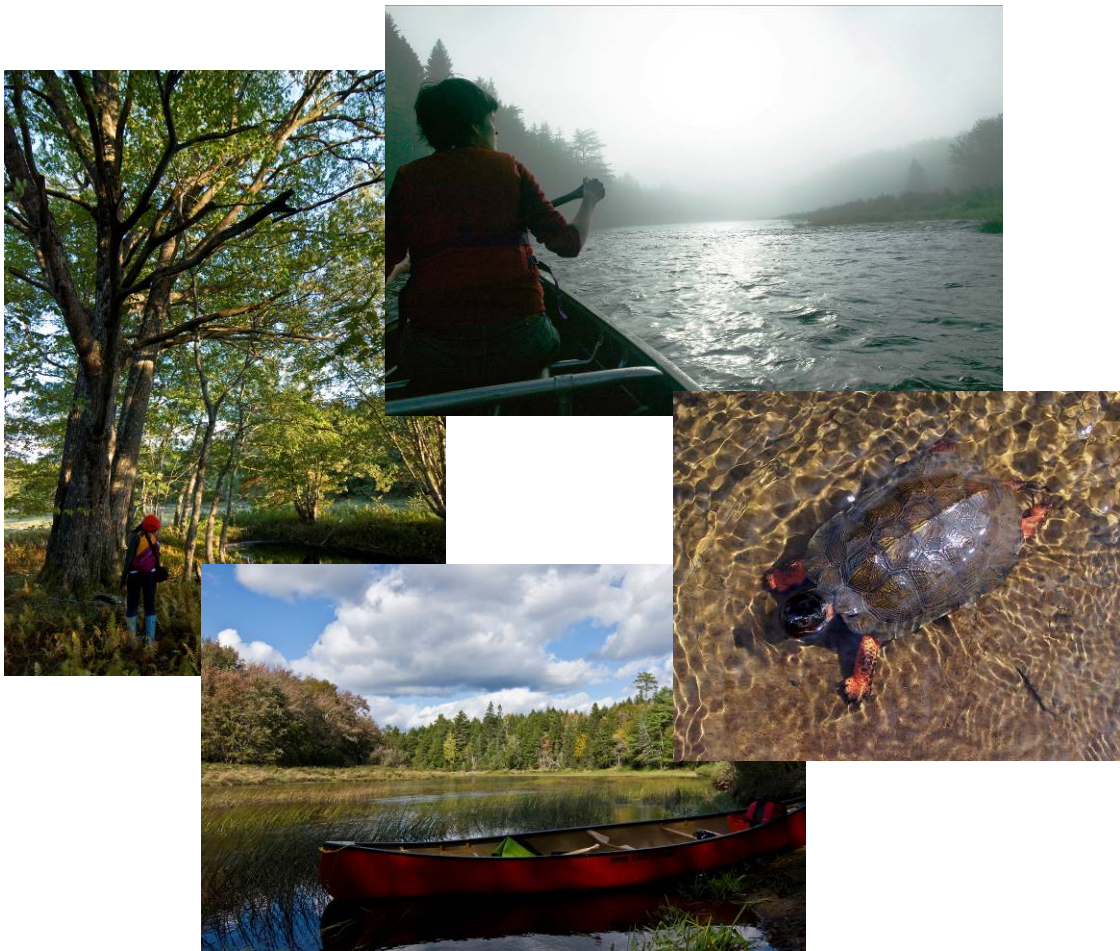


# ST. MARY'S RIVER CONSERVATION LEGACY CAMPAIGN 2009-2010



FINAL REPORT TO HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND  
*OCTOBER 2010*

## INTRODUCTION

The St. Mary's River is a special place, one that is not only beautiful, but that also support a variety of interesting and unique ecological features. The riverfront habitat along the river are essential to water quality and to the survival of the species living in and around the river, including Atlantic salmon and Wood turtles – both of which are now rare in Canada. The old-growth hemlock and Acadian floodplain forests found along the shores of the St. Mary's are found along few other rivers in the province.



It was with this in mind that the Nova Scotia Nature Trust began the **St. Mary's River Conservation Legacy Campaign** in 2006, to work with landowners to protect some of the most outstanding natural areas along the river. Through this campaign the Nature Trust has carried out landowner outreach and community stewardship activities, and has permanently protected a number of conservation properties, including the A.M. Sandy Cameron Conservation Lands and the Hemlock Falls Conservation Lands. During the 2009-2010 project year the Nature Trust continued with its landowner outreach and community stewardship activities, while permanently protecting two new conservation properties; the C.W. Anderson Conservation Lands and the Archibald Conservation Lands. These important shoreline properties bring to five the number of sites along the river that the Nature Trust has protected through this campaign.

## PROJECT GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project is to permanently secure ecologically significant habitat along the St. Mary's River, helping to ensure the ecological integrity of the river and the survival of associated imperilled species, including Wood turtles and Atlantic salmon. The project will also protect habitat by increasing landowner and community awareness of land conservation issues, while building upon the existing stewardship ethic in the local community. By working with both private and government stakeholders, the long-term goal of the project is to create a corridor of protected areas along the river that support ecologically significant habitat.

