

# Purcells Cove Backlands

Proposed Protected Area

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Developed for: Community Design Advisory Committee  
Regional Plan 5 Year Review  
Halifax Regional Municipality



*Proposed Protected Area  
Purcells Cove Backlands*

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## I Introduction

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This document is to confirm the requested amendments to the land use designation and zoning detailed in my letter dated March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (also found in Appendix) and provide further justification for the request that four HRM owned parcels in Purcells Cove be designated Open Space Natural Resource (OSNR) and Protected Area (PA).

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) owned lands in Purcells Cove, which neighbour the Purcells Cove Conservation Lands owned by the Nova Scotia Nature Trust (NSNT), meet the criteria outlined in Chapter 2 of HRM's Regional Municipal Planning Strategy for lands to contribute to HRM's Open Space Network. Specifically, the Regional Plan calls for designating lands as Open Space and Natural Resource Designation if they have the following (all of which occur on these lands):

- a) A strong potential cooperative partnership between the municipality (HRM) and private landowners or non-governmental organizations (in this case the NSNT who is both the land owner and a non-governmental conservation organization) to achieve good environmental management.
- b) Lands including trail networks.
- c) Private conservation lands.
- d) Wetlands.
- e) Access to healthy and clean swimming locations.

This document will outline the features found on these properties which support the request to have this land designated Open Space and Natural Resource and rezoned as Protected Area. It is broken in to three sections focusing on the potential partnership between HRM and the NSNT, the recreational and cultural significance, and the ecological importance of the Purcells Cove Backlands.

The properties identified in this document are PIDs 41357955, 41293721, 00334383, and 40180622 owned by HRM and PIDs 00334391, 41294158, 00337220 owned by the NSNT and are shown on Figure 1.

## 2 Partnership between the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Nova Scotia Nature Trust:

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The NSNT has over 6500 acres of land on 50 properties across the property, many of which have recreation trails. We have the knowledge, access to resources, and experience to manage conservation lands both independently and in partnership with other organizations. We have worked in partnership with Nature Conservancy Canada and the Kingsburg Coastal Conservancy to protect and maintain a popular hiking destination and important coastal headland on the South Shore. Gaff Point is a success story that can be repeated.



We have also worked with a municipality to protect and manage their land. The Town of Wolfville has placed a conservation easement with the NSNT on one of its properties. Again this is a popular hiking spot. We have successfully partnered with town staff and volunteers to develop and maintain trails as well as organize property events and promote the protected area.

HRM can increase the impact of designating their lands by partnering with NSNT to increase the total area of the regional park. The NSNT has acquired the three neighbouring parcels in Purcells Cove (see attached location map – Figure 1). These three parcels include 87 acres of undeveloped coastal barrens which, combined with HRM lands in the area, could contribute to close to 300 acres of open space and protected lands in the Purcells Cove Backlands. This partnership would not only leverage land from the NSNT to increase the overall size of the protected area, but the NSNT would also help in management of the lands. The NSNT has a team of dedicated staff and volunteers and access to funding opportunities to help maintain conservation lands with low impact recreation facilities.

The NSNT is a reputable organization with over 18 years' experience in land conservation in Nova Scotia. We have a strong support base within HRM and across the province. We have a history of successful partnerships with other organizations and could work with the HRM in the management of these properties.

### 3 Recreational Importance and Trail Networks:

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As part of the Purcells Cove Backlands, municipal properties 41357955, 41293721, 00334383, and 40180622 are integrated within an extensive network of over thirty-six kilometres (and counting) of trails stretching from Williams Lake to Herring Cove, and from Purcells Cove to Spryfield (see Figure 3). Over generations almost every community and neighbourhood surrounding the Backlands has developed its own access point(s) to the network providing residents with high quality outdoor recreational/educational opportunities. Today, this “near-urban” wilderness is a favoured destination for local residences and citizens of greater Halifax, as well as many visitors from farther afield. In fact, readers of *The Coast* recently named Purcells Pond one of the city’s “Best Places to Swim”<sup>1</sup>, while the area’s mountain biking trails are highly regarded by enthusiasts of the sport.<sup>2</sup>

The Backlands can be reached by car, public transit (Routes 20 and 15), or one of two active transportation routes running the lengths of Purcells Cove Road and Herring Cove Road. Given their proximity to the city centre, and the convenience with which they can be reached, the Purcells Cove Backlands provide a “near-urban” wilderness experience that very few cities can rival.

