



ISLAND NATURE TRUST

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Land Matters Project
Department of Agriculture and Land,
Strategic Policy and Evaluation Division
11 Kent Street, PO Box 2000
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8

Dear Land Matters Advisory Committee,

Island Nature Trust (“INT”) is the oldest private land trust in Atlantic Canada, established in 1979 to protect and conserve natural areas in Prince Edward Island. INT is dedicated to land conservation in PEI through creating a network of protected, robust, representative natural areas and by engaging and supporting a community of like-minded Islanders and organizations in sustainable practices. INT acquires, stewards, and protects natural areas for the benefit of wildlife and people, is a key knowledge provider on land stewardship and wildlife, and works to protect Species-at-Risk in PEI by working with a passionate group of members, volunteers, and local businesses to change impactful human behaviours. In addition, INT advises private landowners seeking to sustainably manage and/or protect their own properties, and delivers numerous immersive outreach opportunities to connect Islanders of all ages to local natural ecosystems.

INT now owns over 5,000 acres, which are protected in perpetuity, including off-shore islands, hardwood, softwood and mixed-wood forests, wetlands, and coastal shores. Our organization operates through our own fund-raising initiatives, including specific project-based proposals to private philanthropic foundations and the federal government. INT is a membership-based registered Canadian charity, operating as a not-for-profit organization and governed by a Board of Directors.

In the most densely populated province in Canada, with 87% of the land mass in private ownership, connectivity of protected natural areas is integral to the retention of healthy, resilient landscapes across PEI. At this time, only 4.4 percent of Island lands are protected, far from the provincial goal of 7 percent and the national goal of 30 percent terrestrial areas protected by 2030. INT recognizes the need to protect additional natural areas in a timely manner, specifically representative, connected natural areas that reduce fragmentation and provide habitat for wildlife while also providing the basic service foundation for our Island economy. This will need to be a collaborative effort by the provincial government, private organizations, and individual Islanders. Through financial support and education, Islanders can be informed of their options in protecting land through the Natural Areas Protection Act to expand the reach of the government and land trusts.

Natural areas provide many benefits to Islanders, including providing resiliency to the impacts of a changing climate. Ecosystem services are the benefits that nature provides to humans and are often divided into four main categories: provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting. Provisioning services range from food and water to medicines and genetic resources. Regulating services include water filtration, pollination, and climate regulation, while cultural ecosystem services consist of recreation, aesthetic value, opportunities for education, and support for mental health and well-being. Ecosystem processes, such as soil formation, nutrient cycling, and biodiversity, are maintained by supporting ecosystem services. A well-known ecosystem service popularized in the media is carbon sequestration and the ability of forests and soils to store carbon. As the province develops a path towards Net Zero by 2040, the protection and enhancement of natural areas to promote carbon sequestration provides a natural solution that benefits all Islanders. INT focuses on enhancing its natural areas through stewardship efforts to promote healthy ecosystems and in turn provide ecosystem services to Islanders. This work helps address declining biodiversity, creates resiliency against climate change impacts, maintains integrated natural carbon sequestration systems, and promotes sustainable decision making across land management and governance scales.

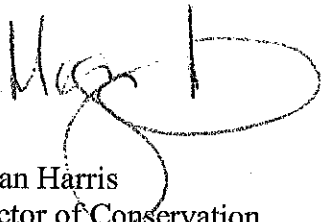
Moving forward, INT recognizes the importance of education, collaboration, and protection of natural areas in providing an Island home that is habitable for both Islanders and wildlife. As biodiversity continues to decline around the globe, with wildlife populations declining an average of 68%, and wild areas continuing to be developed, it is essential that Islanders re-evaluate priorities and recognize the importance of and our dependence on natural ecosystems for a vibrant and thriving future.

Island Nature Trust recommends:

- Prioritization of protected natural areas to a 10 percent provincial target in the short-term through a concentration of resources and political will;
- Identification and protection of representative natural areas and wildlife corridors to reduce fragmentation and support quality wildlife habitat and the promotion of ecosystem services;
- Timely and widespread land-use planning that maintains existing wild/natural areas, limits urban sprawl and that is informed by the identification and strategic retention of functionally meaningful ecosystem service areas in each watershed;
- Removal of incentives that promote practices harmful to the functional integrity of the land and provision of incentives that support best practices in forests, wetlands, coastlines and agricultural lands;
- Consistent, resourced education on the importance of natural ecosystems, native species, and identification of invasive species as well as the Natural Areas Protection Act; and
- Maintaining and enforcing land-holding limits in PEI while encouraging the use of land protection legislation as a mechanism to exempt private lands held and managed for conservation and the provision of ecosystem services.

Our team at Island Nature Trust would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have or discuss these elements further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Megan Harris". The signature is stylized with a large, looping flourish at the end.

Megan Harris
Director of Conservation