

Picking up garbage, one island at a time



Volunteers returned to the mainland at the end of the day, along with 1450 kg of garbage.

(Janet Wallace photos)

by Janet Wallace

A cruise to three uninhabited islands – what a way to appreciate a July day in the Maritimes! This was no expensive jaunt on a crowded ship with the ambiance of a shopping mall; it was much better. I had the chance to explore three islands that few people have ever visited. I had the satisfaction of doing a good deed. And the cruise was “all inclusive” – granola bars, juice, home-made cookies, and work gloves were provided during the day, and a pizza dinner followed. The event was fun and free. It was the “Fundy Isles Cruise and Clean,” organized by two charitable organizations: Nature Trust of New Brunswick and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC).

I boarded a barge in the morning, at L’Etete, New Brunswick, near St. George, with two-dozen volunteers and a few employees of the host organizations. The weather was incredible – clear blue sky, a slight breeze, and a remarkably warm temperature.

We visited three small islands in Passamaquoddy Bay. One is owned by the NCC, another is owned by the

Nature Trust, and the third is owned privately but managed under a conservation easement with the NCC. The islands provide habitat for sea birds and migratory shore birds. While traveling between islands we saw sea birds, including large rafts (floating flocks)

of eiders. A few Harbor porpoises skipped in and out of the waves next to the barge. In the distance, harbor seals basked on rocks near the shoreline.

We collected a tonne of garbage, literally. It had all been washed clean by the waves and the job was enjoyable, not



This painting of a local ship was found washed up on the beach.

nasty smelly work as you might think when you hear “garbage clean-up.” At one site, the beautiful aroma of a huge hedge of *Rosa rugosa* mingled with the salty smell of the sea. We put garbage in bags and dragged the larger items to a central spot. While a couple of volunteers traveled on the small boat to load the garbage onto the barge, the rest of us explored the islands.

One island was shaped like an hourglass – a sandbar in the middle separated two coves. Seaweed tossed in storms was found in the centre. We talked about the increase in sea levels and wondered how long it would be before the island was split into two.

We found a few strange things. I was amazed to find three light bulbs that had been tossed ashore completely intact. We found a painting of a ship



Nylon rope accounted for much of the garbage. Rope poses a threat to many forms of aquatic life. Endangered species of sea turtles and whales, for example, have been found carrying heavy loads of tangled rope.

on a carved piece of wood. One of the volunteers, who worked as a lighthouse keeper, recognized the boat. But almost all the garbage was plastic or Styrofoam

and much of it was waste from the fishing and aquaculture industry. Some may have been litter thrown away or accidentally dropped overboard; other

Nature Conservancy of Canada and Nature Trusts

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has helped protect 2.6 million acres of land throughout Canada, including 54,000 acres in the Atlantic provinces. New Brunswick, P.E.I., and Nova Scotia each have a separate Nature Trust. (The Newfoundland and Labrador Legacy Nature Trust was terminated in 2009.)

The NCC and the Nature Trusts operate in similar ways. They both protect ecologically sensitive land – some that they own, and some privately-owned parcels protected under conservation agreements. Once a piece of land is acquired, a group might contact the neighboring landowners to see if they are willing to transfer management of their properties. Land is protected by the groups in the following ways:

Donations: People donate both land and money to the NCC and Nature Trusts. Individuals can donate land to these organizations and receive a tax-deductible receipt. Landowners sometimes subdivide the land, keeping or selling the house but donating the rest of the land. If the land is considered ecologically sensitive, the donation can be considered an ecological gift. This has various tax benefits including a lack of taxable capital gains on the transfer of the property and fewer restrictions on the donation. For details, click the Environment Canada link at AtlanticFarmer.com and search for the Ecological Gifts Program.

Purchases: The groups use donations of money to buy ecologically sensitive land at reduced or market value. At times, but not often, an organization will sell donated land that has little ecological significance but high market value to buy land with a greater ecological value.

Conservation agreements: Landowners can sign a conservation agreement, also called a conservation easement, to allow the organization to manage their land (or part of their land). The landowners can continue to live on (and use) the land but under certain restrictions – these vary depending on the ecological features of the land and the interests of the landowner. The reduction in the value of the land due to the easement is considered a donation.

Combined methods: Landowners can combine these methods. For example, they might sell part of the land to the organization and donate the rest. Another option is to sell the property to the organization for less than market value and the difference in value would be considered a donation.

Other options: Each Maritime province offers its own land trust arrangements, such as Nova Scotia’s Special Places Act and New Brunswick’s Protected Natural Areas Program. There are also non-profit land trust organizations that protect farmland or forestland.



