



Bluenose Atlantic Coastal Action Program (BACAP)

Coastal Island Conservation Project

Final Report - June 2002

Participating Partners:

- Bluenose ACAP
- Habitat Conservation Fund
- Environment Canada (EC)
- Nova Scotia Nature Trust (NSNT)
- Nova Scotia Water Trail
- Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS)
- Nova Scotia Department of Environment & Labour
- Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (NSDNR)
- Eastern Habitat Joint Venture
- Local Residents
- Artificial Reef Society
- Mahone Bay Kayaks
- Town of Mahone Bay
- Municipality of Chester

Total Value of Project: \$81,000.00

Trust Fund Contribution: \$10,000.00

Brief Description of Project: The **Coastal Island Project** at Bluenose ACAP is seeking to increase conservation and awareness on 70 islands in the Bay. The project is currently in its second year of a three-year project. During the summers of 2000 and 2001, information was collected on many of the 70 islands ranging from land ownership, bird and plant species, habitat, and human impacts. Working with landowners, promoting stewardship, additional data collection, and public awareness are project components to be accelerated in 2002. Some of the plans for the spring/summer include a public lecture series on the islands, the initiation of *Island Watch*, a volunteer monitoring program, island tours for landowners pointing out the unique features on their islands, one-on-one consultations with island owners, and a public awareness campaign targeting recreational boaters.

Accomplishments:

All existing data on the Mahone Bay islands was compiled at the beginning of the project. For the most part, this data was found to be out-of-date, very sparse, and in many cases non-

existent.

Information on colonial nesting birds was updated via site visits. This data was collected and stored in an avian database. As some of the data changes on an annual basis, data collection is always ongoing.

This project involves the partnership of a number of different community groups, government agencies, local businesses, and landowners. A steering committee was formed in June, 2001 to provide direction, advice and input. Steering committee members include representatives from the following: NS Nature Trust, NS Water Trail, Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of Natural Resources, Municipality of Chester, Mahone Bay Kayak Adventures, Sail Mahone Bay, and island owners.

Priority habitats and species have been identified during the 2000 and 2001 field seasons. Data collection will be ongoing and continue in the 2002 field season. This data will be used to update the DNR significant habitat database, incorporated into CWS colonial nesting seabird databases, provided to the NS Museum of Natural History, and will provide information for the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre. Non-profit groups may also use the information for long-term project planning.

Through island visits and discussions with municipal planners, development pressures affecting the islands have been identified and included in an island database. These pressures include both residential and commercial development. Because of a lack of regulations guiding island development, it seems to be increasing at a phenomenal rate often with little attention being paid to island species and habitat which are being negatively affected.

A draft conservation plan entitled "***Coastal Islands: A Conservation Plan for the Islands of Mahone Bay***" was written in April 2001. This document contains all of the information collected on the islands either through field work or through a literature review on the Mahone Bay islands. This report also prioritized the islands based on the following criteria: bird species present; habitat type; species use; and human threat. Island priority was expected to, and indeed did, change as more island data was collected. The draft plan was initially distributed at a community meeting held in Chester in July 2001. The goal of this management plan is to guide future project of all interested stakeholders including government and non-government agencies.

BACAP has discussed the importance of these islands in maintaining a diversity of habitats and species at a number of public forums. Presentations have been made at the Mahone Bay Kayak Festival, South Shore Exhibition, the Chester Chapter of the Nature Trust, and the South Shore Naturalists Federation Conference. Newsletters and brochures are another tool used by BACAP to get the message out to the public.

BACAP has established a positive relationship with most of the recreational businesses in the area that use the islands (e.g. Mahone Bay kayaks has actually written some of BACAP's guidelines regarding island conservation and island ethics directly into their waiver form, which is read and signed by all participants). Signage has been developed and posted at local yacht clubs, public beaches, on the islands themselves, and some of the local recreational businesses.

Communication with landowners via telephone, e-mail, and regular mail have been conducted on a regular basis since the initiation of the project. Some face-to-face meetings with island owners have also taken place. In addition to an initial letter which explained the purpose of the CIP and requested permission to visit islands for the purpose of data collection, seasonal newsletters and brochures have also been distributed to island owners which provide island conservation tips in an informal and interesting format. More meetings with landowners are planned for the spring and summer 2002.

BACAP has had numerous discussions with the NSNT regarding the topics of stewardship agreements, conservation easements, and land acquisition. After speaking with island owners regarding the various options for land conservation, BACAP will refer those landowners interested in formal environmental protection to the NSNT, who are experts in this area, to draw up formal contracts. The provincial and federal governments will be made aware of any islands identified as having critical habitat and species as they could potentially receive provincial or federal designation.

Brooke Cook
Bluenose Atlantic Coastal Action Program (BACAP)

Date of Post: March 2003