



NATURE
CONSERVANCY
CANADA

Conservation Impact Through Partnership

Natural Heritage Conservation Program
2020-2021



ABOUT NCC

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is the country's unifying force for nature.

NCC delivers permanent and significant conservation in collaboration with a diversity of partners, including private landowners, government, Indigenous communities and industry.

Together, we have conserved more than 15 million hectares, equivalent to about 4,000 NHL-sized hockey rinks a day, since 1962!

NCC maximizes impact by working on privately protected areas, complementing Crown-led and Indigenous-led conservation.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

The Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) supports that work. Launched in 2007 as the Natural Areas Conservation Program, this unique public-private partnership mobilizes Canadians to conserve and care for the places they cherish; places that support community resilience in the face of climate change.

The program contributes directly to Canada's ambitious goals of conserving 30 per cent of our land and freshwater by 2030.

NCC is proud to introduce the Natural Heritage Conservation Program Impact Report (2020-21), spotlighting what the partnership has achieved in the past year and since its inception, including:

- Today more than 95 per cent of Canadians live within 100 kilometres of a project conserved through the NHCP.
- Supporting important stewardship work on more than 260,000 hectares, including vital restoration actions that improve carbon sequestration and storage.
- Inspiring more than 350 donations of land from Canadians who care about conservation.

NCC respectfully acknowledges that the work we do across the country is on the traditional territories of many Indigenous Nations and communities, past and present. NCC thanks and honours these original caretakers and acknowledges the ongoing work and presence of Indigenous Peoples in Canada today.

natureconservancy.ca/NHCP

245 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 410
Toronto, Ontario, Canada | M4P 3J1

For questions about the Natural Heritage Conservation Program, contact Paul Hewer, Manager, Government Relations
1-877-231-3552 x. 2268 | paul.hewer@natureconservancy.ca

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A partnership for conservation



This past year and a half has underlined the importance of connecting with nature. As Canadians, we are fortunate to have an abundance of nature in our backyards — a gift that comes with tremendous responsibility to protect and manage it sustainably. Nature across Canada also supports iconic biodiversity and helps fight climate change by storing carbon and making our communities more resilient to its impacts.

Healthy ecosystems are critical to the continued health of all living beings, which is why the Government of Canada is committed to protecting 30% of Canada's land and ocean by 2030.

This year marks the second year of the Natural Heritage Conservation Program. Under the Program, funded through a major investment from the Canada Nature Fund, our government is collaborating with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and its partners to protect even more environmentally sensitive and biodiversity rich lands from coast to coast to coast.

The Government of Canada also works with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and many other partners, through the Ecological Gifts Program, to provide tax incentives to Canadians who donate ecologically sensitive land to qualified organizations. These programs make significant contributions toward our conservation goals.

On behalf of Environment and Climate Change Canada, I congratulate the Nature Conservancy of Canada and its partners for their wildlife habitat conservation and stewardship achievements. I look forward to seeing what we will accomplish in the coming years under these programs.

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, PC, MP

Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Government of Canada
(2019 – 2021)



There has never been a more important time for nature, nor a greater need for conservation. Beyond the pandemic, we face two global crises — rapid biodiversity loss and climate change. That's why conservation matters, now more than ever.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is proud of our partnership with the Government of Canada through the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP). Canada has committed to conserve 30 per cent of its lands and freshwater by 2030 and achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Neither target can be reached without an extraordinary investment in nature conservation. By encouraging Canadians to come together in support of privately protected and conserved areas, the NHCP delivers on those targets with permanent and sizeable results.

The program motivates Canadians to take action, whether by contributing matching funds, or by donating and caring for conserved lands, to ensure that even more of us enjoy the benefits that nature provides.

We thank all our partners, including Ducks Unlimited Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada, the Canadian Land Trust Working Group and local land trusts. We are inspired by the many individual donors and landowners whose generosity fuels our impact. I also want to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Environment and Climate Change Canada for this important investment in nature, part of the Government of Canada's Nature Fund.

Once we emerge from the pandemic, we know we need to accelerate our pace to protect and restore the places we cherish: the lands and waters that support our health and well-being. NCC stands ready to mobilize more Canadians and to double our impact. Nature is the key to a resilient future. When nature thrives, we all thrive.

Catherine Grenier

President & CEO, Nature Conservancy of Canada

Delivering impact

There is an amazing place on the northern side of Manitoulin Island where you can travel the shoreline for nearly 20 kilometres and not see evidence of human activity. Privately owned, undeveloped and uninterrupted Great Lakes shoreline such as this one around Vidal Bay is rare and becoming more so.