While most of the area’s trails are informal and unmanaged, they are well used by hikers, swimmers, mountain bikers, trail runners, naturalists, students, and researchers who are treated to stunning vistas of the city and harbour, exposure to a highly variable matrix of iconic granite barrens, mixed forests, lakes, and

<sup>1</sup> Berkel, L.v. (2007). Outdoor swim guide. *The Coast*. Halifax, NS. Sourced on August 22, from: <http://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/outdoor-swim-guide/Content?oid=960874>

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://trails.mtbr.com/cat/trails-around-the-world/canada-trails/trails-canada-nova-scotia/trail/fight-trail/prd\\_166140\\_4527crx.aspx](http://trails.mtbr.com/cat/trails-around-the-world/canada-trails/trails-canada-nova-scotia/trail/fight-trail/prd_166140_4527crx.aspx)

verdant wetlands, as well as rich biodiversity and significant wildlife habitat. The Backlands' trails also provide contact with noteworthy elements of our shared cultural heritage, including; the Queens Quarry, which provided the stone used to build many of the city's earliest structures (e.g. Citadel Hill, Grand Parade, Province House), "Prisoners Cave," at least one WWII era military installation, and what may be the province's oldest railway bed.

Municipal property 40180622 currently serves as the primary access point to the Purcells Cove Conservation Lands where it meets Purcells Cove Road, a small parking area, and a transit route #15 bus stop. At least ten trails cross this property, providing connections to Fergusons Cove, Purcells Pond, Flat Lake, Duck Pond, York Redoubt, Spryfield, and Herring Cove.

Municipal property 00334391 contains much of the Queens Quarry site and provides a trail linkage from the "rail bed" trail adjacent to the Purcells Cove Social Club to a favoured swimming destination at Purcells Pond. In addition to the piled granite and industrial remnants of the quarry, this property's trails offer elevated views of the city's south end, the Northwest Arm, and the Harbour, as well as connections to Colpitt Lake, the Governor's Brook development, Oceanview Drive, Flat Lake, and a significant portion of the area's mountain bike network.

Property 41357955 is the largest of the area's four municipal properties, and is made up almost entirely of an expansive landscape of exposed granite barrens. Consequently, it has become a very popular destination for mountain bikers and has developed a sprawling network of trails to accommodate them. This property provides connections to Colpitt Lake, Governors Brook, Flat Lake, and the greater Purcells Cove Conservation Lands' trail system. Trail connections to the McIntosh Run Community Trail and Spryfield are also possible through Roachs Pond Park, which adjoins the property to its southwest.

#### 4 Ecological Importance of the area:

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*Dr. David Patriquin, a retired Professor of Biology at Dalhousie University and a member of the Halifax Field Naturalists (who help steward the NSNT lands in Purcells Cove), has put together the following argument for the ecological case in protecting the Purcells Cove Backlands.*

The Purcells Cove Conservation Lands (PCCL) encompass an approximately 265 m wide slice of land that runs from Purcells Cove Road into the "Purcells Backlands", crossing Purcells Pond and terminating at the shore of Flat Lake, approx 1.4 km inland. Flat Lake is an undisturbed headwater Lake for the Powers Pond (Macintosh Run) watershed. Purcells Pond (Lake) is the headwater and only lake on a small watershed that drains into Purcells Cove. (The PCCL include all of Purcells Pond and part of "Purcells Brook" going into Purcells Cove.) Outcrops of the Halifax Formation occur on the Purcells Road end of the property, beyond that the bedrock is lueco monzogranite.



