

RE: 9.1.2

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Subject: 100 Wild Islands update for HRM ESSC

Dear members of the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee,

I understand that the Nature Trust's proposal for HRM support of our 100 Wild Islands initiative, and review of the related staff report, is on the agenda for your upcoming meeting.

Please find enclosed an updated proposal for your consideration. We have taken into account the issues raised by staff and offer an alternative that we hope you find helpful and informative.

We look to your committee for strong leadership in supporting this nationally significant environmental initiative (and significant recreation, tourism and economic driver), and look forward to your decision.

Bonnie

Bonnie Sutherland
Executive Director

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Nova Scotia Nature Trust—100 Wild Islands Legacy Campaign Proposal for Halifax Regional Municipality

Update for the Environment and Sustainability Committee--March 2015

The 100 Wild Islands

Off Nova Scotia's Atlantic shores lies one of our least known, yet greatest natural treasures – a wild and beautiful group of pristine coastal islands and headlands encompassing over 7000 acres of diverse coastal habitats.

Bookended by Clam Harbour and Taylor Head Provincial Parks, this archipelago is home to over 100 wild islands. Only an hour from Halifax, untouched white sand beaches and idyllic sheltered coves, dramatic, windswept headlands and ancient rainforests provide refuge for a rich diversity of birds and other wildlife. The islands offer unparalleled opportunities for education, recreation, research and discovery. One of the last vast, wild and ecologically rich coastal archipelagos on the planet, its protection provides a world class ecotourism and economic development asset for Nova Scotia.



This incredible natural treasure is located wholly within Halifax Regional Municipality. We hope that you, the members of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, will encourage the Municipality to show its leadership in environment and sustainability by supporting this initiative. We offer this **updated** proposal for your consideration.

Environment Committee Mandate

The Nature Trust's 100 Wild Islands campaign proposal is before your committee because only you have the mandate to advise Council on how best to protect the environment and to advance sustainable parks, forests and open space. Our project delivers significant environmental and open space protection, as well as healthy living, recreation and tourism opportunities. The effort is already widely supported by the federal and provincial governments, corporate sector and private donors from Nova Scotia and far afield. No doubt many who already enthusiastically endorse this nationally significant environmental initiative will look to your environmental leadership in also supporting this important initiative.

We understand that Council must consider recommendations of the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee, and that the Finance and Audit committee is responsible for determining budget implications and funding options for recommended projects. We hope that your decision will not be swayed by staff concerns about the land acquisition budget and 'lost opportunities.' Funds for this initiative do not necessarily need to come from the land acquisition budget (especially where the land is *not* being purchased by the Municipality). Our request is simply for funding support for a major environmental opportunity, similar to the support for the Discovery Centre and other community initiatives. Our project clearly meets the Committee's environmental mandate, and we hope you will recommend Council support based on its environmental significance.

The staff report also expresses concern that the project is not in the current budget. Our fundraising initiative is a long-term one, with many major partners spreading support over multiple years. The Municipality's contribution could be budgeted and transferred in future fiscal years, so the current budget need not obstruct your recommendation of funding support.

100 Wild Islands is a very significant environmental initiative, and support by the Municipality makes good financial sense. The Municipality would only be making a small investment (see below for modified request) in an initiative bringing land worth many millions of dollars into protection, land with important environmental conservation and open space recreation opportunities that benefit the Municipality and its citizens significantly. And unlike if the Municipality had purchased all of the islands, there are no long-term budget and staffing implications with ongoing land and infrastructure management. The project offers irreplaceable environmental benefits, while leveraging significant economic, health and other benefits to the Municipality and its citizens and with negligible financial implications for the Municipality.

Halifax Regional Municipality Priorities

Healthy Communities

The Municipality's priorities for 2015/16 for Healthy Communities include providing access to facilities and natural assets that enable a range of choices for structured and unstructured leisure and recreation activities. A second priority is that "Halifax is a leader in Energy and Environment Initiatives."

The 100 Wild Islands project meets the objectives of both priorities. The islands provide a unique, as yet largely untapped opportunity for outdoor recreation, both structured and unstructured (sailing, kayaking, hiking, boating, birdwatching, camping, eco-tours etc.). The federal and provincial governments, regional and local tourism/development organizations and community members are already jumping on board to explore new opportunities for recreational and tourism development that this island campaign opens. Being only an hour from downtown, the islands as well as future trail, access, camping and other recreational and tourism infrastructure, will create excellent opportunities for the Municipality to foster and support active living and healthy lifestyles of its residents (and largely funded by other entities).

Municipal partnership in our initiative will demonstrate environmental leadership and also leverage tremendous benefit towards encouraging healthy, active living for its residents.

Economic Development

The "Now or Never" report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy calls for bold, innovative and collaborative approaches to expand economic growth while ensuring environmental sustainability. Our islands initiative is an exciting and ambitious game-changer for Nova Scotia, with globally significant conservation benefits, and also significant potential to support the urgent priorities of stimulating economic and population growth. A new world-class protected area an hour from Nova Scotia's capital offers incredible potential for tourism positioning, branding and developing new tourism and recreational products and opportunities at the provincial, municipal and local levels. Having 100 wild islands protected just beyond the city is also an asset that contributes to the unique quality of life and lifestyle that Nova Scotia offers. Promoting such an asset can help in retaining population and attracting people and capital to our province and to the Municipality.

