

# Reconciling Traditional and Recreational Activities in the 100 Wild Islands

*Ross Firth, Director of Conservation, Nova Scotia Nature Trust, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, ross@nsnt.ca*

*Peter Green, Conservation Manager, Nova Scotia Nature Trust, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, peter@nsnt.ca*

---

Established in 1994, the Nova Scotia Nature Trust is an incorporated charitable conservation organization dedicated to protecting ecologically important natural areas in the province of Nova Scotia, Canada with a focus on rare, outstanding and imperiled habitats and critical habitat for at-risk species. The Nature Trust works with private landowners to protect their land through donation, purchase and conservation easements, and once a property is protected has a rigorous, science-based program of ongoing stewardship and management to ensure that the lands' natural values are protected in perpetuity. This work involves hands-on public education and engagement that builds knowledge and support for nature conservation, and helps Nova Scotians to take an active role in environmental stewardship.

## The Location

The 100 Wild Islands, located in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, includes more than 280 offshore islands, and ecologically significant mainland properties stretching along some 30 kilometres of the Atlantic coast.

Once considered for national park designation, and later as a provincial park, this island archipelago represents one of the last remaining intact and ecologically rich island groups of its size in North America, and the only island group of its kind in Nova Scotia. The islands support a mosaic of undisturbed and interconnected coastal habitats, including boreal forest, coastal barrens, beaches, wetlands, bogs and salt marsh. The area provides habitat for more than 100 species of migrating and breeding song birds, sea birds and shore birds, including Common Eider, Leach's Storm Petrel and Great Blue Heron.

The 100 Wild Islands has been identified by the Nova Scotia Nature Trust as a priority conservation area due to the area's ecological integrity, richness, uniqueness and representativeness. In 2014, it launched an ambitious campaign to protect the area comprised of approximately 1,150 hectares (2,840 acres) of privately owned islands and mainland parcels, as well as 1,650 hectares (4,080 acres) of provincial government (Crown) owned islands. The Province has acknowledged the significance of the area and, in 2015, designated all Crown-owned islands as the Eastern Shore Islands Wilderness Area. To date, approximately 85% of the 2,800 hectares (7000 acres) of wilderness has been protected, with more in progress. More recently, the Eastern Shore Islands have been identified by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans as an area of interest towards the possible designation as a marine protected area.

The islands were first used by the indigenous Mi'kmaq people as a location for coastal camps from which to gather a variety of fish, invertebrates and mammals. More recently, the islands and coasts have been sparsely settled by European descendants with fishing and forestry as the primary economic activities. The islands continue to be used by both local residents and visitors for a variety of recreational activities. This includes pastimes such as sea kayaking, motor boating, hunting, fishing, bird watching and camping. These activities are primarily self-directed with a limited number of commercial enterprises engaged in supporting their provision. Recreational activities occur on privately owned Nature Trust conservation lands,

Crown lands designated as a wilderness area and on waters that may be designated federally as a marine protected area. These activities take place in a largely unregulated environment with minimal management intervention.

## **Conservation, Recreation and Economic Initiatives**

In 2017, a multi stakeholder initiative was launched called the Wild Islands Tourism Advancement Partnership (WITAP). WITAP is a community-based project with the goal to capitalize on the eastern shore archipelago as a tourism destination. As part of the WITAP project, the Nature Trust and the provincial Department of Environment, are developing a management strategy that will provide complementary management direction on both Nature Trust and Crown land. The Nature Trust has focused community engagement for several years on gathering information on ecological and social variables, and to discuss and receive feedback on plans to acquire privately owned properties for conservation. More recently, communities have engaged with the Nature Trust to discuss possible management approaches to the 100 Wild Islands.