The trail into Purcells Pond, which is only partially in the PCCL, goes through areas where there is some accumulation of till and through steep embankments leading down to Purcells Brook. Moisture-loving species and species characteristic of older forests such as Hobblebush, Witch-hazel, Striped Maple, Yellow Birch and Hemlock are common in the latter area. Leatherleaf-dominated wetland fringes much of Purcells Pond. There are larger wetlands/wet black spruce forest to the north and west sides of Purcells Pond. Between Purcells Pond and Flat Lake, the trail crosses an undulating topography of NW/SE oriented high barrens and forested plateaus (Black Spruce, Big tooth Aspen, Birches, Jack Pine) alternating with lower-lying wetter areas, some with bush cover (False Holly, Canada Holly, Rhodora) or swampy Red Maple/Black Spruce/Balsam Fir, small ericaceous bogs, or graminoid-dominated vegetation. Thus, overall, the property is a mosaic of habitats encompassing a wide range of moisture regimes and vegetation types.

Of particular note are the higher, more exposed barrens and forested plateaus which support a suite of fire-dependent/fire adapted plant species which are also adapted to low nutrient, acidic regimes. This suite includes likely the highest concentration of Jack Pine in any of the protected areas or parks on the Chebucto Peninsula (and possibly also in comparison to all or most protected areas in N.S.); extensive broom crowberry, an Atlantic Coastal Plain species that is threatened in the limited areas where it occurs outside of Nova Scotia, but not in N.S., however, it is declining due to development of sand and rock barrens; and the yellow listed Golden Heather and Greenland Sandwort. Jack Pine, Broom Crowberry and Golden Heather are dependent on repeated fire to be maintained over longer periods, and possibly Greenland Stitchwort as well. The 2009 Spryfield Fire moved from beyond Flat Lake into the PCCL and towards Purcells Pond, stopping finally at wetland approximately halfway between these two water bodies. The lower wetter areas in the larger burnt area were only partially burnt or not burnt at all. Thus the landscape as a whole includes recently burned and not burned barrens and woodland, further diversifying the habitats and allowing maintenance of fire-dependent species.

Bird life of particular note includes nesting warblers and flycatchers in the backlands, also Grey Jay and Black-backed woodpeckers. It is expected that the recovering, post fire forest stands will be good habitat for the endangered Olive-sided Flycatcher. Lichen expert Francis Anderson was impressed with the diversity of lichens when she visited the area in 2009, noting several new records for HRM.

Please see

<http://halifaxfieldnaturalists.ca/arnell/inventory2012/PCCLinventory2012.pdf> for more details from our species inventories. The wetland plants, insects, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and aquatic life are not as yet well documented.

The PCCL, while conserving a variety of habitats and species, is highly vulnerable to edge effects because of its high edge-to-area ratio and includes only slices of the larger wetlands

bordering Purcells Pond. Currently, adjacent lands are largely free from human disturbance, but enlarging the protected area as a whole is obviously highly desirable from a conservation perspective. The wilderness style trail that begins on HRM land and is readily accessible from Purcells Road presents many spectacular and unusual vistas, surely an asset to citizens and visitors to HRM.

This description of the NSNT lands in Purcells Cove holds true for the surrounding area including those parcels owned by HRM. This is shown on the attached 'Ecology Map.' Of particular note is the large wetland surrounding Purcells Pond. HRM has identified the protection of wetlands as essential in their Regional Municipal Planning Strategy. This wetland complex is part of the Purcells Pond watershed, a small but significant watershed that includes the area around Purcells pond and the small stream running from the pond to Purcells Cove in the Northwest Arm. By designating this land as OSNR and PA, HRM in partnership with the NSNT will be able to protect the watershed and ensure a safe and healthy water system including a popular swimming location.



