



Bluff Trail Stewardship Program (BTSP) Year in Review 2021

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, reaching 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, abuse, and over-use. 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 Natural Resources and Renewables staff.

Now entering its sixth 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 and Climate Change – 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.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to the stewardship of the trail. One of those challenges was a general decreased accessibility for funding **the Bluff Trail Stewardship Program (BTSP)**. The reduced funding capacity to pay dedicated program staff,

resulted in generally reduced capacity of the program. However, the BTSP has 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 2021.

020 Approximate Contributions & Program Valuation

Initial Program Funding		\$17,035.00
Private Contributions from supporters of BTSP, WRWEO, and SMBSA	\$7,035.00	
Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change	\$10,000	
Additional Funding		\$16,466.00
Canada Summer Jobs Program	\$16,466.00	
In-kind Contributions		\$48,614.24
On-Trail Labour Value (minus monetary funding)	\$40,522.23	
Off-Trail Labour and Services	\$7,942.01	
Materials & Equipment	\$150.00	
2021 BTSP Approximate Total Program Value		\$82,115.24

2017-2021 BTSP Approximate Total Program Value \$358,040.74



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

BTSP by the Numbers: 2021

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

Trained

26 BTSP Stewards – an average of 2 BTSP Stewards trained every months

Collected

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

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

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

48 Days with presence on Hay Marsh Loop

56 Days with presence on Bluff Loop

81 Days with presence on Mi'kmaw Hill Loop

123 Days with presence on Pot Lake Loop

2580.25 Hours of BTSP Stewardship Presence on the trail – an average of 215 hours/month
1,054.25 hours (41%) were paid and 1,526 hours (59%) were volunteer hours

Observed

3,805 People Observed & 1,378 People Engaged – **36%** of visitors observed on the trail

496 Dogs Observed on the trail – approximately 24% of the dogs observed were off leash

Approximately 76% of the dogs observed were on leash

Approximately 3% 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 **90** times – on average, over seven times per month

Crow/Ka'qaquj was checked on **90** times – on average, over seven times per month

Squirrel/Atutu'wej was checked on **33** times – on average, almost 3 times per month

Moose/Tia'm was checked on **45** times – on average, almost 4 times per month

Remediated

An estimated 314+ trail spur, widening, and braiding barriers constructed/refurbished

30+ fire pits remediated - a maintenance of the dramatic increase from 2019-2020, **12+ fallen trees**

removed, **entire section of first boardwalk replaced** with repairs for the other two sections, **dozens of**
way markers repainted or replaced

Generated

More than **\$41,762.36** in donated volunteer labour¹, materials, and equipment:
\$33,670.35 of on-trail labour + \$7,942.01 Off-trail Labour + \$150 of materials and equipment

On average, the program generated **a total value of at least \$56,894.51**, more than **\$4,741.21 per month** of on-trail labour (paid and unpaid), \$661.83 per month of off-trail labour and \$12.5 per month of donated materials and equipment. **An annual total of \$82,115.24 with a monthly average of \$6,842.94.**

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.

¹ WRWEO calculates the value of volunteer labour according to the 2021 study, *Working for a Living, Not Living for Work* 2021, 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 \$22.05/hr.

BTSP Data Comparison 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Average*	Above Average**
Number of Stewards Trained	40	52	14	4	26	27	
Number of Reports Collected	180	198	223	204	203	201	✓
Days of Presence on trail and/or in FBLWA	130	151	158	137	138	143	
Days of Presence on Pot Lake Loop	121	137	149	131	123	132	
Days of Presence on Mi'kmaw Hill Loop	70	58	71	87	81	73	✓
Days of Presence on Bluff Loop	34	39	27	47	56	41	✓
Days of Presence on Hay Marsh Loop	25	30	19	27	48	30	✓
Hours of Presence on trail and/or in FBLWA	1757	2443	1853	2525	2580	2232	✓
Check-Ins at Coyote/U'lukwej	38	49	58	80	90	63	✓
Check-Ins at Crow/Ka'qaquj	36	54	58	80	90	64	✓
Check-Ins at Squirrel/Atutu'wej	14	14	12	24	33	19	✓
Check-Ins at Moose/Tia'm	11	8	14	14	45	18	✓
Illegal fire pits remediated	53	30	20	30	30	33	✓
People Observed	3045	2773	3702	3845	3850	3343	N/A
People Engaged	1181	1024	2013	1801	1378	1479	
Percentage of Observed People Engaged	39%	37%	54%	47%	36%	43%	
Dogs Observed	562	414	662	511	496	529	
Percentage of dogs off-leash	63%	48%	46%	56%	24%	47%	✓
Approximate total In-Kind Contributions	\$38,000	\$36,000	\$17,354	\$44,309	\$41,762	\$35,485	✓
Approximate In-Kind Labour On Trail	\$23,744	\$30,652	\$14,160	\$29,081.2	\$33,670.4	\$26,261.5	✓
Approximate In-Kind Labour Off Trail	\$13,453	\$5,162	\$3,073	\$15,227.3	\$7,942	\$8,971.5	
Approximate In-Kind Materials & Equipment	\$1,170	\$342	\$120	\$100.00	\$150	\$376.4	
Approximate Total Program Value	\$70,000	\$81,000	\$50,925	\$74,000.5	\$82,115.2	\$71,608	✓

*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 fifth 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges for 2020 and 2021; people left 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 and maintained in 2021. The former represents the first time that this number increased in the program's history and it was maintained in the latter. 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.

With an increase in use and abuse on the rise on the trail taken into account, there was a heavy focus on checking in on the LNT sites in order to remediate damages as quickly as possible. However, this resulted in a reduced prioritization of engagement, which has been reflected in this years' data.

Perhaps one of the most interesting elements of the data from 2021 is the rather dramatic decrease of dogs that are both off leash and disturbing the environment or users. I take this as a sign that we are becoming more successful in getting the community educated about the impacts of dogs and our request to have them leashed.

BTSP continues to take a relatively small amount of base funding and multiply its value. It is estimated that the program will have generated over half of one million dollars of total value by the end of 2023. 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 engages in more fulsome dissection, review, and data-driven planning and management using the data displayed here as well as that which is not.