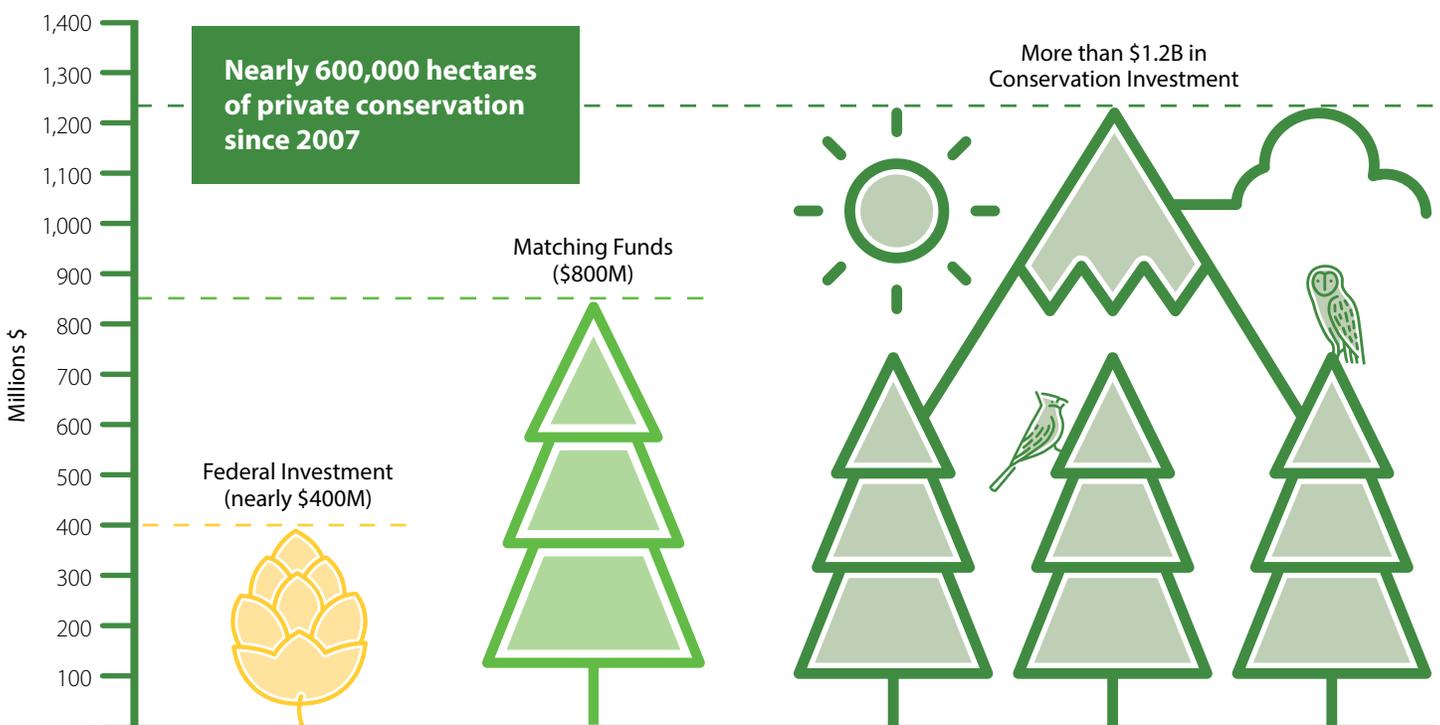
Vidal Bay Forests and Shoreline property is now protected, thanks to a unique public-private partnership that mobilizes Canadians to conserve and care for nature — the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP). With support from the NHCP, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has conserved this vast coastal area, in addition to 7,400 hectares of inland forests and alvars. When added to other protected areas nearby, it is now part of a 250-square-kilometre natural network. This project sets a new standard for large landscape-scale conservation in southern Ontario.

The NHCP is a model for what Canadians can do when they come together. Leveraging an investment by the Government of Canada under the Canada Nature Fund, partners NCC, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and more than 45 local land trusts raise matching contributions from individuals, foundations, corporations and other levels of government to deliver conservation impact. The program empowers landowners to protect and conserve biodiversity.

In the past program year (April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021), NHCP delivery partners have continued their ambitious work, conserving 28,907 hectares. The federal investment of \$25 million was matched with more than \$60 million in contributions raised from other sources.

The NHCP partnership model has been supporting privately protected and conserved areas since 2007, with impressive, long-lasting results of national and global significance. Over that time, program partners have conserved nearly 600,000 hectares. That's equivalent to an area slightly larger than Banff National Park. It represents habitat for more than 200 species at risk. NCC and its partners will actively protect and manage these lands, ensuring that the communities located nearby benefit for generations to come.

In the face of climate change and rapid biodiversity loss, nature is our ally. Canada has set ambitious goals to protect 30 per cent of our lands and freshwater by 2030. Privately protected and conserved areas are critical to achieving those goals. In the pages that follow, we invite you to explore some of the NHCP's successes in the past program year. These stories represent what is possible when Canadians come together to conserve the lands they love and amplify the powerful benefits of nature where people live, learn, work and play.





Enhancing conservation technology

The NHCP is helping NCC and its partners make big strides in improving their conservation planning approaches. The program is supporting NCC's collaboration with Carleton University to develop a new tool to help identify the most important places to focus conservation efforts at a national, regional or local scale.

The NHCP also supports NCC's work with the Center for Geospatial Solutions to create a multi-year strategy to help NCC answer complex conservation questions, improve its decision-making and better support the assessment, monitoring and reporting of its conservation impact.



Pathways to Indigenous collaborations

Nathan Cardinal is Métis, with roots in the Fort McMurray, Alberta, area. He joined the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) in July 2020 on a two-year secondment after 15 years with Parks Canada. As NCC's senior advisor, Indigenous conservation relations, Cardinal has taken the lead on implementing an Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework (ICEF), which will provide a pathway for how NCC builds meaningful relationships with Indigenous Peoples and renewing its approach to better support Indigenous-led efforts to conserve and steward their traditional territories. He reflects, below, on how NCC's ICEF and the relationship-building with Indigenous communities have been supported through the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP).



What was the status of Indigenous engagement at NCC when you joined the organization?

