



Bluff Trail Stewardship Program (BTSP) Year in Review 2022

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, now the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables). The trail runs through ecologically sensitive barrens, reaching into the dwindling habitat of the critically endangered mainland moose, and broom crowberry, a coastal plain species threatened globally. 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 in its seventh season, the BTSP continues to be 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 large increase of new users to the trail and subsequent

rise in illegal and harmful activities. 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 2022.

Contributions & Program Valuation

Initial Program Funding (2022)		\$16,932.00
Private Contributions from supporters of BTSP, WRWEO, and SMBSA	\$8,932.00	
Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change	\$8,000	
Additional Funding		\$16,731.00
Canada Summer Jobs Program	\$16,731.00	
In-kind Contributions		\$54,679.16
On-Trail Labour Value (minus monetary funding)	\$50,014.41	
Off-Trail Labour and Services	\$4,664.75	
Materials & Equipment	\$250.00	

Table 1

2022 BTSP Approximate Total Program Value **\$88,342.16**

2017-2022 BTSP Approximate Total Program Value Generated **\$446,382.90**



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

BTSP by the Numbers: 2022

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

Trained

28 BTSP Stewards – an average of over 2 BTSP Stewards trained every months

Collected

186 Reports from BTSP Stewards, staff, and other trail users – an average of over 15 per month documenting:

143 Days of BTSP Stewardship Presence on the trail – an average of 12 days per month

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

39 Days with presence on Hay Marsh Loop

51 Days with presence on Bluff Loop

98 Days with presence on Mi'kmaw Hill Loop

140 Days with presence on Pot Lake Loop

2842.23 Hours of BTSP Stewardship Presence on the trail and broader Wilderness Area – an average of over 236 hours/month

970.75 hours (34%) were paid and 1,871.48 hours (66%) were volunteer hours

Observed

3,223 People Observed & 1,530 People Engaged – 47% of visitors observed on the trail

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

Approximately 44% of the dogs observed were on leash

Approximately 10% 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, almost twice a week

Crow/Ka'qaquj was checked on **90** times – on average, almost twice a week

Squirrel/Atutu'wej was checked on **24** times – on average, twice a month

Moose/Tia'm was checked on **28** times – on average, over twice a month

Remediated

An estimated 400+ trail spur, widening, and braiding barriers constructed/refurbished

25+ fire pits remediated - a drop from the high numbers of 2020 and 2021, **20+ fallen trees** removed, repairs for the two smaller boardwalk sections, **dozens** of trail markers repainted or replaced

Generated

More than **\$54,679.16** in donated volunteer labour¹, materials, and equipment:
\$50,014.41 in on-trail labour + \$4,664.75 in off-trail Labour + \$250 of materials and equipment

The program generated **an approximate total value of at least \$88,342.16**, more than **\$5,895 per month** of on-trail labour (paid and unpaid), \$638.73 per month of off-trail labour, and \$20 per month of donated materials and equipment. **An annual total of \$88,342.16 with a monthly average of \$7,361.85.**

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 2022 study, *Working for a Living, Not Living for Work* 2022, 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 \$23.50/hr.

BTSP Data Comparison 2017-2022

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Average *	Above Average* *
Number of Stewards Trained	40	52	14	4	26	28	27	✓
Number of Reports Collected	180	198	223	204	203	186	199	
Days of Presence on trail and/or in FBLWA	130	151	158	137	138	143	143	✓
Days of Presence on Pot Lake Loop	121	137	149	131	123	140	134	✓
Days of Presence on Mi'kmaw Hill Loop	70	58	71	87	81	98	78	✓
Days of Presence on Bluff Loop	34	39	27	47	56	51	42	✓
Days of Presence on Hay Marsh Loop	25	30	19	27	48	39	31	✓
Hours of Presence on trail and/or in FBLWA	1757	2443	1853	2525	2580	2842	2333	✓
Check-Ins at Coyote/U'lukwej	38	49	58	80	90	90	68	✓
Check-Ins at Crow/Ka'qaquj	36	54	58	80	90	90	68	✓
Check-Ins at Squirrel/Atutu'wej	14	14	12	24	33	24	20	✓
Check-Ins at Moose/Tia'm	11	8	14	14	45	28	19	✓
Illegal fire pits remediated	53	30	20	30	30	23	31	✓
People Observed	3045	2773	3702	3845	3850	3223	3406	N/A
People Engaged	1181	1024	2013	1801	1378	1530	1488	✓
Percentage of Observed People Engaged	39%	37%	54%	47%	36%	47%	43%	✓
Dogs Observed	562	414	662	511	496	456	516	N/A
Percentage of dogs off-leash (changed to 'Causing Harm' in 2021)	63%	48%	46%	56%	24%	11%	41%	✓
Approximate total In-Kind Contributions	\$38,000	\$36,000	\$17,354	\$44,309	\$41,762	\$54,670	\$38,683	✓
Approximate In-Kind Labour On Trail	\$23,744	\$30,652	\$14,160	\$29,081	\$33,670	\$50,014	\$30,219	✓
Approximate In-Kind Labour Off Trail	\$13,453	\$5,162	\$3,073	\$15,227	\$7,942	\$4,664	\$8,253	
Approximate In-Kind Materials & Equipment	\$1,170	\$342	\$120	\$100	\$150	\$250	\$355	
Approximate Total Program Value	\$70,000	\$81,000	\$50,925	\$74,000	\$82,115	\$88,342	\$74,397	✓

Table 2

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

**Above average means 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. As noted in Table 2, we also will periodically change how we use our data to determine the scope of issues as well as our level of success. However, as the sixth 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 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional challenges to the Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail; 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. Fortunately, we have seen this number drop in 2022. 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.

One of the most positive trends that we continue to see reflected in our data is the ongoing decrease of dogs that are disturbing the environment or users. We 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.