilometres of high quality, managed backcountry hiking trail (see: www.wrweo.ca/BluffTrail/index.html). This trail was developed by Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization (WRWEO) with

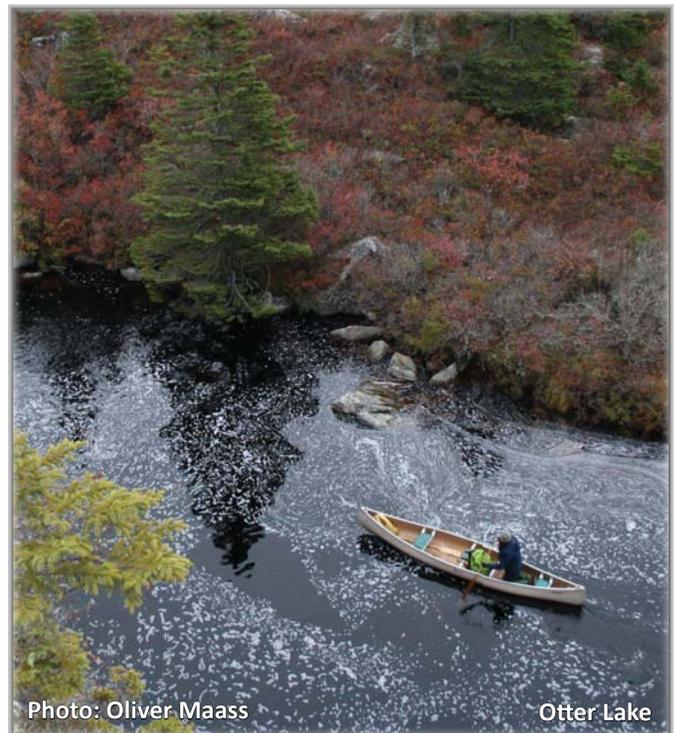
authorization from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Once the wilderness area is designated, this authorization will be renewed as a trail management agreement with Nova Scotia Environment.

Two unmaintained old roads bisect the area. The Old Coach Road (connecting Goodwood and Seabright) and Fire Road (extending from Lewis Lake, south, to Old Coach Road) are enjoyed by OHV riders, hikers, and others.

Several excellent canoe routes with portages permit travel from Hubley Big Lake to Big Five Bridge Lake, and then either to Shivering Sticks and Blind Bay, or to Nine Mile River and Shad Bay. This generally involves lake-to-lake travel, using informally maintained portages. For skilled paddlers, Nine Mile River can be travelled at high water.

Other informal trails are also used for a variety of recreational activities.

New trails for non-motorized recreation can be developed by groups through a formal agreement with the province.



Legal Interests

Seven campsite leases are located within the candidate wilderness area. Nova Scotia Environment can honour these as pre-existing legal interests under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*. Vehicle access to these camps can be licenced to support maintenance.

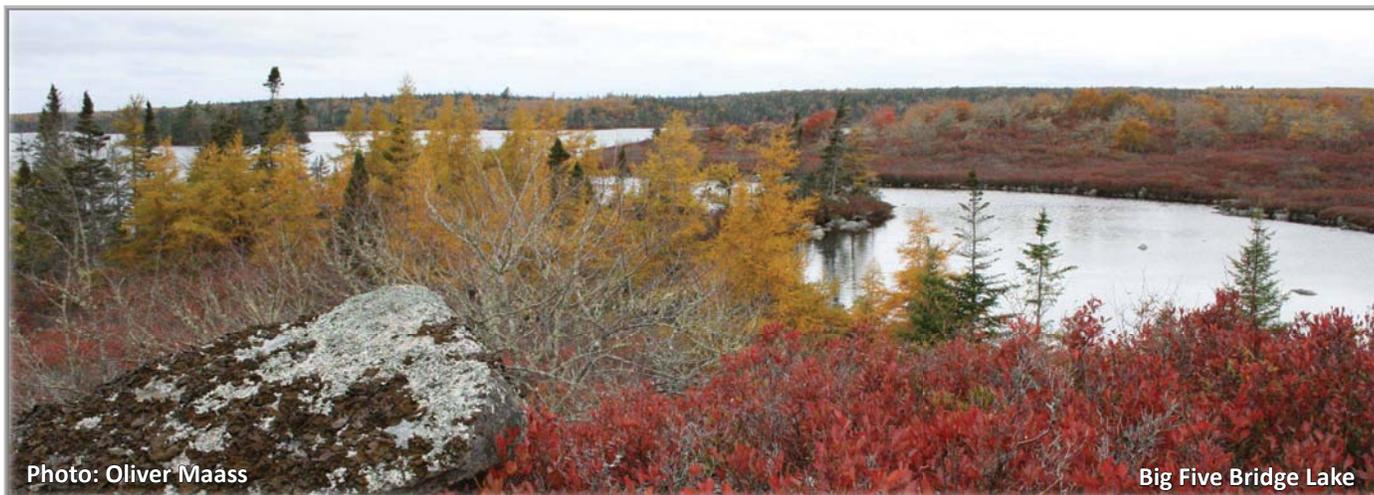
Private land is not part of the candidate area. Access to private lands that are surrounded by the wilderness area will be provided, but may be subject to conditions.

There are no existing mineral exploration licences within the candidate wilderness area.

For more information on the consultation process please visit: <http://gov.ns.ca/nse/protectedareas> or contact us.

For general information on wilderness areas, please refer to the Protected Areas website or contact us for copies of these publications:

- Nova Scotia Wilderness Areas: Questions and Answers
- *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*
- Protecting Wilderness: A Summary of Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas Protection Act
- Keep it Wild: A Guide to Low Impact Recreation in Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas



CONTACT INFORMATION

Nova Scotia Environment
Protected Areas Branch
Box 442, 5151 Terminal Road
Halifax, NS, B3J 2P8
Tel: 902.424.2117 Fax: 902.424.0501
Email: protectedareas@gov.ns.ca
Web: www.gov.ns.ca/nse/protectedareas

