



Five Bridge Lakes Candidate Wilderness Area

August 2010

Public Consultation Summary

OVERVIEW

This document is a summary of public comments received by Nova Scotia Environment during public consultation on Five Bridge Lakes Candidate Wilderness Area.

In October 2009, the province announced its intent to designate Crown lands of the Five Bridge Lakes area in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*. The 8,266 hectare (20,425 acre) candidate wilderness area is located on the Chebucto Peninsula, between Highways 103 and 333. The wilderness area will protect valued wildlife habitat and high quality wilderness recreation opportunities, all within minutes of Atlantic Canada's largest urban centre.

This winter we asked you to tell us what you think of the proposal. Comments received during consultation are a key part of the decision making process, and provide an opportunity to identify and resolve any issues before designation.

To encourage people to share their views and opinions, we released a discussion newsletter on February 12, 2010. The newsletter provided background information and highlighted key discussion topics to help generate public feedback.

We also held public information meetings in Halifax on March 10, in Upper Tantallon on March 24, and in Hatchet Lake on March 27. These sessions included an information display and a series of discussion tables focusing on key topics. As well, interested groups and individuals were invited to meet directly with staff to share information or discuss specific concerns. The consultation period ended on April 30, 2010.



HOW YOU PARTICIPATED

In total, 121 written submissions were received during the consultation period. Many of these submissions provided detailed comments on a range of issues. Of these, 85 explicitly supported designation of the proposed wilderness area, while six opposed designation. Between 50 and 70 people attended each of the three public meetings, and we also met individually with a variety of interest groups.



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WHAT YOU SAID

A number of common themes were expressed in the comments we received. These are summarized below.

Boundary

Most people supported designating the proposed wilderness area as part of Government's effort to legally protect 12% of Nova Scotia's landmass.



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Many also expressed interest in expanding the boundary by adding adjacent or nearby Crown land. This includes Crown land northwest of the candidate wilderness area, which would protect additional moose habitat and extend the wilderness area to Upper Tantallon Village. Other Crown lands of interest include the area east of Flake Brook, the head of the Bluff Wilderness Trail, and Crown land next to highway 103, and at Big Lake. Boaters and paddlers expressed interest in including the Crown right-of-way at Silver Birch Drive on Frederick Lake. There was also interest in adding Crown owned islands in several lakes.

We also heard that the province should work with HRM to protect the municipality's lands at Big Five Bridge and Moores lakes.

Private lands are not being considered as part of this process. However, some respondents encouraged the acquisition of private land in-holdings to add to the wilderness area. A few suggested trying to acquire properties adjacent to the candidate wilderness area on Hubley Big Lake and Frederick Lake.

A few people suggested excluding parts of the proposed wilderness area. Two local residents' associations requested a boundary adjustment to exclude lands along the eastern shore of Hubley Big Lake to allow for potential development of a community wind-energy project. A number of camp and private land owners from the Powers Lake area expressed concern about potential loss of off-highway vehicle (OHV) access; they proposed excluding an existing access trail and some adjacent Crown lands. One individual also suggested excluding land at the northwest end of Big Five Bridge Lake because he thought this area is not Crown land.

Special Values and Features

Many people described special values and features of Five Bridge Lakes Candidate Wilderness Area, often based on personal experience and detailed local knowledge.

A variety of comments described the area as a refuge for plants and wildlife in a rapidly urbanizing landscape. Some submissions highlighted the area's importance for mainland moose – an endangered species in Nova Scotia. Others mentioned rare or uncommon species such as the olive-sided fly catcher, and the Canada warbler. Other features such as old

forests, drumlins, wetlands, and watercourses were also mentioned. Several respondents emphasized the value of remote rivers and lakes for sustaining native trout populations.

Use of the Wilderness Area

Many people described how they currently use the area. The most common activities were hiking, paddling, fishing, hunting and ATV riding. Winter activities such as snowshoeing, cross country skiing and ice skating were also discussed. Other activities include bird watching, camping, photography, trapping and exploration. Several people also described experiences of simply resting or contemplating in the quietness and solitude of the area.