There are clear spin-off opportunities of protection and promotion of the 100 Wild Islands for the residents of the eastern shore in particular. With the help of an ACOA STEP grant and an economic development grant from the Municipality, residents are already exploring best options for rural economic development along the coast, centred on the 100 Wild Islands. The Municipality's Economic Strategy supports and encourages such entrepreneurship, recognizing that rural economic development is an integral component of the Municipality's overall economic prosperity.

The Municipality has already endorsed and financially supported this local economic development initiative generated by the 100 Wild Islands project. Supporting the actual protection of the islands demonstrates the Municipality's commitment both to environment and to economic development within the Municipality and for Nova Scotia more broadly.

Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan

The proposal for the Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan (GPOSPP) states that “protecting the environment is both a core principle of the Regional Plan, and a core value for Halifax citizens.” Priorities include identifying ecologically sensitive areas and protecting untouched wilderness that can sustain wildlife, plants and fish, as well as scenic views, in a network of natural spaces.

While we understand that the plan is not yet complete, the 100 Wild Islands project is an irreplaceable opportunity that meets the proposal's broad objectives. Not acting on this unique opportunity simply because the plan is not complete does not make sense, especially in light of the small investment by the Municipality (especially relative to the \$15+ million in land protected to the benefit of the Municipality and its residents and the scale of significance of the project). There is also no commitment required to long-term investment in Municipal infrastructure or ongoing human resource investment (as there would be if the Municipality were acquiring the lands). Should the GPOSPP identify the 100 Wild Islands area a priority, the islands will already be protected.

There is no other island wilderness of such vast scale and high ecological significance within the Municipality, nor even within the province or the country—this opportunity is truly unique. From a greenbelting and open space perspective, we have an exciting development since our presentation to your committee. We are protecting land that provides a much-needed direct linkage between the 40,000 acres Tangier Grand Lake Wilderness Area and the 100 Wild Islands. The site could encompass a picnic/pull-over area on the coastal highway, interpretive signage, boat access to the 100 wild islands, and trail and river access between the coast and this currently inaccessible yet fantastic inland wilderness area. A truly a unique wilderness recreation opportunity within the Municipal boundaries!

The impact of protecting the 100 Wild Islands is profound for environmental and open space protection, and will no doubt be a very positive asset to any future greenbelting and open space plan.

Campaign Success to Date

The Campaign goal is \$7 million. We have already raised \$5,553,000 to date, with support from across Nova Scotia, Canada and the US. Notable donors include Environment Canada, the Province, Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust, TD Bank Group, RBC, Mountain Equipment Coop, David Wilson, Jim Lawley, Colin MacDonald, the O'Regan family, Paul Scott, Dave Hebb, the John and Barbara Poole Family Funds and the McCain family. With Cole Harbour native and entrepreneur Paul Gauthier's generous match of every dollar raised, we have only \$735,000 left to go.



Rationale and Request for Municipal Support

The 100 Wild Islands project offers a unique opportunity to protect environmentally important open space for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations. It connects the Municipality's environment, healthy community and economic development objectives. We seek a small investment that will leverage protection of well over \$15 million in conservation lands. There are no on-going costs as would be the case if the Municipality acquired the islands, as the Nature Trust and the Province bear all future management costs. In addition, the community is already working to develop a tourism plan for the area, encouraging private investment to expand tourism and recreational infrastructure. Much of the usual Municipal investment required to maximize benefits of such an initiative for citizens, and to meet Municipal environmental, open space, recreation, tourism and development goals, will be leveraged through significant private, provincial and federal investment.

The campaign has resonated deeply with other levels of government, the business community and citizens across the province and beyond, with tremendous support in place already for the campaign. We now look to the Municipality for its leadership in and commitment to environmental sustainability.

HRM: Inspiring the Community and Bringing the Campaign to Goal

We kindly request that the Municipality provide up to \$180,000 in support. We also encourage you to challenge your residents to donate \$180,000, together bringing the Campaign to goal. Inspire the community to work together with the Nature Trust and the Municipality to protect this important part of the treasured coastal legacy that defines and shapes our city, province and country.

We proposed the Municipality offer its funding as a match for every dollar donated by a business or resident of the Municipality between March 1, 2015 and March 1, 2016 (up to a maximum of \$180,000). With both your support and community donations being matched one to one by our campaign benefactor, the leveraged financial impact of your investment is \$720,000, meeting the \$7 million goal.

Payments could be spread over a 3 year period (*beginning in 2016 if necessary*). The annual payment would be just \$60,000, with no ongoing costs as we bear all property management responsibility.

We also encourage the Municipality donate or sell for one dollar, the 1 acre school lot on Gerard Island (with no value to the Municipality), to become a part of the 100 wild islands legacy.

With tremendous support and engagement from all other levels of government, the corporate sector and community, the Municipality's absence as a campaign supporter would be notable. The Now or Never report challenges all Nova Scotians, including Municipalities, to take action: to embrace the significant opportunities before us; to do things differently and to change old attitudes; to transform Nova Scotia into a dynamic and creative province, capable of taking bold measures and risks, and of coming together as a unified community to build a better future. We urge you to be bold. To look beyond reasons not to act, and instead to show environmental leadership. To champion a community-led example of the kind of multi-partner, innovative and cooperative initiative we need in Nova Scotia and in the Municipality if we are to succeed in protecting our environment and building a sustainable and prosperous future. We urge the Municipality to proudly lead the 100 Wild Islands campaign over the finish line!

Nova Scotia Nature Trust

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