The objectives of the 2009-2010 campaign were:

### STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH

- 1) To increase support for permanent land conservation on private lands along the St. Mary's River and foster awareness of options for protection of land among the owners of priority conservation lands.
- 2) To recruit and train local community members as volunteer "Property Guardians" to be involved in the long-term stewardship of lands protected through the project.
- 3) To work with community partners operating in the St. Mary's River area, including the St. Mary's River Association, to develop an effective stewardship plan for the long-term protection of the watershed.

### EDUCATION

- 4) To increase awareness among the local community, recreational users of the river and summer residents of the importance of the river, its unique habitats, and options for taking action to help the conservation of significant areas along the river.

## SECUREMENT

- 5) To permanently protect at least one priority conservation site on private land on the St. Mary's River over the project year, protecting significant natural areas including some or all of the following: Acadian floodplain forest, old-growth hemlock forest, Wood turtle habitat and Atlantic salmon habitat.
- 6) To informally protect significant shoreline properties through voluntary "Stewardship Agreements" with interested landowners.
- 7) To work with the NS Government to protect ecologically important Crown lands along the river.
- 8) To work in partnership with community partners to identify additional priority sites for permanent protection in the future years of the project.

## **PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS**

### STEWARDSHIP / OUTREACH

- A total of 139 landowners along the St. Mary's River received information and updates about the St. Mary's River Conservation Legacy Campaign.
- In partnership with the St. Mary's River Association the Nature Trust hosted the third annual *River Days* in May 2009. This annual event drew more than 50 local community members, and was marked by guided nature walks, a public bbq, and the announcement of the newly protected C. W. Anderson Conservation Lands.
- In May 2010 the Nature Trust hosted the fourth annual *River Days*. This year's event took place over a full weekend, and was hosted in partnership with the St. Mary's River Association and Nature Nova Scotia. As Nature Nova Scotia's members come from across the province this was a great opportunity to introduce the St. Mary's River Conservation Legacy Campaign to a much wider audience. Along with the many guided walks and public events that were held over the three days, the Nature Trust hosted a public bbq and presentation for more than 65 people to celebrate the newly protected Archibald Conservation Lands.
- The Nature Trust provided St. Mary's River Property Guardian information sessions to interested individuals during the annual River Days events. Property Guardians provide an important service for the Nature Trust by assisting the Nature Trust with monitoring protected properties.
- The Nature Trust is continuing its partnership with the St. Mary's River Association towards the long-term protection of priority properties along the river. There are ongoing communications between the two organizations, and the River Association continues to be an important source of information, expertise and advice.
- We are continuing to work with the provincial Department of Environment and Natural Resources to protect land along the St. Mary's River.



### EDUCATION

- We continue to maintain our project display at the SMRA Interpretive Centre for visitors.

- We have updated our project brochure and have distributed it to the public through the St. Mary's River Association, local Department of Natural Resources offices, and the Atlantic Salmon Federation.
- The project has received significant media coverage, both provincially and locally, including articles in the Chronicle Herald, the Guysborough Journal, New Glasgow News, the Antigonish Casket, the St. Mary's River Association newsletter and Atlantic Salmon Journal, as well as a feature story on XFM Radio in Antigonish. As well, coverage of the St. Mary's River Project, and the Anderson and Archibald Conservation Lands were published in the Nature Trust's print and online newsletters, as well as on our website.

## SECUREMENT

- Two high priority conservation sites were protected in perpetuity:
  - **C.W. Anderson Conservation Lands** – This 111 acre property has over 1,000 metres of shoreline on the main branch of the St. Mary's River. The property is characterized by steep slopes with remnants of climax Acadian forest. The forest along the shoreline is predominantly hardwood, with some softwood interspersed. The Mad Falls Brook, including Mad Falls runs through the property into the main river, and is a known area for Bald eagles.
  - **Archibald Conservation Lands** – This floodplain property measures some 16 acres in size and protects over 100 metres of shoreline along the West Branch St. Mary's River. The property is characterized by a mature floodplain Acadian forest, some of the last of its kind in the province, and seasonal ponds and over 100 metres of undeveloped river frontage, critical habitat for the Wood turtle, a reptile listed on Canada's endangered species list.
- Interpretive signage for both the C.W. Anderson and Archibald Conservation Lands has been designed and created, and will be installed by year's end. The signage highlights the protected status of the properties, including their unique natural features, as well as background information about the landowners and their donations.
- We are continuing to work with private landowners along the St. Mary's River, to protect additional high priority natural habitats.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

The Nature Trust will continue its land securement and public outreach activities as part of the St. Mary's River Conservation Legacy Campaign. There continues to be excellent opportunities to preserve some very rare and important habitat, and the unique species they support. On this basis we will:

- 1) Identify and prioritize additional sites for permanent protection.
- 2) Work with landowners to protect priority habitat.
- 3) Work with the Province of Nova Scotia to encourage the protection of significant Crown lands along the river.

- 4) Increase support for private land conservation and stewardship of habitat with key landowners.
- 5) Continue to raise awareness of the river and its rare habitats and wildlife through community events, distribution of interpretive materials, public celebrations to mark project achievements, and training and supporting new and existing volunteer Property Guardians.
- 6) Begin the second phase of the St. Mary's River Conservation Legacy Campaign, which involves undertaking habitat restoration work and land stewardship to protect the shoreline between core protected areas, ultimately working towards the long term goal of contiguous intact shoreline habitat along the entire project area.