



Final Report - Plants on the Edge – Securement and Stewardship of Atlantic Coastal
Plain Flora

Nova Scotia Nature Trust

For Nova Scotia Species at Risk Conservation Fund

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Project goal and objectives

The primary goal of the project is the permanent securement of high priority habitat for *Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada* (COSEWIC)- and Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act (NSESAs)-listed species of Atlantic coastal plain flora (ACPF). Landowners were to be encouraged towards the permanent securement of habitat through land donation, or conservation easement.

Land securement is achieved through many means, but is primarily facilitated through increasing voluntary stewardship, community awareness, and public engagement in conservation efforts through landowner contact, targeted outreach, and public education. The project builds awareness of the importance of conservation of at-risk species of ACPF and their imperilled habitats, and encourages land owners to become good stewards of these rare habitats, possibly through formal, legal protection.

The first objective of the project was to secure in perpetuity priority habitat for species of Atlantic coastal plain flora listed under the NSESAs as *Endangered*, *Threatened* or *Vulnerable*, or identified by COSEWIC as *Endangered*, *Threatened*, or of *Special Concern*. The second objective of the project was to raise awareness of, and support for the protection of priority coastal plain habitat among key landowners, local communities, targeted user groups and the general public. The third objective of the project was to engage local citizens in habitat monitoring and long-term stewardship of priority coastal plain habitat through support and expansion of the Nature Trust's volunteer Rare Plant Monitoring program and Property Guardian program.

Outline of the work completed

The first objective was accomplished through working with the ACPF Recovery Team, Nature Trust staff and contractors, and negotiating with landowners for permanent securement of priority habitat through land acquisition and conservation easements. A list of priority habitats was generated to target for landowner contact during the project period. Landowner contact information was located, and field checks for current presence of at-risk species were conducted. Landowners were contacted by phone, and/or received personal visits from staff. This database of both the ecological characteristics of properties of interest, and communications with landowners, will continue to be maintained and used in the future.

The second objective was accomplished through landowner contact (phone, mail, in-person), public presentations, guided interpretive walks on Atlantic coastal plain habitat, and distribution of educational materials. Education materials were developed and distributed throughout the year, and public presentations and guided walks were primarily conducted during the summer months in ACPF areas.

The third objective of engaging citizens in plant and habitat monitoring was achieved through the strengthening of our two volunteer programs. Training sessions were held for new volunteers, and a volunteer appreciation night was held. Materials about these programs have been distributed within communities, and at presentations in targeted communities. Citizens were also engaged during our celebration ceremonies for newly protected properties.

Results

Land Securement: One of our biggest successes this year was the permanent protection of 2 properties that host ACPF.

The Medway River Conservation Lands were a donation of 66 acres of ecologically important river front property on the Medway River near Port Medway, Queens County, by the Ponhook Fish and Game Club. The property features extensive undeveloped shoreline and bog habitat within associated wetlands. These wetlands support habitat for Long's Bulrush, a plant listed nationally as of *Special Concern*. The celebration of this property, held at the site, had approximately 60 people in attendance. The Baseline Document Report and all other securement work have been completed for this property.

The Cameron Lake Conservation Lands (62 acres in South Brookfield, Queen County) were purchased for their Carolina redroot and Eastern ribbon snake habitat. Extensive cottage development within the Ponhook and Cameron Lake area has lead to a loss of

significant habitat and associated species. All securement work, with the exception of the Baseline Document Report (which will be completed this summer) has been conducted for this property.

The permanent protection of these two properties has increased habitat protection for ACPF by 122 acres.

To move more projects towards permanent protection, a list of priority properties with ACPF habitat was generated, including landowner contact information. This list includes 100 properties, of which 80 land owners were contacted about conservation options on their property. From this came 12 landowner visits, 8 formal site assessments, 8 new Stewardship Agreements, and 4 sites that have moved on to the securement phase (i.e. entering into negotiation for purchase, donation or easement).

Landowner, community, and public outreach: This year, 50 copies of print material specifically about ACPF were distributed in targeted communities, and over 100 members of the public were personally reached through presentations on ACPF and their importance. General education materials about the Nature Trust also included information on ACPF. These materials – the biannual newsletter, and 1-page info sheet – reached approximately 1,500 and 1,000 people, respectively. The guided walk had about 25 people in attendance, and the two ACPF-specific presentations conducted by the Nature Trust pulled in about 75 people. The public is also invited to learn more about the Plants on the Edge project through our website.

The Cameron Lake Conservation Lands announcement was covered in the Chronicle Herald, Canadian Press (attached), SouthShoreNow, NovaNewsNow, and SNAP Halifax. For the Medway River Conservation Lands, PSAs (public service announcements) were aired on radio stations and appeared in newspapers (and online) across the province. General awareness about the Nature Trust's work was increased through other property celebrations, public events and presentations, guided nature walks, an outreach mailing to over 50,000 households in our active project areas, a CBC radio feature, a Chronicle Herald article, Farley Mowat's appearance on CBC's *The Hour*, and Nature Trust's staff interview on *Breakfast Television* and CBC's *Information Morning*.

Engage citizens in volunteer programs: Thirty ACPF sites were monitored for changes in the health of ACPF populations in 2008 thanks to the Rare Plant Monitor and Property Guardian programs. Eight new Monitors and 3 new Guardians were recruited and trained in 2008. Two training sessions were held to train new Rare Plant Monitors. Property Guardians' data is used to track changes on ACPF properties, and may be used if stewardship activities are deemed necessary.

An interpretive sign was installed at a Nature Trust protected property on Molega Lake – a critical lake for both ACPF habitat, and for engaging the many landowners on the lake in stewardship activities. Property boundary signs for the 2 new secured properties will be installed this summer. An interpretive sign is in the works for the Medway Lands for this summer.

An assessment of achievements and lessons learned

These results are outstanding for the ACPF project, achieved through a great deal of outreach to select landowners, field work, engaging community, and general public education. Almost every project activity was completed, and those that were not, will be finished this summer. All forms of stewardship are needed to preserve ACPF habitat, and this project, over the past year, has made gains in many areas of landowner engagement. Ultimately, 2 new properties, totaling 122 acres, are now permanently protected to support the recovery of ACPF.

Retention of volunteers in the Rare Plant Monitor program could be improved. Not all monitors complete their assigned work after training, and not all monitors send in reports every year. This program could be strengthened, especially with regards to the volunteer management side. Volunteers need more frequent communications, more recognition of their work, and more opportunities to provide feedback on the program. It also appears that data gathered through this program could be better shared.

Property Guardians are needed for the 2 newly protected properties. It can be hard to engage new Property Guardians when the Nature Trust first begins securing properties in a new community – we have no history and reputation there yet. We need to examine how to become more widely known in a community after securement, with the vision of engaging locals in annual property monitoring.

Recommendations for follow-up steps to the project

- Work with the ACPF Recovery Team, ACPF researchers, and the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre (ACDC) to improve the sharing and use of Rare Plant Monitoring data. Parks Canada has expressed an interest in partnering in order to streamline our program with their plant monitoring program in Kejimikujik National Park and Historic Site.
- Engage plant monitors in improving the Rare Plant Monitoring program, in order to improve volunteer retention and recognition, and to learn what is attractive about the program.
- Continue securement on properties “in the pipeline,” and continue to engage landowners (especially those who have signed Stewardship Agreement) with the vision of permanently protecting priority ACPF habitat.

- Improve our positive presence in communities with ACPF habitat (in communities that have existing secured sites, and in communities where there is potential to protect sites).