When I joined NCC, I was quickly impressed by three main things:

- the amount of collaborative work with Indigenous people already taking place;
- the excitement and willingness of staff to undertake this work; and
- NCC's commitment to this work.

That included all of the good work happening in BC, where I now make my home and where NCC has been working with the Ktunaxa in support of the Qat'muk Indigenous Protected Conservation Area. In Saskatchewan, NCC was collaborating with Indigenous advisors in the development of a bison management plan at Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area. In Ontario, NCC had made great strides in its restoration efforts at Rice Lake Plains, in consultation with the Alderville First Nation. It made me realize that there was commitment and intention to explore new approaches to conservation.

NCC had also done a tremendous amount of work to raise awareness among staff and senior volunteers about the importance of engaging with Indigenous Peoples and the relationships that we, as an organization, had a responsibility to uphold.

While there was much good work happening, there is much more that NCC can be doing, including developing policy, providing additional training to staff and more.

How has the NHCP helped NCC develop its capacities to engage Indigenous communities?

The future of conservation lies in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples in ways that respect their rights and support Indigenous leadership in conserving and stewarding their

traditional territories. The NHCP funds provide an amazing platform to partner with Indigenous communities and others in meaningful conservation.

With support from the NHCP, nearly all NCC staff have now received Indigenous cultural competency training, which has helped increase NCC's ability to engage. The NHCP has also helped support NCC in developing the tools necessary to guide NCC staff in their work with Indigenous communities.

Lastly, with the support of the NHCP, NCC has been able to work directly with Indigenous Nations in supporting Indigenous-led conservation efforts, as well as facilitating connections to important cultural landscapes across the country. These opportunities have also helped NCC determine how best it can support Indigenous-led conservation efforts. The NHCP has allowed us to work directly with Elders and Knowledge Holders, including exploring Indigenous approaches to fire management to improve landscape restoration efforts.

What are the lasting impacts that the NHCP will have through this work?

From my perspective, it's nothing short of doing our part to change the world. The things people have been able to learn through the different training opportunities not only enable them to be better partners in conservation but also better neighbours and community members. Developing empathy and understanding among NCC staff will help enable an organization-wide cultural shift where building relationships with Indigenous Peoples and supporting Indigenous-led conservation is a natural part of what we all do. Collaborating directly with Indigenous Peoples in conservation will help NCC transition from a place of doing conservation for Indigenous Peoples, to conservation with Indigenous Peoples.



Expanding a hiking haven

Situated on the Canada-U.S. border near Osoyoos lies a special natural area. First established in 2012, the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area takes its name from the sagebrush plants that cover its rolling hills, plus the many sparrow species found there (11 at last count!).

This unique landscape is also a beautiful hiking destination. Visitors can follow trails that wind through a diverse range of landscapes and discover breathtaking views. Wetlands provide moisture in this arid landscape, and some of the oldest stands of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine forests in the BC interior can be found here.

These lands are also habitat for a wide range of wildlife, including several species that are listed on Canada's *Species at Risk Act*, such as western rattlesnake (threatened) and Lewis's woodpecker (threatened). With the help of the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP), the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) expanded the conservation area by 126 hectares in 2020, bringing the total to over 1,500 hectares.

The grasslands of Sage and Sparrow form part of a migratory corridor for species moving between the desert areas of Washington State, BC's dry interior grasslands and beyond. As the impacts of climate change increase over time, species will increasingly need places that allow them to move and adapt.

Thanks to the NHCP, these lands will continue to offer outstanding opportunities for Canadians to appreciate nature, and to provide a home to the local plants and animals.



In total, the partnership has conserved more than 50 protected areas with accessible recreational trails.

Conserving a working landscape

The family farm has long been a staple in rural Canada.

Providing food for Canadians and beyond, these working landscapes are often passed down from generation to generation. They not only become the setting of a thriving small business, but also a place where the human connection to the land has roots that run deep.

This is especially true for the Morkin family near Claresholm, Alberta. Bill Morkin’s grandparents arrived in the Porcupine Hills in 1910 and began farming and ranching in the area. His children and grandchildren are the fourth and fifth generations of family members involved in the operations. With support from the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP), the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and the Morkins reached an agreement to ensure that their 643-hectare ranch is conserved for the long term. The agreement meets Morkin’s vision for the future of the land.

“These grasslands are not replaceable,” said Morkin. “They have provided me and my family with so much opportunity. It’s important that these same opportunities are available for my children and grandchildren.”

The ranching operations on the property will continue. They are entirely compatible with the natural processes of the ecosystem. They keep the native grasses healthy and vibrant. And that’s good news for the species that rely on this habitat, like Sprague’s pipit.

The Morkins ranch is now part of a larger network of privately protected land. NCC and the Southern Alberta Land Trust have conserved more than 7,600 hectares within 15 kilometres of the ranch. Networks like these are important for large mammals like elk, deer, moose, and grizzly bear, a species at risk.

In total, the partnership has helped conserve more than 90,000 hectares of grasslands, an area larger than the city of Calgary.





Protecting grasslands

Across Canada's Prairies, two often unsung heroes play an important role in managing the grasslands: ranchers and their cattle herds. Historically, thousands of bison once roamed Canada's grasslands, grazing the landscape and stimulating the growth of healthy native grasses. With the near total extinction of plains bison, ranchers and their cattle mimic the grazing that bison used to do, keeping the landscape healthy.

