



## Bluff Trail Stewardship Program (BTSP) Year in Review 2020

WRWEO respectfully acknowledges that we are located in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded and unsundered ancestral land of the Mi'kmaq (L'nu). We are all treaty people.

### Background

Completed in 2005, **The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail** was constructed by the Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization (WRWEO) under a letter of authority from the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forestry (DLF). The trail runs through ecologically sensitive barrens, reaches into the dwindling habitat of the endangered mainland moose and broom crowberry, a coastal plain species threatened elsewhere. The purpose of the trail was to allow the public to become aware of the extraordinary natural assets of this area, in the belief that awareness was the first step in protection. In 2011, the Province designated Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*. However, by 2015, the trail and the wilderness area were showing signs of distress. As a result of the significant increase in the volume of visitors, there was an alarming increase in harmful human impacts. Visitors expressed concern and disappointment about the damage caused by the ever-widening trail, the increased amount of garbage, toilet paper, and human waste in the area, harm caused by inappropriate camping, the cutting of trees, and the damage to the soil surface and tree canopy caused by campfires. These observations were reiterated in the annual trail inspections performed by Department of Lands and Forestry staff.

Now entering its fifth season, the BTSP is a joint project of the Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization (WRWEO) and the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association (SMBSA). With support from the Nova Scotia Environment – Protected Areas and Ecosystems Branch, and contributions from individuals, the program seeks to decrease the number and severity of harmful human impacts and to ensure the careful and responsible management of The Bluff Trail and the surrounding area.

2020 was a year that brought many challenges. One of those challenges was a decreased accessibility for funding and **the Bluff Trail Stewardship Program (BTSP)** was not immune to these effects. The lack of funding reduced the capacity to pay dedicated program

staff, resulting in generally reduced capacity of the program. However, the BTSP carried out another successful year of engaging with the community, spreading awareness on the impacts that the trail faces, and reducing and remediating harms enacted upon the trail and surrounding Wilderness Area.

The following **Year in Review (YIR) Report** offers an overview of the **Bluff Trail Stewardship Program** from January to December 2020.

**020 Approximate Contributions & Program Valuation**

<b>Initial Program Funding</b>		<b>\$15,200.00</b>
Private Contributions from supporters of BTSP, WRWEO, and SMBSA	\$5,200.00	
Nova Scotia Environment	\$10,000	
<b>Additional Funding</b>		<b>\$14,392.00</b>
Canada Summer Jobs Program	\$14,392.00	
<b>In-Kind Contributions</b>		<b>\$44,308.50</b>
On-Trail Labour	\$29,081.20	
Off-Trail Labour	\$15,227.30	
Materials & Equipment	\$100.00	
<b>2020 BTSP Approximate Total Program Value</b>		<b>\$74,000.50</b>

2017-2020 BTSP Approximate Total Program Value \$275,925.50



Photo by Mike Lancaster, Summer Stewardship Assistants and Trail Stewards at work

## BTSP by the Numbers: 2020

During its fourth year of operation, the Bluff Trail Stewardship Program:

### Trained

**4 BTSP Stewards** – an average of 1 BTSP Stewards trained every 3 months

### Collected

**204 Reports** from BTSP Stewards, staff, and other trail users – an average of 17 per month documenting:

**137 Days** of BTSP Stewardship Presence on the trail – an average of over 11 days per month

13 Days with presence in the wider Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area (FBLWA)

27 Days with presence on Hay Marsh Loop

47 Days with presence on Bluff Loop

87 Days with presence on Mi'kmaw Hill Loop

131 Days with presence on Pot Lake Loop

**2525 Hours** of BTSP Stewardship Presence on the trail – an average of 210.4 hours/month  
1,191 hours (47%) were paid and 1,334 hours (53%) were volunteer hours

### Observed

**3,845 People Observed & 1,801 People Engaged** – 47% of visitors observed on the trail

**511 Dogs Observed** on the trail – approximately 56% of the dogs observed were off leash

Approximately 44% of the dogs observed were on leash

Approximately 26% of the dogs observed were disturbing other users and/or the environment

### Monitored

The four Leave No Trace (LNT) Educational Camping Sites were regularly checked on:

Coyote/U'lukwej was checked on **80** times – on average, almost seven times per month

Crow/Ka'qaquj was checked on **80** times – on average, almost seven times per month

Squirrel/Atutu'wej was checked on **24** times – on average, once per month

Moose/Tia'm was checked on **14** times – on average, approximately once per month

## Remediated

**An estimated 50+ trail spur barriers** constructed/refurbished, and **275+ trail braiding barriers** constructed/refurbished, **30+ fire pits** remediated - a 50% increase from last year, **3+ fallen trees** removed, **4+ trail widening barriers** constructed/refurbished, **22** areas of boardwalk repaired, **dozens of** way markers repainted or replaced

## Generated

More than **\$44,308.50** in donated volunteer labour<sup>1</sup>, materials, and equipment:  
\$29,081.20 of on-trail labour + \$15,227.30 Off-trail Labour + \$100.00 M&E

On average, the program generated more than \$2,423.43 per month of on-trail labour (paid and unpaid), \$1,268.94.00 per month of off-trail labour and \$8.33 per month of donated materials and equipment. **A total average monthly value of \$3,692.38**

SMBSA and WRWEO wish to express their sincere appreciation for the collaboration with the Nova Scotia Environment and CLimate Change: Protected Areas and Ecosystems Branch, and the support of Canada Summer Jobs Program, and the many individual donors who have made the BTSP possible. We are especially grateful to the volunteers who have given so generously of their time to help ensure the continued careful and responsible management of The Bluff Trail and the surrounding area.