Figure 1: Location Map for HRM and NSNT lands in the Purcells Cove Backlands

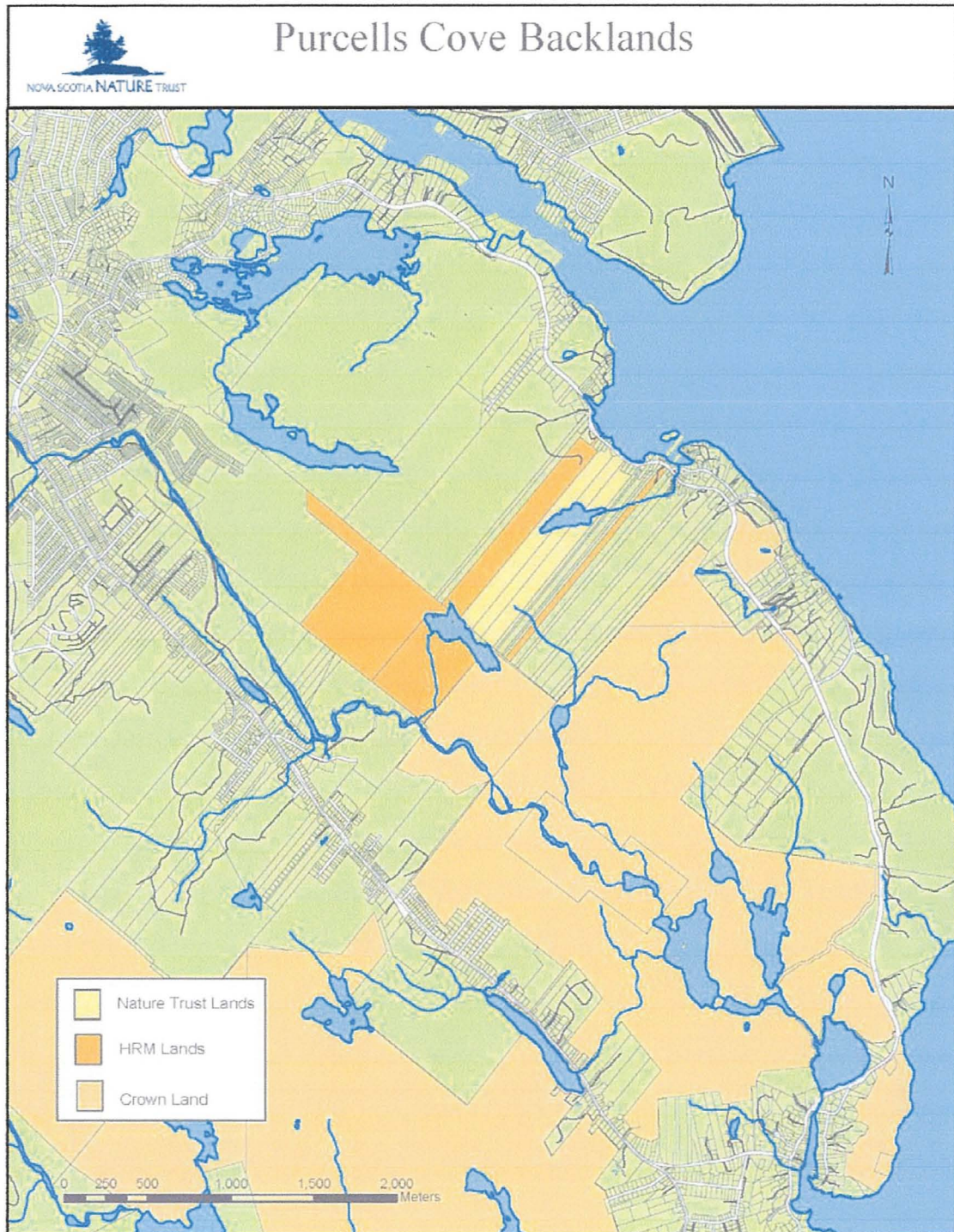






Figure 3: Trail Map of the Purcells Cove Backlands