In Saskatchewan, cattle continue to play an important role in ensuring the health of grasslands, including at Mackie Ranch. Located between Moose Jaw and Swift Current, near the Trans-Canada Highway, the ranch boasts a large area of native grassland.

Thanks to funding from the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP), the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has now conserved 646 hectares of grasslands and wetlands along the eastern shoreline of Chaplin Lake — the second-largest saline lake in Canada. This is good news in a province that has lost more than 80 per cent of its native grasslands in the past 25 years. Less than 20 per cent of native grassland habitat now remains in Saskatchewan.

The disappearance of this habitat is linked to the effects of climate change, which are increasing at a rapid pace. The loss of the grasses and their deep root systems means that the land cannot absorb and store as much carbon from the atmosphere. As Canada strives to secure a carbon-neutral future, protecting and restoring native grasslands will become increasingly important.



In total, the partnership has supported the conservation of more than 27,000 hectares of habitat in more than 70 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas.

The area is also a haven for birds. It supports more than 30 species of shorebirds each year. And while grasslands may not seem like a hot spot for shorebirds, Chaplin Lake is one of the most important inland sites for migratory shorebirds in North America. The area is particularly important for sanderlings, with over half of the world's population stopping to rest and feed here during spring migration. These lands are home to many species at risk, including Baird's sparrow, bobolink, chestnut-collared longspur and Sprague's pipit. Aside from providing thrills for local birding enthusiasts, these and other species control insect populations and spread seeds, allowing native species to flourish.

The conservation area has been named to recognize generations of the Mackie family who have cared for it. Cattle grazing will continue to help keep the grasslands healthy and support the local economy.

Protecting fresh water

Each spring, in the wetlands of Douglas Marsh in southern Manitoba, a distinct sound, like pebbles being tapped together, can be heard across the landscape. It's the call of the yellow rail, a small, elusive bird that spends most of its life near the ground, only engaging in brief periods of flight. As of 1995, Douglas Marsh was considered to be home to more than 10 per cent of the global population of this federal species of special concern. This rich habitat is designated an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area.

Now, with support from the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP), the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and local communities, not only do yellow rail and other species at risk have more room to roam and thrive here, but local communities can benefit from the wetlands, lakes, rivers and underground aquifers of Douglas Marsh. Located just outside of Brandon, Douglas Marsh is the largest wetland system in the Assiniboine Delta. In addition to habitat for wildlife, Douglas Marsh provides freshwater ecosystem services, such as filtration, storage and drought mitigation, to local communities.

With the help of the NHCP, NCC expanded the protected area by 114 hectares. Both the waters of Willow Creek and aquifer-fed groundwater flow through the property toward the Assiniboine River. The protection of this area means that these services will be there for local residents long into the future.

The splendour of Douglas Marsh also offers an opportunity for local economic development. NCC, in partnership with the Central Assiniboine Watershed District, will establish a marsh and bird lookout area. This new perch will be enjoyed by local birdwatchers and attract others from afar, providing a boost to the local economy.

In total, the partnership has supported the conservation of more than 100,000 hectares of wetlands and lakes across Canada.





Natural Heritage Conservation Program

NCC, DUC and land trust securement projects as of March 31, 2021

- Nature Conservancy of Canada securement project
- Ducks Unlimited Canada securement project
- Land Trusts Conservation Fund securement project





Large-scale conservation success

When conservation organizations like the Nature

Conservancy of Canada (NCC) have an opportunity to protect a large expanse of wilderness, the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) is there to provide important financial support. NCC was able to do just that on the north shore of Manitoulin Island.

At Vidal Bay, more than 7,400 hectares of undisturbed wilderness, including close to 19 kilometres of Lake Huron shoreline, are now protected thanks to the NHCP. When combined with nearby conservation lands, including the 6,530-hectare Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Mnidoo Mnissing Provincial Park, the total amount of protected land measures 250 square kilometres — the largest of its kind south of the Canadian Shield in Ontario. This includes a total of 86 kilometres of Great Lakes shoreline; more than twice what is currently protected at Bruce Peninsula National Park.

Conservation at this scale is becoming increasingly important as Canada endeavours to become carbon-neutral. Opportunities like Vidal Bay Forests and Shoreline will get us that much closer. The forests, wetlands and alvar habitats found on the Vidal Bay property store 8.7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, sequestering 22,675 tonnes each year. That's the equivalent

of taking nearly 5,000 automobiles off the road each and every year. These lands also contribute to healthy, prosperous communities by filtering pollution out of the water and the air.

The protected status also means that the plants and animals that rely on the habitat found at Vidal Bay will remain undisturbed. Iconic mammals, like black bear and gray wolf, roam the forests and escarpment, and species at risk, such as lakeside daisy and Hill's thistle, and the endangered mottled duskywing butterfly, can be found here. The area is also an important stopover for migratory birds that make their way north to breed in the summer.

Thanks to the NHCP, the Vidal Bay Forests and Shoreline property will stand as a model for large, private conservation projects and will provide benefits long into the future.



The forests, wetlands and alvar habitats of Vidal Bay absorb 22,675 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.

Helping a national park

Canada's national park system has long been instrumental in protecting our iconic landscapes. Along with other publicly protected areas, these conservation cornerstones provide benefits to the plants and animals that rely on them for habitat, and to local communities.

On the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec, Forillon National Park protects some of the most scenic stretches of Canada's Atlantic coastline. These spectacular views are enjoyed by thousands of tourists every year who seek to escape into nature to hike its forests and open meadows, observe colonies of shorebirds from its cliffs and drink in the natural splendour. These visits connect Canadians with nature and provide a sizable boost to the local economy.

