



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 9.1.2
Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee
March 5, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee

Original signed

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Jane Fraser, Director, Operations Support

Original signed

Brad Anguish, Director, Parks and Recreation

DATE: February 5, 2015

SUBJECT: NS Nature Trust 100 Islands

ORIGIN

July 3, 2014, motion of the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee (ESSC) as MOVED by Councillor Watts, and seconded by Councillor Rankin, that ESSC refer the presentation by NS Nature Trust to staff and request a staff report including the following information:

- Look at what requests are currently before Council for the acquisition of land with dates and amounts of lands being considered and the financial costs to those commitments;
- To look at what previous commitments to similar campaigns HRM has been involved in with the NS Nature Trust; and,
- Identify any municipal lands that may be located in the area.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Chapter 39, Section 61 (5) (a); The Municipality may acquire property, including property outside the Municipality, that the Municipality requires for its purposes or for the use of the public.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee not recommend to Regional Council, the approval of a donation, nor a grant of funds, nor a grant of land, to the Nature Trust's 100 Wild Islands Campaign.

BACKGROUND

Nova Scotia Nature Trust's (NSNT's) Executive Director, Bonnie Sutherland, made a presentation to the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee (ESSC) about their campaign to preserve over 100 islands along the Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM's) eastern shore. This report responds to three specific questions posed in ESSC's motion of July 3, 2014, and further includes information about the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, its '100 Wild Islands Legacy Campaign' (www.100wildislands.ca), and NSNT's request for municipal support.

Nova Scotia Nature Trust

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust (the Nature Trust or NSNT) was formed in 1994 with the intention of conserving ecologically significant lands. The Nature Trust is an incorporated charitable organization and is designated as a conservation organization under the Conservation Easement Act of Nova Scotia. Their mission is, "To protect Nova Scotia's outstanding natural legacy through land conservation." (source: <http://nsnt.ca/aboutus/>)

Through donations by private landowners and collaboration with government, NSNT has acquired properties ranging from woodlands and islands, to coastal and lakeshore sites. Such holdings preserve unique and significant natural features including old forests, wetlands, rare plant communities, and animal habitats, for the benefit of the public. When acquisition is not an option, the Nature Trust advances the use of conservation easements as a tool for protecting private lands. Easements protect the natural values of the property in perpetuity, while allowing the owner to retain title. After a property has been acquired, or an easement placed on it, the Nature Trust then becomes the permanent steward of that land, working to ensure ecological integrity is protected 'forever'.

Other primary land trusts in Nova Scotia include the Federal Government, the Province of Nova Scotia, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (Atlantic), and the Halifax Regional Municipality. Toward this end, NSNT maintains an extensive stewardship program that involves Nature Trust staff, professional biologists, government, landowners and volunteers.

The 100 Wild Islands Area

The archipelago of '100 Wild Islands' represents approximately 7,000 acres of near-shore islands along Halifax's Eastern Shore, between Taylor Head Provincial Park, to the north, and Clam Harbour Beach Provincial Park, to the south (see Attachment 1). The span between Provincial parks is over 30 kilometres along Highway 7.

This series of islands include boreal rainforests, bogs, barrens, white-sand beaches, coves, 250 kilometres of undisturbed shoreline, over 100 species of seabirds and songbirds, both migratory and year-round residents, among other fauna and flora. It is described by the campaign as, "one of the last remaining intact and ecologically rich island groups of its size in North America", and which, "have been largely undisturbed by humans for over 10,000 years."

In addition to environmental, park and open space benefits, the islands are deemed (by the Nature Trust) to be an asset through which ecotourism, economic development, and health and wellness objectives, may be leveraged along the eastern shore. The Nature Trust indicates that the tourism sector, ACOA, and the eastern shore Chamber of Commerce, are engaged in promoting the area and the islands.

Protected To-Date

Of the 7,000 acres of land the NSNT strives to protect, approximately 4,000 acres of crown land within the archipelago has already been secured with Provincial agreement, and which is specified in the Provincial parks and conservation plan: "Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Plan for Nova Scotia". Approximately 3,000 privately-owned acres has been, or will be, secured, as per Nature Trust's campaign information. NSNT has already succeeded in protecting several islands, including Ship Rock Island, Shelter Cove, Borgles Island, and a significant portion of Gerard Island, where the municipality owns (subject to legal verification) a 1-acre parcel (see Attachment 2, Item 1 in table A.)