We heard that many people cherish The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail and that others enjoy the canoe routes through the interconnected lakes and rivers. Some expressed concern that too much recreation infrastructure development could detract from the wilderness experience and harm the wildlife or ecosystems. Others suggested that the near-urban location may warrant additional trail development and related facilities.

Many comments focussed on the future of the Old Coach Road and Fire Road. Some felt that OHV use is inappropriate in a wilderness area and that OHV use should be restricted or eliminated. We heard, in particular, that the Fire Road should be closed to OHV use because it crosses through lands frequented by moose. As an alternative, it was suggested that OHV riders can access the Old Coach Road via the Old Halifax Road. Several people cited studies which show that OHV use can negatively affect moose. Some respondents said these routes should remain open for non-motorized forms of recreation and heritage tourism.

We also heard from OHV users and some others that both the Old Coach Road and Fire Road should remain available for OHV use, as these routes allow vehicle access to interior lakes, provide important connections with the regional OHV trail system, and allow for travel in a loop. They felt that these existing routes should either be excluded from the wilderness area entirely, or managed using trail management agreements within the wilderness area. Some also suggested

that a southern winter access route over the ice of Upper Holman Marsh Lake should be permitted to connect the Old Coach Road with the Shad Bay area. A few people expressed concern that any OHV trail management agreement might exclude the use of other vehicles, such as automobiles.

Others proposed that OHV trail management agreements should only be considered after additional opportunities for public comment. Some advocated restrictions, such as seasonal closures to protect moose and other wilderness values, or phasing out routes within the wilderness area where alternative routes can be developed or used. A few also suggested restricting hiking, particularly on the outer loop of The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail, to avoid disturbing moose, especially during calving season.

Socio-economic Values

Numerous people commented on social and economic values of the candidate wilderness area. Many value having a protected, near-urban wilderness setting for diverse forms of outdoor recreation, and some thought the province and HRM may benefit from nature-based and cultural tourism.

People spoke of health and quality of life benefits, including opportunities for enjoying nature's beauty, spiritual renewal, hiking, canoeing, camping, fishing, hunting; and for other activities like camp use. We also heard about opportunities for learning, such as field trips and research studies, given the nearby schools and universities. Some mentioned the role a wilderness area can play in providing natural (ecological) services, such as purification of water and air.

As noted, we heard mixed views about vehicle access within the proposed wilderness area. ATV riders and some others value or support having access to existing routes, particularly on old roads, while others would prefer little or no vehicle access.

Some people discussed the proposed wilderness area as it relates to municipal planning, viewing it as a green belt that can limit urban sprawl. Those interested in developing nearby private lands also saw the wilderness area as an asset. We heard from a variety of people that designation of the candidate wilderness area will complement HRM's Western Common Wilderness Common initiative.

Little was said about commercial values, benefits or costs of designating the proposed wilderness area. We heard about tourism-related benefits, potential mineral values near Blind Bay, and a proposal to exclude land at Hubley Big Lake for a possible community wind energy project. Many, however, said they expect designation to have a positive social and economic impact by helping make Halifax and Nova Scotia an attractive place to live, work, and invest.

NEXT STEPS

The province is currently consulting with Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq about the proposed designation. In addition, a study which examines the social and economic effects of designating the candidate wilderness area will be available for public comment before designation.