The park's habitats extend beyond its boundaries into adjacent privately owned lands. These lands are key to conserving the overall health of the park's ecosystem, so their protection is tremendously important. Thankfully, some local residents also have an attachment to these lands and see the benefit of their protection. With the help of the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP), the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is protecting some of these private lands, extending Forillon National Park's conservation impact.

One local resident, Jérémie Gagné, was motivated by NCC's work and decided to sell his land to the conservation organization. "There was a point when I decided to sell my land, which had been part of the family estate for over 30 years, since I no longer had the time or resources to take care of it," says Gagné. "I thought I would sell it to another individual, but after considering the Nature Conservancy of Canada's proposal to preserve it for the benefit of future generations, I saw nothing but advantages. I now have all the peace of mind I could wish for."

Thanks to assistance from the NHCP to acquire and conserve the property, NCC now protects more than 200 hectares near the park. Located on both sides of Route 197 on the peninsula, these properties create an ecological corridor that links Forillon National Park to the east with other public lands to the northwest. Several iconic wide-ranging species, like Canada lynx, American marten and fisher, can be found in the area.

96 per cent of all partnership projects are located within 25 kilometres of a federal or provincial protected area.





Local conservation champions

The majestic Musquash River winds through Acadian forest and vast marshlands to meet the world’s highest tides in the Bay of Fundy. Fresh water from the river meets and mixes with the salt water from the ocean at the Musquash Estuary. This estuary is one of the healthiest natural settings in Atlantic Canada — and the last fully functioning estuary in the Bay of Fundy. In fact, 10 years ago, the Musquash Estuary was designated as New Brunswick’s only Marine Protected Area.

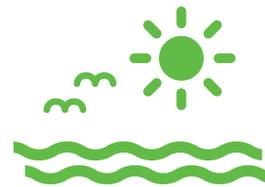
Since 2001, the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) partners, Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and Ducks Unlimited Canada have been identifying and securing parcels of land surrounding the estuary to create a 3,000-hectare protected wilderness reserve just minutes from Saint John.

Home to bobcats, moose, deer and harbour seals, the area is not only a haven for wildlife, but for people too. With over 20 kilometres of hiking trails that are maintained by local volunteers, it is a popular destination for hikers and birders. But some of the land here is still unprotected. With the help of the NHCP and local nature lovers, NCC and local partners secured another 37 hectares of forested land here.

One of the partners, Explore Lorneville Inc., owns a small, adjacent parcel of land, upon which sits a lighthouse. This

lighthouse is a popular destination for hikers. Built in the 1950s, it needed care. In addition to fundraising to conserve the land and improve the trails, NCC and Explore Lorneville also put out a call to help save this iconic nautical landmark. The response was overwhelming. Over 250 donations were made to fund the effort, as well as contributions of invaluable expertise, labour, equipment and materials, including a lot of red and white paint.

As a result of local nature enthusiasts coming together to make their community a little better, and thanks to support from the NHCP, hikers seeking to enjoy the splendour of the Musquash Estuary will be able to do so long into the future.



The NHCP has helped conserve more than 8,500 kilometres of rivers and streams across Canada — more than seven times the length of the St. Lawrence River.

Inspiring a generous donation

In the 1970s, Dr. Hans Caemmerer of Germany fell in love with Canada and purchased land in the Chignecto Isthmus.

“He always said to me that the sky is bluer in Canada than in Germany, the cloud formations more impressive and the fall colours of the leaves breathtaking,” said Hans’s daughter, Dr. Monika Caemmerer, of her father. “He loved the friendliness of the people. He never became a resident of Canada, but he bought land because he loved those wild woods and the wild animals that lived there and wanted to protect the land from development.

“My dad died at age 91. Now it is on me to decide how to protect the land forever. The Nature Conservancy of Canada seems to be the perfect steward.”

Recently, Caemmerer announced her intention to donate these lands to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) to ensure they remain wild for the long term. The 389-hectare property serves as an important segment of the isthmus, connecting existing conserved lands, further aiding wildlife that need room to roam. The isthmus is the only route for animals, such as the

endangered Nova Scotia mainland moose and Canada lynx, to move between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

With the help of the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) and Canada’s Ecological Gifts Program, NCC has been working in the area for over a decade to expand conservation areas along the isthmus. These programs support the Moose Sex Project, an initiative to assist endangered moose in Nova Scotia in finding potential mates elsewhere.

With the addition of this generous donation, NCC has conserved a total of over 1,793 hectares on both sides of the Chignecto Isthmus. With the help of the NHCP, NCC and its partners hope to protect even more.

In total, the partnership has inspired more than 350 gifts of land across Canada.





Protecting Acadian forest

Prince Edward Island has a rich agricultural history. Often referred to as the garden of the Gulf, the landscape is a mosaic of rolling farmland and regenerating forest. Due to a long history of land use, most of the island's original Acadian forest has been lost. With it have been lost the ecological goods and services the forests provided: flood prevention, carbon sequestration and storage, as well as water and air purification. These benefits are important for maintaining healthy communities and the species that live in the forest.