The Campaign

In order to preserve the entire 3,000 privately-owned island-acres, the legacy campaign (www.100wildislands.ca) seeks to achieve its goal through purchases, donations, and conservation agreements/easements with island owners. The Nature Trust's overall financial goal is \$7 million, of which \$4.6 million has been raised, to-date. A primary NSNT donor and entrepreneur originating from Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia, Mr. Paul Gauthier, has pledged to match new donations dollar-for-dollar, over-and-above his contribution of \$3,500,000, to-date¹. Under this scenario, NSNT's current goal seeks to raise \$1,200,000 in order to leverage matching funds from Mr. Gauthier, to achieve the needed balance of \$2,400,000.

Request for Municipal Funding Support

The Nature Trust approached the municipality's Environmental and Sustainability Standing Committee in July 2014, with a presentation and a request for a \$500,000 donation/grant. The requested donation was also proposed to be spread over a maximum of two years. A challenge to Halifax citizens to match the municipal amount was also proposed, with the prospect of having donations matched by Mr. Gauthier until 2016. NSNT's intent; however, is to achieve its current goal of \$1,200,000 by November 2015.

Other types of municipal support that were proposed include municipal land donations or sale of municipal property to the Nature Trust. Municipal acquisition and development of coastal land were also suggested, thereby allowing greater public access for the launching of watercraft in order to access the islands. As well, a vacant one-acre parcel on Gerard Island, that is owned by the municipality (subject to legal verification), was mentioned by the Nature Trust as a potential donation (see Attachment 2, Number 1 in Table A.)

DISCUSSION

July 3/14 Motion: Proposed Land Acquisitions

The Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee's motion of July 3, 2014, requested three specific information items, the first being land acquisition requests currently before Council that are:

- a) Either, acquisitions currently being investigated or analysed by municipal staff, in response to standing committee or regional council direction. Lands bearing this status are being considered for their capacity, or potential, for open space or trail acquisition. This status requires municipal staff to inform or provide recommendations to Regional Council;
- b) Or, properties that municipal staff are working to acquire, through offers and negotiation with other land owners, as directed by Regional Council.

Table A of Attachment 1 to the Private and Confidential Information Report, NS Nature Trust 100 Islands, dated February 5, 2015, provides potential property acquisitions as per the above criteria.

If Regional Council were to consider a donation to the 100 Wild Islands Campaign, there would be an impact—an opportunity cost—in that other municipal park or trail acquisitions, that are prioritized and budgeted, may be postponed or even, perhaps, pre-empted, as a result. Also, refer (below) to the Conclusion sub-section of this report's Discussion section, as well as this report's Financial Implications section.

¹ Nova Scotia Nature Trust press release, "Nature Trust Honours Paul Gauthier's 100 Wild Islands Legacy", October 23, 2014, Source: <http://nsnt.ca/newsevents/?id=326&category=>

July 3/14 Motion: Commitments to Previous Campaigns

The second item requested in the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee motion sought information about similar campaigns which Regional Council supported in the past:

1. **Troop Island** – This is a 29-acre island on the eastern side of St. Margaret's Bay, in the Glen Margaret community. A municipal donation of \$150,000 was approved on August 10, 2010. The source of funds was the Q107 Parkland Development Reserve Account, via the Parkland Acquisition Account (CPX01149). Funds were, in part, generated by the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association (SMBSA) with assistance from other funding partners, including the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust. The Nova Scotia Nature Trust (NSNT) holds title to the island, which was purchased for approximately \$620,000.
2. **Micou's Island** – Micou's encompasses 22 acres and is located in the St. Margaret's Bay area near French Village. A municipal donation of \$100,000 was approved on March 27, 2007. The source of funds was Q107 - the Parkland Development Reserve Account. Municipal funds were donated to SMBSA's fund-raising efforts. Title is held by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (NSDNR), who also contributed \$500,000 toward the island's acquisition. It was purchased for approximately \$780,000.
3. **Young's Island** – This is an 84-acre island in Musquodoboit Harbour. A municipal grant of \$25,000 was approved on June 10, 2014, derived from the Community Grants program. Additional contributions came from: Federal Government Natural Areas Conservation Program (\$99,210), Provincial Government Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust (unconfirmed at time of application), the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (International) \$11,000, and a private land donation (\$151,000 land value equivalent.) The Nature Conservancy of Canada (Atlantic Region) holds title to the island, among other nearby islands. It was appraised at \$504,000.