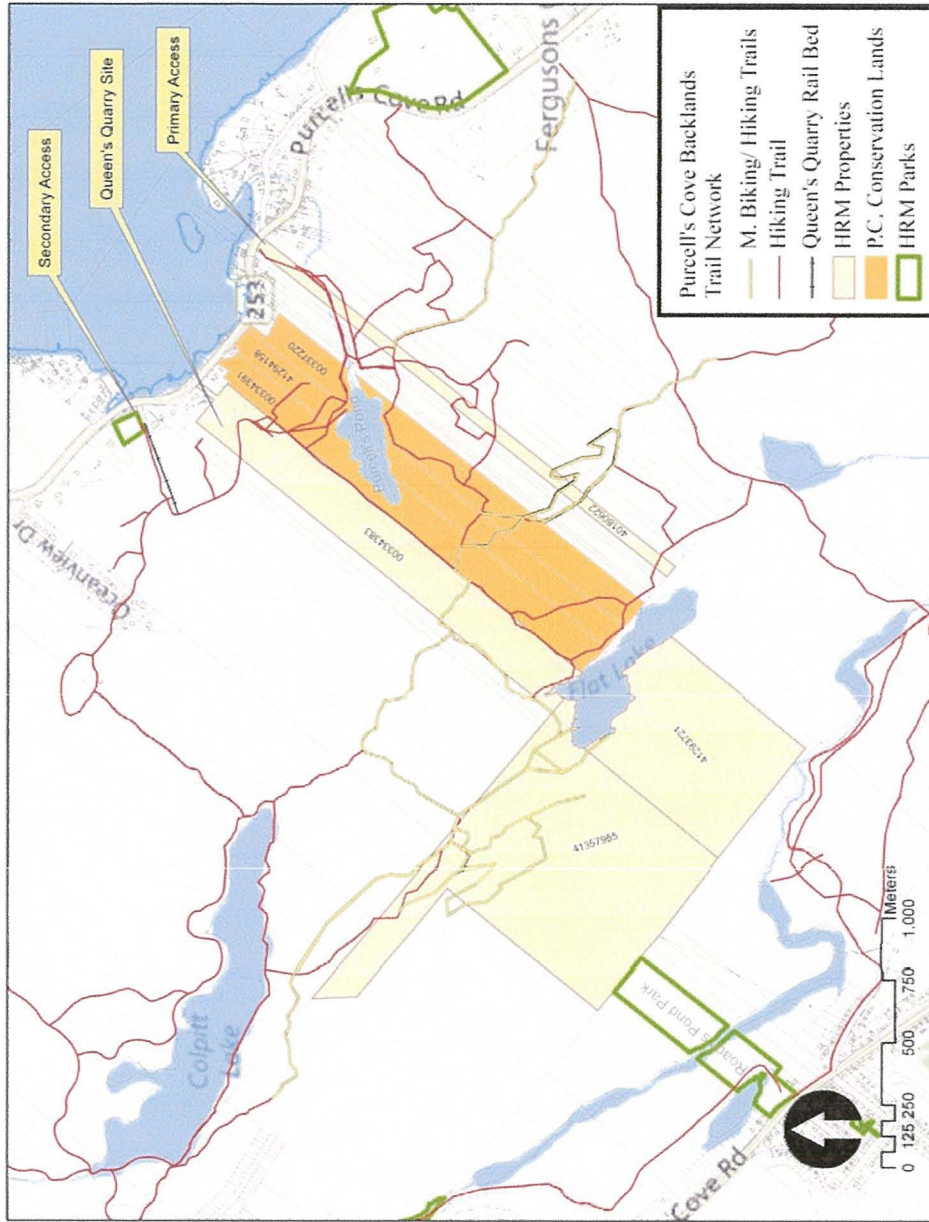
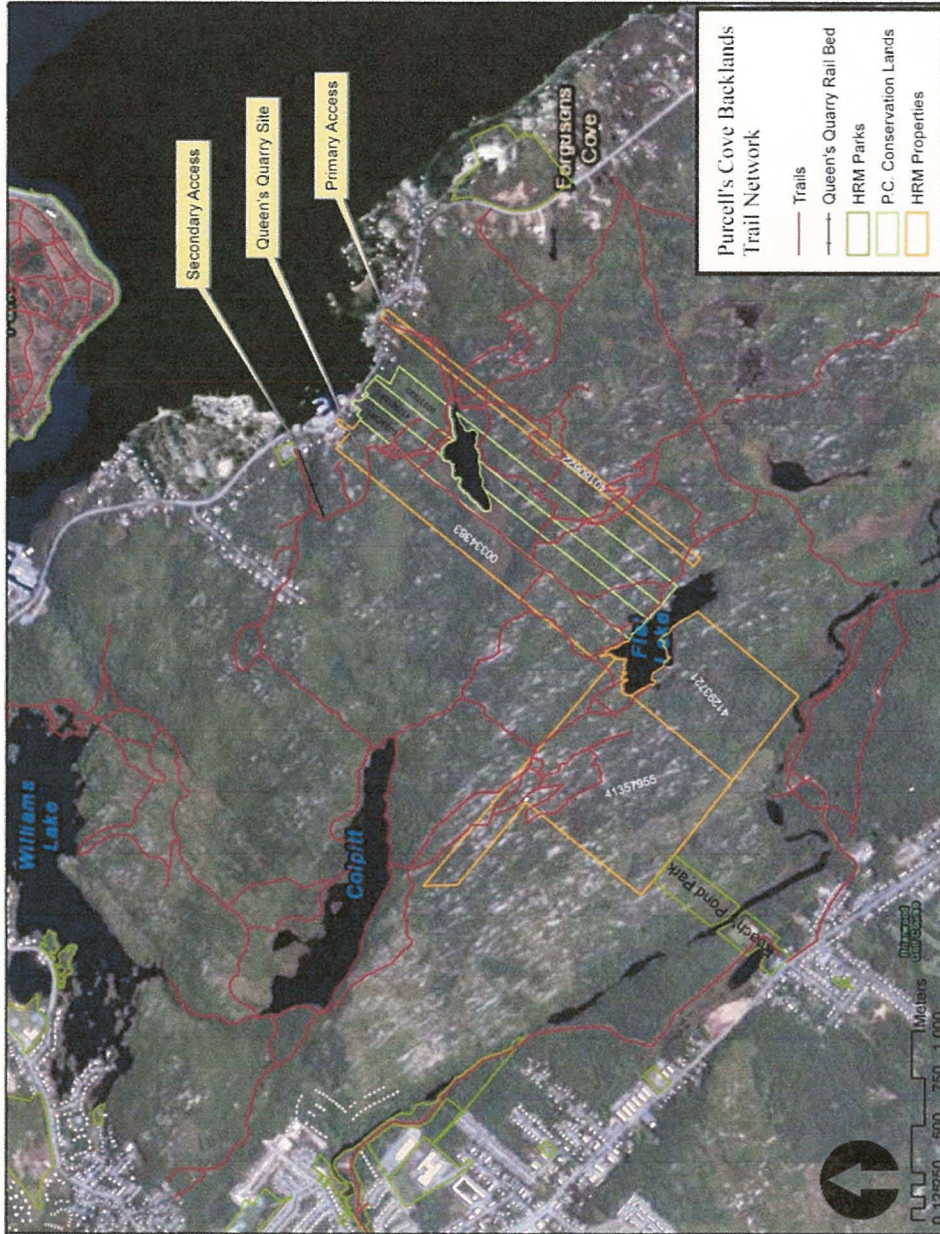