With assistance from the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP), the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) was able to expand the Elizabeth Walsh Nature Reserve. First established near Souris in 2019, the reserve honours the memory of a cherished aunt. After losing her brothers during the 1918 influenza epidemic, Great Aunt Lizzie farmed the land on her own for decades. In 2019, her family generously donated 11 hectares to NCC in her name. The addition of a small parcel (three hectares) fills in a gap of unprotected land. Often, projects such as this one may be small in size but can be critical puzzle pieces to connecting with other protected natural lands.

Like the lands around it, the newly conserved property is primarily forested with black spruce, trembling aspen, balsam fir, white birch and red maple. The presence of large aspens creates an ideal wildlife habitat. The cavities in these trees provide nesting places and habitat for woodpeckers and flying squirrels. The forest is also home to several species of birds that help control the insect population, including black-capped chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, black-throated green warbler, ovenbird and Swainson's thrush.

The recovery of natural areas on PEI is crucial to native wildlife and all Islanders. The NHCP is helping NCC and partner organizations make it happen.

In total, the partnership has supported the conservation of more than 390,000 hectares of forest habitat, more than $\frac{2}{3}$ the size of PEI.



Stewarding a family's legacy

For the Pike family, directing funds from the estate of Phyllis and David Pike to conserve land in the Codroy Valley was just the meaningful gesture they had been seeking.

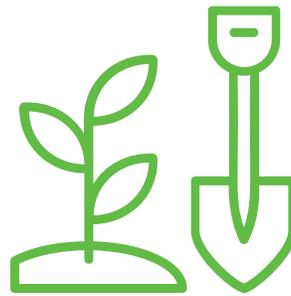
"My parents, Phyllis and David Pike, were avid naturalists who loved Newfoundland. They were supporters of the Nature Conservancy of Canada for many years. Our family is so proud that their legacy includes helping to protect this important wildlife habitat in the Codroy Valley," said Christopher Pike.

This generous gift has also created a natural legacy that will benefit Canadians living in the valley and beyond. The Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) helps program partners manage these lands to deliver long-term benefits, both for the species that rely on the habitat and for local communities that rely on the services the land provides. This process is playing out on the land acquired with the help of the Pike family.

Early assessments of the land resulted in important conservation findings. The habitat found here is vital for several species at risk, including blue felt lichen, and several birds, like olive-sided flycatcher (threatened), bobolink (threatened), barn swallow (threatened) and red crossbill (threatened).

Future investigation will determine if two species of at-risk bats occupy this land: little brown myotis (endangered) and northern myotis (endangered). These creatures help control insect populations. The forests on the property also help local communities. The mix of balsam fir, black spruce, white spruce and yellow birch absorbs carbon dioxide and stores carbon, decreasing the amount of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. The trees also filter out pollutants from the air and water.

The support provided by the NHCP to help care for properties like these will provide benefits to Canadians for generations to come.



In total, the partnership has supported stewardship activities on more than 260,000 hectares.



Ducks Unlimited Canada successes

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is one of the country's largest and longest-standing conservation organizations. Since its inception in 1938, more than 80 million hectares of important natural habitats have been conserved, restored and influenced across the country. Support from the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) is expanding this legacy of on-the-ground success.

In the second year of the program, DUC received almost \$5.3 million in NHCP funds, matching it with more than \$9 million from individual donors, corporations, foundations and other levels of government.

DUC used these funds to realize 59 projects, conserving 7,760 hectares. The ecological benefits of these conserved areas are impressive, include:

- **Conserving** habitat for more than 7,500 nests for grassland birds, shorebirds and ducks, including many federally and provincially listed species at risk.
- **Storing** 1.08 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- **Storing** 4.1 million cubic metres of water every year, preventing water runoff and flooding.
- **Retaining** 5,000 kilograms of phosphorus and 19,000 kilograms of nitrogen every year, keeping these nutrients from entering our lakes and rivers.



PROJECT SPOTLIGHTS

From sprawling marshes whose shining waters have become national, natural landmarks, to small vernal ponds that are quietly cared for by private landowners, the properties DUC has impacted are vast and varied. Each has its own story; each has its own unique value.



Baker Conservation Easement: Saskatchewan farm family's roots anchor conservation ethic

Terry Baker's fourth-generation farm sits at the confluence of three major migration flyways in southwestern Saskatchewan. In this region of the Canadian Prairies, grasslands are increasingly being converted to annual cropping, which makes a parcel like this critical for many wildlife species. The optimal mix of perennial cover and water also provides habitat for among the highest densities of nesting waterfowl in the Prairies. Its habitat value is extraordinary and so is the deep connection this conservation-minded family has to the land.

"The land was homesteaded by my grandfather in the early 1900s, then farmed by my dad. My wife, Nancy, and I moved back to the farm in the 1970s, where we raised our two sons and daughter," Baker said.

Baker and his family signed 125 hectares of grasslands into Ducks Unlimited Canada's conservation easement program to conserve the land for the long term. The property also includes a special memorial in honour of his late father's and other family members' commitment to conservation. An easement was the perfect instrument for the Bakers to live out their conservation values while protecting a precious family legacy.