July 3/14 Motion: Municipal Land In The Area

The Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee motion also requested information about land that the municipality owns in the area:

Within the campaign area (i.e., between the two provincial parks), ownership information derived from the provincial land ownership database, Property Online, indicates that six parcels are apparently owned by the municipality, and are listed in Table A, Attachment 2.

In addition to municipal properties within, and adjacent to, the campaign area, municipal parcels are also located north and south of the campaign area/provincial parks:

Approximately 11 kilometres north of Taylor Head Provincial Park, in the community of Sheet Harbour, the municipality owns several parcels of land supporting the following public amenities: sportfields, an arena, a refuse transfer station, a fire hall, schools, tourist information, and a playground. The nearest municipal beach (fresh water) is approximately 15 kilometres north of Sheet Harbour, at Malay Falls, which is leased from Nova Scotia Power Incorporated.

To the south of Clam Harbour Beach Provincial Park, near Lake Charlotte, three municipal properties accommodate a ball field, a fresh water boat launch, and a vacant parcel, none of which have ocean frontage. The municipality also operates an aquatic program at Webber's Campground Beach on Lake Charlotte.

Policy Alignment

The Nature Trust's current objectives overlay, and complement, the near-50-year-old provincial intent of establishing, first, a national park, and later a provincial park, in the area. A recent (2013) Government of Nova Scotia initiative named, "Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Plan for Nova Scotia", supports the NSNT campaign. The provincial plan intends to: 1) Update Nova Scotia's park system to secure and strengthen its long-term success; and 2) Increase Nova Scotia's legally protected landmass to at least 12 percent by 2015. The collaborative goal, between the Nature Trust and the Province, is to designate approximately 4,000 acres of provincial crown islands and headlands (both wilderness and provincial parks) for protection.

The Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS) policy includes such broad aspirations as the health of the local economy, providing opportunities for public recreation, protection of natural corridors, environmental sustainability, land and water resource preservation, and growth/settlement pattern management.

The campaign's objectives are bolstered by the existing Eastern Shore (East) Municipal Planning Strategy, which states: "Existing coastal park areas and other crown owned coastal lands and islands within the Plan Area will be recognized through appropriate zoning. The zoning will support only those uses which are consistent with long term park objectives and will provide for overall protection of coastal lands including islands."

From a recreational standpoint, the population adjacent to the 100 Wild Islands coastline is sparse, and as such, there is a low incidence of municipal investment in recreation infrastructure along the 30 kilometres adjacent to the campaign area. However, recreation opportunities *are* concentrated in communities on both ends of the campaign area, namely Sheet Harbour (11 km north of Taylor Head Provincial Park), Malay Falls (22 km north of Taylor Head Provincial Park), Lake Charlotte (10 km south of Clam Harbour Beach Provincial Park), and Musquodoboit Harbour (17 km south of Lake Charlotte). These communities host municipal recreation opportunities such as trails, playgrounds, sportfields, arenas, parks, and aquatic programs at private fresh water beaches (i.e., at Lake Charlotte and Malay Falls.)

Securing the islands would support leisure activities such as canoeing, kayaking, fishing, bird watching, and wilderness camping, among others, and may be regarded as opportunities for growing ecotourism along the eastern shore. Other than at the Bollong Park Ballfield, 19088 Highway 7, Spry Harbour—where one could launch a canoe or kayak from shore—there are no other municipally-owned properties offering direct access to the ocean. There are; however, other public and private boat launches within the campaign area (see Attachment 1).

Conclusion

Despite the environmental benefits of preserving the 100 Wild Islands, the municipality's participation ought to be rationalized against the fact that there is currently no budget allocated for this matter. As well, any municipal contribution would be made in absence of a broad-scope municipal plan for open space distribution and financial allocation, which is now being developed as the "Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan (GPOSPP)."

