

Katowe'katik (formerly McGowan Lake) Wilderness Area

Katowe'katik Wilderness Area will protect about 1,225 hectares (ha) of woodland and lakeshore habitat at McGowan Lake, in Queens and Annapolis counties, about 8 km east of Kejimikujik National Park.

This area is home to one of only several populations of endangered Blandings turtle and threatened ribbon snake in Nova Scotia.

Establishing this wilderness area complements efforts of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, which has acquired and protected about 26 hectares of private land at McGowan Lake.

This wilderness area will include the following lands:

- 1,155 ha previously consulted on and proposed for protection as a nature reserve in the 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan. This includes lands of the former Bowater Mersey Paper Company acquired for protection in 2007.
- 45 ha of additional land along the western shore of McGowan Lake, which was acquired for protection in 2014.
- Several forest access roads and powerline corridors which were not part of the earlier boundary concept or consultation.

The wilderness area will protect over 9 km of shoreline on Dean and McGowan Lakes, within the Medway River system. Much of the forest cover consists of mature and immature mixed-wood and softwood forest, with some hardwood drumlin hills. As the forest ages, it will become increasingly important for species which prefer older forest. Older forests can also store significant amounts of atmospheric carbon.

Protection of these lands helps improve representation of the LaHave Drumlins Natural Landscape in Nova Scotia's protected areas system.

This is an important area for scientific research and education. The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute (MTRI) is located next to the boundary, at Highway #8.

Designation as a wilderness area instead of as a nature reserve will allow hunting and angling and provides the Minister of Environment authority to allow vehicle access to adjacent properties.

The Mount Merritt Shooting Range and Mount Merritt Road to the range will not be part of the wilderness area. However, some other roads which were left outside the earlier nature reserve concept will be within the boundary of the wilderness area. Eight hectares of plantation next to MTRI will not be part of the wilderness area.

Two powerline corridors within the wilderness area will be added to a licence held by Nova Scotia Power (NSPI) that governs operation and maintenance of powerlines in wilderness areas. NSPI will also be authorized to access the dam and spillway at the outflow of McGowan Lake by road from the shooting range.

As recommended by Mi'kmaq elders, the name of the wilderness area will be "Katowe'katik" instead of "McGowan Lake." Katowe'katik (pronounced GAH-toe-wag-a-dik) means Eel Lake, which is a lake next to McGowan Lake. This name honours the special significance of the McGowan Lake area to the Mi'kmaq, along with the cultural significance of eels to Mi'kmaq culture. American eel remains an important species for the subsistence fisheries of many Aboriginal communities throughout its range but is now also considered "endangered" or "threatened" in some jurisdictions outside Nova Scotia.

The main purpose of this consultation is to seek comment on:

- provincial lands added to the proposed boundary since release of the Parks and Protected Areas Plan in 2013
- the change in designation type from nature reserve to wilderness area, and
- a change of name from McGowan Lake Wilderness Area to Katowe'katik Wilderness Area

Aerial view of McGowan Lake, looking northwest