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<sup>1</sup> WRWEO calculates the value of volunteer labour according to the 2015 study, *Working for a Living, Not Living for Work*, released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Nova Scotia in partnership with United Way – Halifax. The report used the Canadian Living Wage Framework to calculate the living wage for Halifax at \$20.10/hr.

## BTSP Comparison 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020

	2017	2018	2019	2020	Average*	Above Average**
Number of Stewards Trained	40	52	14	4	27	
Number of Reports Collected	180	198	223	204	201	✓
Days of Presence on trail and/or in FBLWA	130	151	158	137	144	
Days of Presence on Pot Lake Loop	121	137	149	131	134	
Days of Presence on Mi'kmaw Hill Loop	70	58	71	87	71	✓
Days of Presence on Bluff Loop	34	39	27	47	36	✓
Days of Presence on Hay Marsh Loop	25	30	19	27	25	✓
Hours of Presence on trail and/or in FBLWA	1757	2443	1853	2525	2144.5	
Check-Ins at Coyote/U'lukwej	38	49	58	80	56	✓
Check-Ins at Crow/Ka'qaquj	36	54	58	80	57	✓
Check-Ins at Squirrel/Atutu'wej	14	14	12	24	16	✓
Check-Ins at Moose/Tia'm	11	8	14	14	11	✓
Illegal fire pits remediated	53	30	20	30	33	✓
People Observed	3045	2773	3702	3845	3341	
People Engaged	1181	1024	2013	1801	1504	
Percentage of Observed People Engaged	39%	37%	54%	47%	44%	✓
Dogs Observed	562	414	662	511	537	
Percentage of dogs off-leash	63%	48%	46%	56%	53%	✓
Approximate total In-Kind Contributions	\$38,000.00	\$36,000.00	\$17,354.00	\$44,308.50	\$33,915.63	✓
Approximate In-Kind Labour On Trail	\$23,744.00	\$30,652.00	\$14,160.00	\$29,081.20	\$24,409.30	✓
Approximate In-Kind Labour Off Trail	\$13,453.00	\$5,162.00	\$3,073.00	\$15,227.30	\$9,228.83	✓
Approximate In-Kind Materials & Equipment	\$1,170.00	\$342.00	\$120.00	\$100.00	\$433.00	
Approximate Total Program Value	\$70,000.00	\$81,000.00	\$50,925.00	\$74,000.50	\$68,981.38	✓

\*Averages are based on every year of the program's existence, including the immediate year of the report.

\*\*Above average means that a performance that was better than the established average performance.

Sometimes this means a high number - i.e. number of visitors engaged - and sometimes it means a lower number - i.e. number of illegal fire pits remediated.

## Data Analysis

Due to the inconsistencies of funding and circumstance, achieving an accurate method of informed comparison of the data from the BTSP over the years can be difficult. However, as the fourth year of the program has come to a close, there are many categories for which data is collected that can be used to determine trends, issues, and the subsequent assignment of priorities for the coming year.

Though there were only 142 more people observed on the trail from 2019 to 2020 this does not take into account the fact that the BTSP did not receive reports for roughly two months of the year. This is due to the fact that the trail parking lot, a municipally-owned property, was officially closed during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. With this in mind, it is reasonable to estimate that an additional 16% of trail visitors may have been observed had this not been the case.

2020 brought many new people out of the city to explore the beauty of near-Halifax Protected Areas. One of the results was an increase of visitors who may not be familiar with the laws that apply to Protected Areas, or the general tenets of how we can harm nature through our use. An example of this effect being represented in the data is the large, 50% increase in the number of illegal fire pits remediated from 2019 to 2020, the first time that this number increased in the program's history. Now that many new people are developing a connection to nature and the Bluff Trail it is perhaps more essential than ever to ensure that the BTSP continues to support a robust system of visitor engagement, education, and collaboration, providing an effective avenue for the reduction of our impacts.

BTSP continues to take a relatively small amount of base funding and multiplies its value, generating over a quarter of a million dollars of total program value within its first four years. In order to maintain this momentum, it is essential that funding for the program remains consistent and paid program coordination can continue.

This document contains a brief summary of the data analysis but WRWEO is committed to producing a more in depth report that specifically analyzes and compares the data of previous years within 2021.