The GPOSPP will assist Regional Council in determining an economically and environmentally sustainable strategy for the equitable maintenance and distribution of parks and open spaces throughout the municipality. High level GPOSPP policy objectives are anticipated to be before Regional Council by 2016. One outcome of this plan is to provide Regional Council with recommendations regarding municipal open space acquisitions. Until the GPOSPP is approved by Regional Council—and barring any interim deliberation by Regional Council about the merits of individual, un-prioritized park and open space acquisitions, donations or grants—it would be premature to recommend a donation or grant worth \$500,000, relative to those open space acquisition funds already approved or anticipated through approved master plans. Furthermore, the value of such unbudgeted donation or grant would set-up an opportunity-cost scenario, potentially preventing or postponing the acquisition of lands already approved as priorities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report's recommendation. Should, however, ESSC recommend to Regional Council that a donation, or grant of funds, or grant of land, ought to be made, then Regional Council would have to consider which current land acquisition priorities ought to be set aside in order to reassign funds to this cause, given that there is no current budget for this initiative.

If Regional Council were to approve such donation or grant, a thorough analysis would need to be undertaken by municipal staff, resulting in a subsequent report recommending specific cost implications, changes in priority, and appropriate funding sources. In particular, an assessment would be needed to discern the impact of committing funds to this initiative in the absence of a Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan and priority criteria.

See, also, the above Discussion section of this report, entitled, 'July 3/14 Motion: Proposed Land Acquisitions'.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Not applicable.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no negative environmental implications identified and associated with the goals of the NSNT 100 Wild Islands Campaign. On the contrary, preserving islands and their ecosystems is deemed to be a positive step in terms of the islands' (and surrounding marine habitats') environmental health, sustainability, and conservation. Human interaction with sensitive habitats will be managed through NSNT's impending management plan for the islands, and the Nature Trust's island preservation objective will help ensure responsible stewardship of these natural assets.

ALTERNATIVES

The Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee (ESSC) could, alternatively, recommend to Regional Council, to approve a donation or grant of \$500,000, or another amount, or a grant of land. See Financial Implications Section of this report for additional information.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Map – 100 Wild Islands Campaign Area
Attachment 2 – Table A - Municipal Lands Near Campaign Area