St. Luke's Marsh: A coastal gem, protected in perpetuity

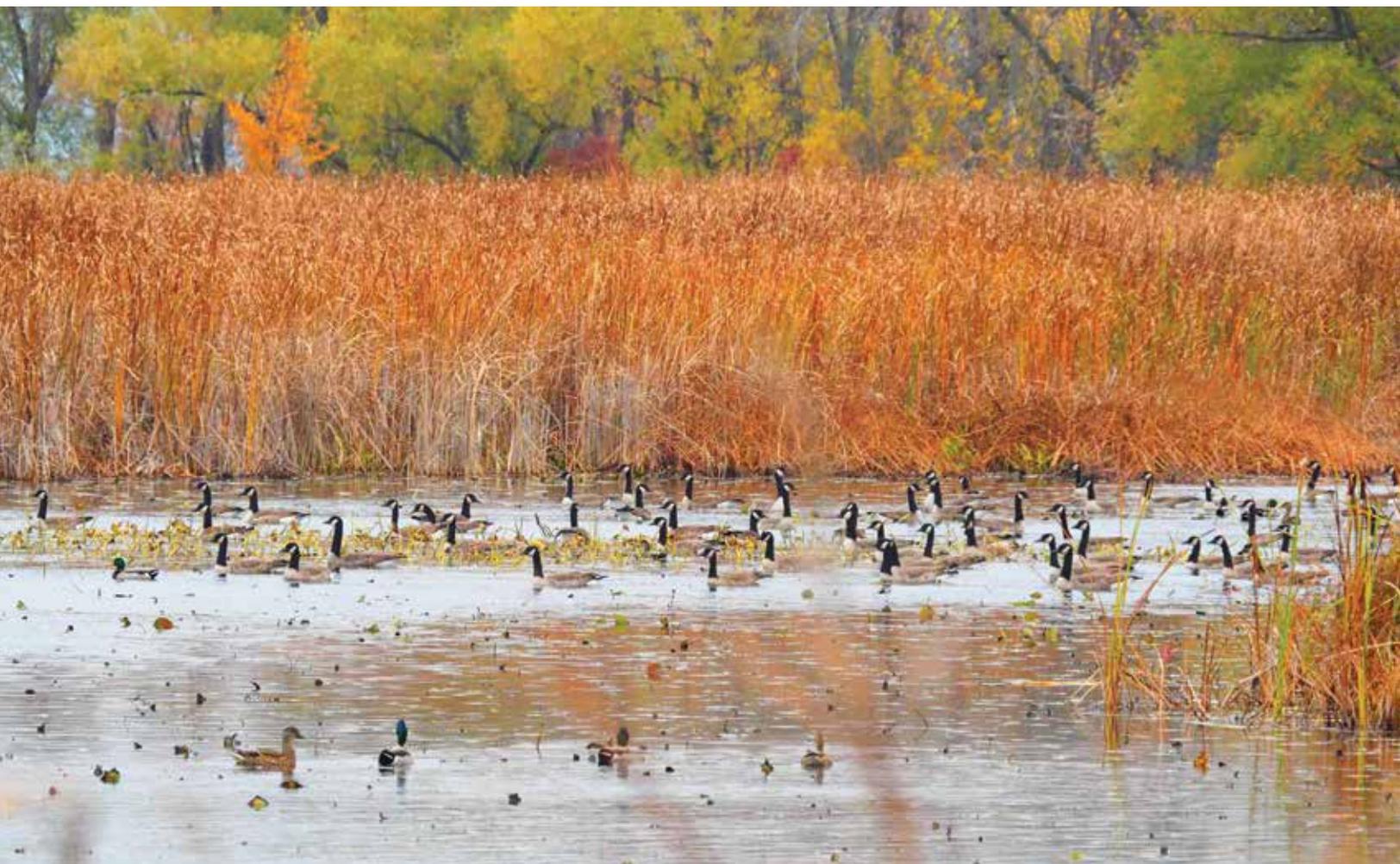
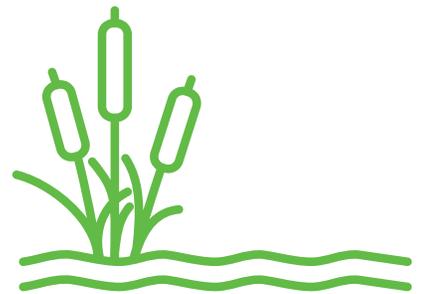
"It's really hard to explain something that's in you," said Bob Lozon, looking out across St. Luke's Marsh. "It's been in me since I was a little boy. I mean, I was raised in the wetland."

Lozon is a local resident and hunting guide who has spent most of his life immersed in the coastal wetland along Lake St. Clair, in southwestern Ontario. It is a rare site within the densely populated area of the province, where only 1.5 per cent of historic wetlands remain. Lozon is one of many conservationists who celebrated DUC's purchase of the 197-hectare property and the protection of its habitats for the long term — protection that was possible thanks to the Natural Heritage Conservation Program.

Conserving these habitats saved vital space for wildlife. St. Luke's Marsh is part of an extensive system of waterfowl habitats around the lower Great Lakes, one of the most significant migratory stopover areas on the continent.

"If you don't conserve wetlands, you're losing a part of the environment that you can't ever replace," said Lozon. "You just can't afford to lose these types of habitats."

Only about
1.5 per cent
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Ontario around
Lake St. Clair.



Land Trusts Conservation Fund highlights

Each year, all across Canada, land trusts and other local conservation organizations do something truly special. These local conservation champions are harnessing the collective energy and desire to conserve local green space and delivering results. The Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) provides important support to make this happen through the Land Trusts Conservation Fund (LTCF).

Under the LTCF, land trusts and conservation organizations can apply to a fund of \$4.5 million to work in their communities. Partners at Wildlife Habitat Canada administer the funding program, with helpful guidance from the Canadian Land Trust Working Group. In the past year, the LTCF assisted 19 land trusts from seven provinces. These organizations completed 34 projects resulting in 2,866 hectares conserved.