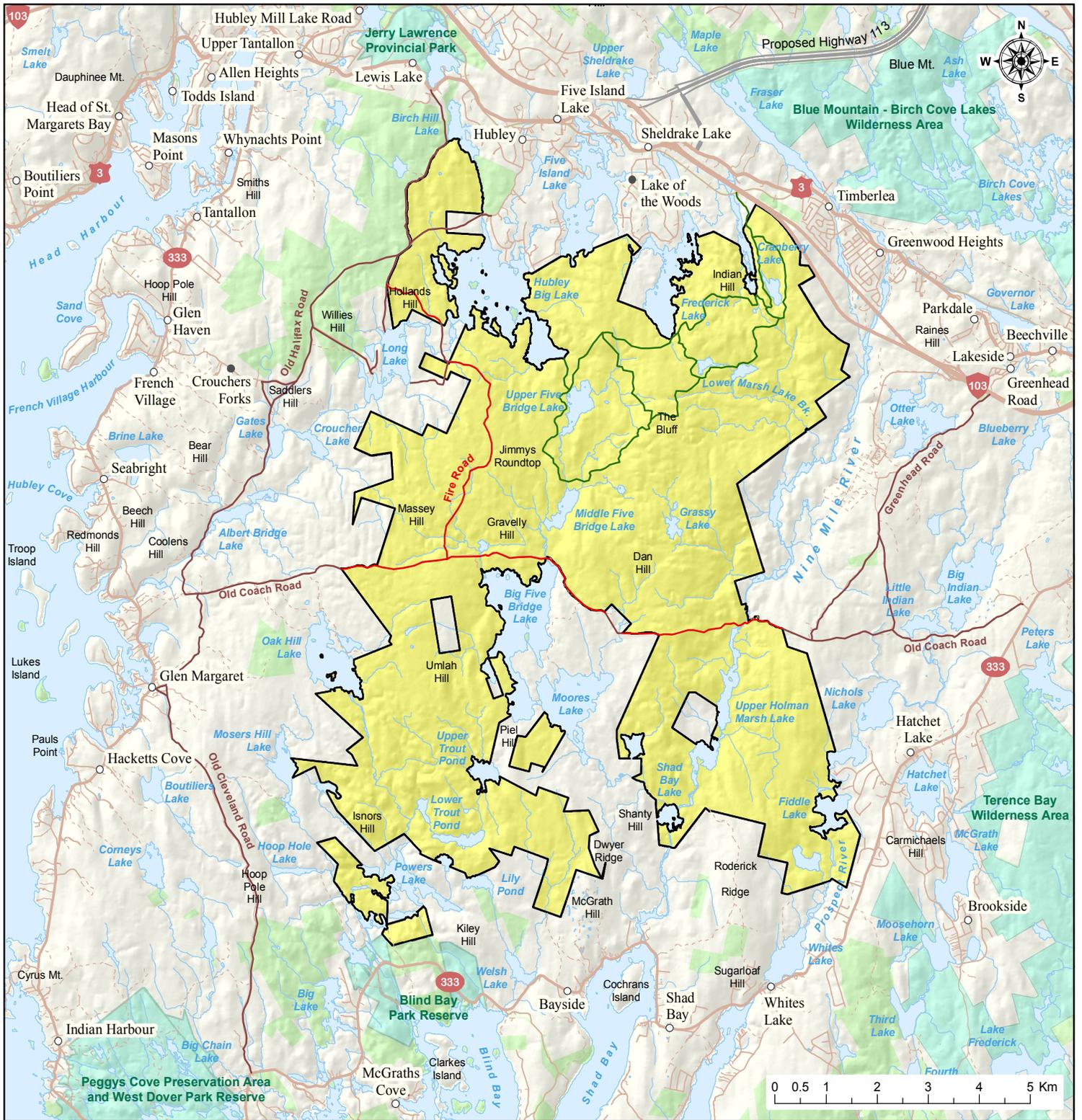
In making decisions about designation, government will consider a range of factors, including public comment, Mi'kmaq interests, and the socio-economic study.

Once all consultation is complete, the Minister of Environment will bring a recommendation to Cabinet on designating this candidate wilderness area under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*.

INFORMATION SHARING

We thank all those who provided comment during the public consultation process. A full set of written submissions received during the comment period is available for viewing at the Nova Scotia Environment office in Halifax (5151 Terminal Road).

Nova Scotia Environment considers participant identity as personal information, in keeping with the provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The privacy of a participant's identity will be protected by the department, unless the participant consents to the release, or if the submission has been made public by the participant. Any person or group may give prior consent, in writing, to the release of their personal information.



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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