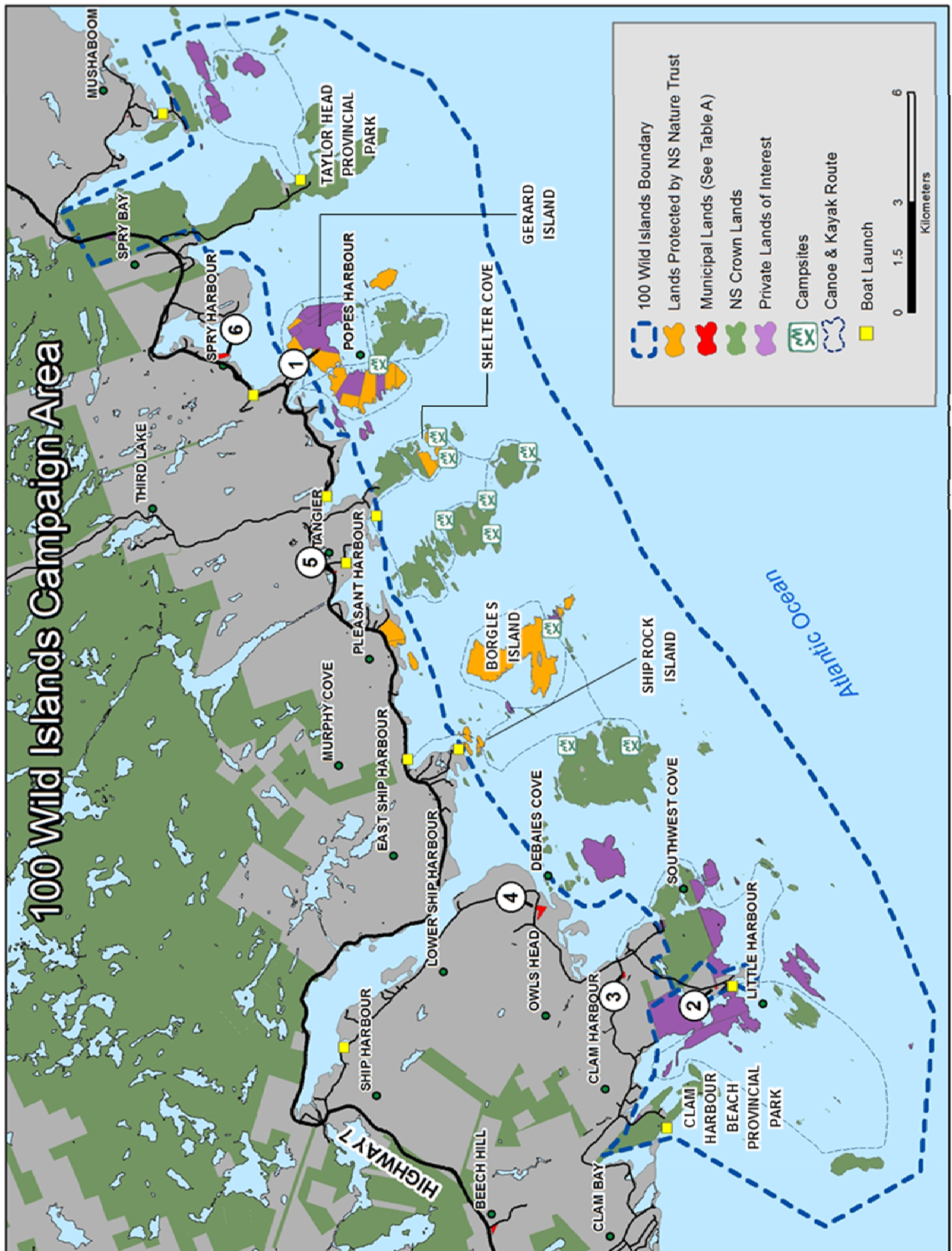
A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

Report Prepared by: Rudy Vodicka, Coordinator, Corporate Real Estate, Operations Support, 902.490.5582

Report Approved by: Original signed
Peter Stickings, Manager, Corporate Real Estate, Operations Support, 902.490.7129

Report Approved by: Original signed
Peter Bigelow, Manager, Real Property Planning, Parks & Recreation, 902.490.6047

Financial Approval by: Original signed
Greg Keefe, Director of Finance & ICT/CFO, 902.490.6308



Attachment 2 Table A – Municipal Lands Near Campaign Area

ESSC REPORT – NS Nature Trust 100 Islands

Numbers 1 to 6, below, correspond to the numbered/circled parcels on the map in Attachment 1.

Numbers <small>Correspond to Map in Attachm't 1</small>	Parcel Label	Land Category	Parcel Assets or Public Uses	PID No. & Civic Address	Parcel Area
1	Gerard Island	Open Space / Vacant (Not Oceanfront)	Unknown	40028193	1.0 Acre
2	Gorden J. Stevens Ball Park	Open Space / Sportfield (Not Oceanfront)	Ball field with fence & wooden dugouts	40189946 520 Little Harbour Rd., Little Harbour	2.1 Acres
3	Robert Jamieson Harbourside Elementary School	Open Space / Play Area (Not Oceanfront)	Paved play area at rear of school	00555516 2743 Clam Harbour Rd., Owls Head	3.2 Acres
4	Vacant lot Debaie's Cove	Open Space / Vacant (Not Oceanfront)	Scrub spruce and low bushes	40288821 Debaies Cove Rd., Debaies Cove	20.0 Acres
5	Lakefront Consolidated School	Open Space / Play Area & Sportfield (Not Oceanfront)	Playground & soccer field associated with school	00554782 17286 Highway 7, Tangier	1.3 Acres
6	Bollong Park Ballfield	Open Space / Sportfield (Oceanfront)	Ball field with fence, backstop & dugouts	00428060 19046 Highway 7, Spry Harbour 40028698 19088 Highway 7, Spry Harbour	0.6 Acres + 7.0 Acres