LTCF projects protect natural spaces for wildlife while offering nature-based solutions like flood and drought prevention, and potential recreation opportunities. This section features two LTCF projects that serve as tremendous examples of what can be accomplished when local residents come together to create lasting conservation impact in their communities.



Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector

Hikers, paddlers, birdwatchers and anglers have long treasured the diversity of wild landscapes of the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove lakes, as well as their proximity to Halifax. “You don’t need a car to get there,” says Dr. Dusan Soudek, a retired family physician and long-time Nova Scotia Nature Trust volunteer. “You don’t have to set aside several days to go have that remote outdoor experience; you can just go for a few hours after work. It’s reachable, which means that the health benefits of outdoor activity are reachable, too.”

This vast undeveloped area lies between Hammonds Plains, Timberlea and Halifax. It encompasses a mosaic of extensive forests, bogs and wetlands, rocky barrens and hills, sparkling rivers and three pristine headwater lakes. The diverse habitats support over 150 species of birds, including loons, osprey and woodpeckers, and several species listed on Canada’s *Species at Risk Act*, including Canada warbler (threatened), olive-sided flycatcher (threatened) and common nighthawk (threatened).

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust recently announced that it had successfully completed the purchase of the Blue Mountain Wilderness Connector, a 227-hectare property at the heart of the beloved lakes. This purchase will ensure that more than 2,023 hectares of undeveloped wildlands remain unbroken, securing the future for one of the largest expanses of urban wilderness in North America.

The protection of this critical link would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of the landowners, Robin Wilber and Bill Fenton. They recognized the unique and irreplaceable conservation value of these particular lands. They agreed to forgo potential development, instead selling their land to the Nature Trust and generously agreeing to donate a sizable part of the land’s value as a charitable gift. It was donated to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, under the Government of Canada’s Ecological Gifts Program, which provides enhanced tax incentives for individuals or corporations who donate ecologically significant land.



Breton Island–Whitridge Reserve

There are not many wilder places than islands untouched by human infrastructure and technology, and there are not many of them left. One more has been saved through a generous donation to The Nature Trust of British Columbia.

The property was donated by four brothers of the Whitridge family. They inherited the island from their parents, who had bought it in 1968. The family couldn't figure out a satisfactory way to own or use the property. When they thought about selling the island, they didn't want to see it developed — they wanted it to remain a wild space. The non-financial values of the island were important to them. This led them to a friend who suggested that they consider donating their island to an organization that protects land for the long term: The Nature Trust of British Columbia.

Breton Island–Whitridge Reserve is a five-hectare island located near the east coast of Quadra Island. The island has excellent conservation value, as it has no existing structures or docks and supports thriving plant and bird populations.

The property contains three sensitive ecosystems: mature coniferous forest, herbaceous rocky shoreline and shallow marine area. All three ecosystems are in a relatively natural state. A globally critically imperiled ecological community, known as Roemer's fescue – junegrass, may occur on this island.

This is a bird lover's paradise. The shallow marine area provides important habitat for sea ducks, shorebirds, seabirds and other waterbirds. Four species found here are listed under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*: the threatened marbled murrelet, and three species of special concern — ancient murrelet, Cassin's auklet and great blue heron.

By protecting the island, this acquisition ensures that the more than one kilometre of coastal shoreline and approximately nine hectares of shallow marine area surrounding the island will not be disturbed by infrastructure that could extend over or through this important habitat.

"I think the shared family feeling is that The Nature Trust of British Columbia will be able to take closer and better care of it than we would, and we haven't lost anything we value highly by transferring ownership as we have," said A. Whitridge.

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NATURE CONSERVANCY CANADA

Nature Conservancy of Canada | 245 Eglinton Ave. East, Suite 410 | Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 3J1

Phone: 800-465-8005 | Email: supporter.services@natureconservancy.ca

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The Nature Trust of New Brunswick, Georgian Bay Land Trust, Thames Talbot Land Trust, Ontario Farmland Trust, Nature-Action Quebec, Fiducie de conservation des écosystèmes de Lanaudière, Island Nature Trust, Rare Charitable Research Reserve, The Nature Trust of British Columbia, Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy, Nova Scotia Nature Trust, Southern Interior Land Trust Society, BC Parks Foundation, Bruce Trail Conservancy, Habitat Acquisition Trust, Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club, Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, Corridor Appalachien

PHOTOS: Cover: Aiden Mahoney. P2: Jamin Hudson. P3: Government of Canada; Geneviève LeSieur. P5: NCC; Esme Batten. P6: Pat Morrow; Jason Leo Bantle. P7: Skye Augustine. P8: Steve Austin; inset: NCC. P9: Brent Calver. P10: Jason Leo Bantle; inset: Logan Salm/NCC staff. P11: NCC. P12: L to R: Andy Teucher; Brent Calver; Jason Bantle; NCC; Jamin Hudson. P13: L to R: June Cairns; Explore Lorneville; NCC; Mike Dembeck; Dave Menke. P14: Jamin Hudson, inset: Esme Batten. P15: Parks Canada/Roger St-Laurent. P16: Mike Dembeck; inset: Explore Lorneville. P17: Mike Dembeck. P18: NCC; inset: NCC. P19: NCC. P20: ©Ducks Unlimited Canada. P21: ©Ducks Unlimited Canada. P22: Adam Cornick. P23: Markus Thompson.