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garbage was part of the structures of salmon pens or lobster traps that had broken apart in storms.

Such beach clean-ups can help wildlife. Most of the garbage we collected can pose threats to wildlife. Garbage bags, for example, can be swallowed by sea turtles that mistake them for jellyfish. Whales, turtles, and other creatures could have become snared by the miles of nylon rope we picked up. Particles of Styrofoam and plastic can become ingested by sea birds, fish, and other marine life. Not only do these substances clog up the digestive passages, but they can also release toxins, such as PCBs, while they break down in the bodies of animals.

A month later, I was involved in another NCC clean-up. The New Horton Garbage Grab took place close to my home, about midway between Fundy

Save the date

The Nature Conservancy and the Nature Trust organizations invite volunteers to participate in educational events and environmental stewardship projects and, in doing so, explore protected land. For example, at Nature Conservancy events in Atlantic Canada, volunteers have planted seedlings to provide cover for Piping plovers, removed the invasive Glossy buckthorn, planted trees, and recorded bird numbers.

Upcoming volunteer opportunities include:

Sept. 8: Tabusintac Birding Workshop on the Acadian Peninsula of N.B.

Late summer (date to be confirmed), Beach Clean-up on Pendleton Island, Fundy Isles region of N.B.

Sept. 29-30: Hike the St. Mary's River. Exploring nature near Sherbrooke, N.S.

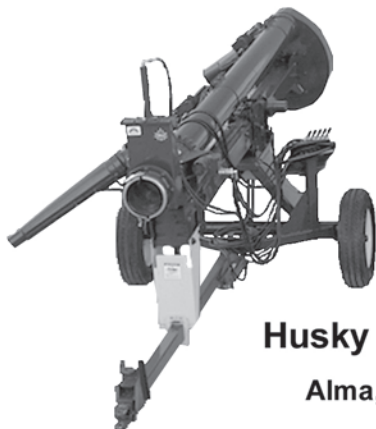
November (date to be confirmed), Fourth Annual Wild for Waterfowl monitoring event in Port Joli Harbour, N.S. ●



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Volunteers enjoying their day at the beach while helping to create a cleaner and healthier shoreline.

National Park and Riverside-Albert, N.B. Before the land was transferred to the NCC, a nearby household used a ravine as their household dump. A stream ran along the bottom of the gully, carrying garbage and its runoff to a nearby river, and eventually the Bay of Fundy.

Volunteers talked and laughed as we pulled garbage from the soil. Some of the waste was amusing. We found clothes from the 1970s; the gaudy colors and the polyester fabric were undamaged from the decades of burial. One of the volunteers had grown up in the

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Land trust organizations

Nature Conservancy of Canada:
Call 1-800-465-0029 toll-free.
To visit the website, follow the Nature Conservancy link on AtlanticFarmer.com.

Island Nature Trust: Phone 902-892-7513 or 902-566-9150, or follow the Island Nature Trust link on AtlanticFarmer.com.

Nature Trust of New Brunswick: Call 506-457-2398 or click the Nature Trust N.B. link on AtlanticFarmer.com.

Nova Scotia Nature Trust: Phone 902-425-5263, or toll-free 877-434-5263. Access the website from the N.S. Nature Trust link on AtlanticFarmer.com. ●



Waste associated with salmon farming was found on the beach, including nylon feed bags and hollow plastic pipes that were once part of the structure of the pen.

nearby house and recognized her Barbie dolls and skates. Much of the waste was packaging – bottles, plastic shopping bags, bread bags, and food cans. Fortunately, a lot of this waste is now being diverted from landfills (private and municipal) by recycling programs.

The importance of our work was made clear when we removed partially full but rusty cans of paint and turpentine. If they were in the ground for another year or so, their toxic contents would likely leak into the stream. At one point, I found a Redback salamander hiding in a broken bottle – a good reminder of who we were working for. We weren't just cleaning up my neighborhood – we were removing hazardous waste from the habitat of many creatures.

Household dumps are ubiquitous in the Maritimes and our clean-up was just a drop in the bucket of the work that needs to be done. However, clean-up events allow people to learn about their environment and develop a sense of stewardship and responsibility. Ironically, we can strengthen our connection with nature while cleaning up the mess made by humans.

After a morning of clearing junk, we walked to a nearby beach. While we ate lunch, a Peregrine falcon flew overhead and the sun glistened on the waves.

The clean-ups highlight some of the things I love about the Maritimes: the natural beauty, the friendliness of the people, and a love we share for the land. And the fact that we're not afraid to get our hands dirty.

(Janet Wallace lives in New Horton, N.B.) ●



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