## **Conservation and Management Issues**

Residents who have participated in open houses and other forms of engagement are broadly supportive of efforts by the Nature Trust to conserve privately owned land. However, support is often qualified on the understanding that activities such as hunting, sea kayaking and camping will continue unhindered as this is viewed as a ‘right’. There is also a lack of clarity and understanding on the respective conservation mandates of the Nature Trust, the Government of Nova Scotia and the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Local communities and their residents exhibit a high degree of ‘ownership’ of the islands and coastal headlands and undertake a wide range of traditional and recreational activities on both Crown land and privately-owned properties. Participants in recreational activities undertake these pastimes in a regulatory setting that is either not actively enforced, or is embryonic in both objectives and direction. Many residents are hostile towards any government entity or non-government entity that is perceived to have hidden agendas that might restrict their continued ability to partake in recreational activities on protected land. The Nature Trust recognizes the importance of securing local resident support in the development and delivery of a management strategy for the 100 Wild Islands. With an anticipated increase in visitation within the 100 Wild Islands comes potential increased threats to their ecological and cultural resources. Limited resources within the Nature Trust to complete management planning and divergent viewpoints and agendas complicate joint management efforts. Challenges arise with efforts to reconcile strongly held local views of the right to participate in recreational activities with the conservation mandate of the Nature Trust.

Efforts to reconcile divergent views between the Nature Trust and users of the resource have, to date, consisted primarily of participant engagement of a more generalist format, eg. public open houses and, secondly, targeted engagement with specific user groups, eg. commercial operators, hunters, fishers. In these forums, dialogue is structured in a conversational format intended to convey the conservation objectives of the Nature Trust and to seek and document the nature and scope of recreational and traditional uses of the islands. Information gathered from these sessions is used by the Nature Trust to compile and conduct an inventory and analysis of the type of activities occurring on the islands and the location and timing of the activities. This information is then used by the Nature Trust to assess the spatial and temporal compatibility of the activities with the conservation objectives of the islands. The Province of Nova Scotia must consider management approaches on Crown land in the context of protected areas legislation and policy. The charitable, non-governmental status of the Nature

Trust provides a high degree of flexibility to consider and incorporate management approaches unencumbered by legislative imperatives.

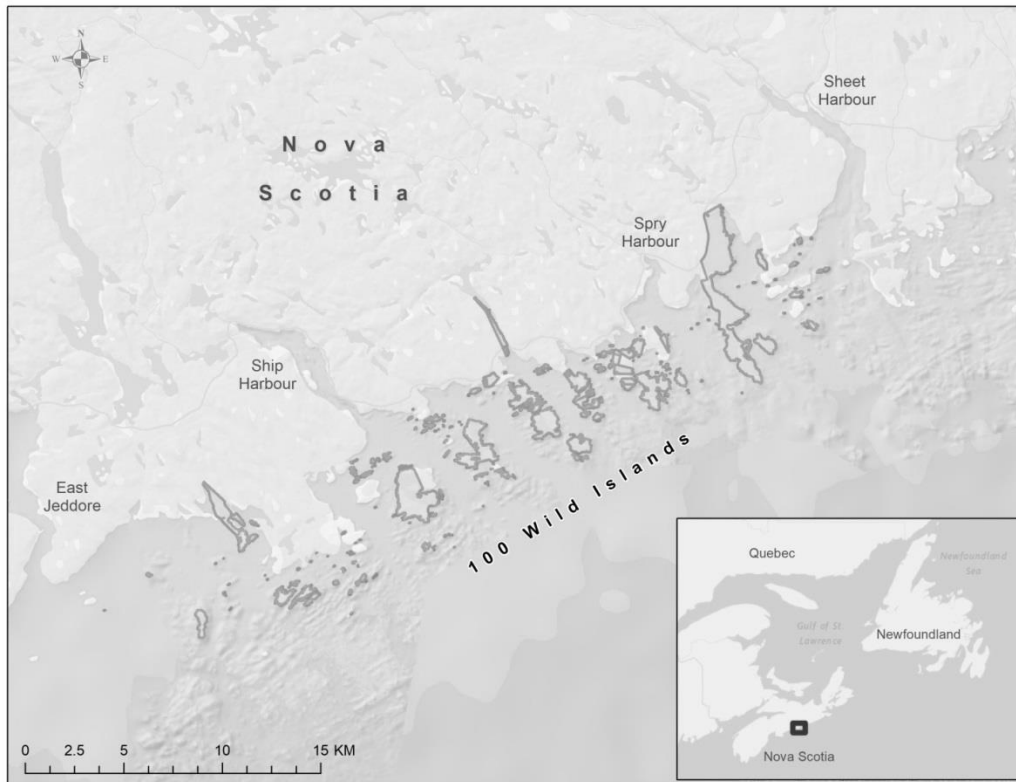


Figure 1. 100 Wild Islands