Figure 4: Aerial Map of the Purcells Cove Backlands



## 5 Appendix

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Halifax Regional Municipality  
Regional Plan 5 Year Review

March 29, 2012

To Whom It May Concern,

Through the current Halifax Regional Municipality Regional 5 Year Review (RP+5) process, the Nova Scotia Nature Trust would like to take this opportunity to request a number of changes to the existing land use designations and zoning for a number of our conservation lands situated within HRM.

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust is a not-for-profit land trust that protects and stewards natural lands throughout Nova Scotia, including several properties within Halifax Regional Municipality. Through the Nature Trust these properties are protected in perpetuity as conservation lands.

The Nature Trust's conservation properties within HRM are currently subject to an assortment of land use designations and zoning. We would like to take the opportunity during the review of HRM's regional plan to have these designations changed to reflect the Nature Trust's intentions for these properties. The properties in question are:

### **SHELTER COVE**

The Shelter Cove Conservation Lands consists of two parcels (PIDs 00554410, and 40547499) situated near Tangier, along the Eastern Shore. Currently these lands are zoned as RE (Rural Enterprise) by the Land Use By-Law for Eastern Shore East, and are designated as RR (Rural Reserve) by the Regional Plan.

### **MUSQUODOBOIT HARBOUR**

The Musquodoboit Harbour Conservation Lands consist of eight parcels (PIDs 00449330, 00591404, 40590069, 40590044, 40590036, 40590028, 40590010, and 40552465) situated on Ostrea Lake Road, Musquodoboit Harbour. Currently these lands are designated as RC (Rural Commuter) by the Regional Plan, and are zoned PA (Protected Area) by the Land Use By-Law for Eastern Shore West.

### **PURCELLS COVE**

The Purcells Cove Conservation Lands consist of two parcels (PIDs 00334391 and 41294158), situated off the Purcells Cove Road. Currently these lands are designated as UR (Urban Reserve) by the Regional Plan, and are zoned as UR (Urban Reserve) by the Land Use By-Law for Halifax Mainland.

Through the current review of HRM's Regional Plan the Nature Trust requests that the designation of these properties in the Regional Plan are changed to OSNR (Open Space Natural Resource).

Additionally, the Nature Trust requests that the zoning for each of these properties are changed to PA (Protected Area) in accordance with Land Use By-Laws for HRM. As the Nature Trust is a not-for-profit conservation organization, I refer you to policy E-6 of the Regional Municipality Planning Strategy, which we believe supports this designation.

*"E-6 Within the Open Space and Natural Resource Designation, HRM shall, through the applicable land use by-law, establish a Protected Area Zone. This Zone shall be applied to wilderness areas which have been designated under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act, nature reserves designated under the Special Places Protection Act, and conservation-related properties owned by government or private conservation organizations. The Zone shall only permit scientific study and education, trails and similar public, conservation and recreational uses."*

The Nature believes the designation of OSNR (Open Space Natural Resource) and PA (Protected Area) zoning for our conservation lands better reflects the natural value of these properties.

#### **HRM LANDS AT PURCELLS COVE**

On behalf of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, I would also like to take this opportunity to request that HRM designate its properties (PIDs 00334383, 41357955, 41293721, and 40180622), located at Purcell's Cove, and adjacent to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust's Purcell Cove Conservation Land as OSNR (Open Space Natural Resource) and PA (Protected Area). This assemblage of properties would create an urban wilderness reserve in an area that is likely to experience significant urban growth in the future, providing current and future residents with excellent recreational opportunities.

Furthermore, by protecting these parcels HRM will leverage additional protected area space through connectivity with the Nature Trust Conservation Lands. By taking advantage of such a partnership HRM can create a larger urban wilderness space than if they were to acquire and protect land on their own. The Nature Trust would also be interested in partnering with the HRM to design and develop a trail network in this area that integrates potential surrounding development.

This designation would occur at an opportune time for HRM. With the water and sewer extension feasibility studies occurring presently for the Purcells Cove community accompanied by local concerns about development, this is an excellent time to plan sustainable development in this part of HRM. This wilderness designation would help reassure local residence about future land use plans.

#### **MOODY LAKE**

Please note the Nova Scotia Nature Trust owns four lots on Moody Lake that are NOT conservation lands and the Nature Trust does NOT want these lands rezoned.

Please let me know if you need further information to process this request.

Kind Regards,



Alice Morgan  
Land Stewardship Coordinator  
Nova Scotia Nature Trust