

PERSPECTIVE

Do what you love to save old forests

Citizens act together on South Mountain

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Climate change and nature loss are biting us again in Nova Scotia.

Flash flooding claimed another life. Driveways washed out. Houses flooded in Annapolis County.

Meanwhile, up on the South Mountain, citizen scientists continue to document old forests and species at risk. If we are successful in protecting these 3,900 hectares around Goldsmith Lake, we will be protecting a pristine lake and the old forests that best absorb and store carbon at the same time as protecting a giant mossy sponge that absorbs deluges like the one that fell on July 11.

We will also be supporting the greatest diversity of life. Compare areas of forest untouched for decades and centuries to those that were logged in 2022-23 and you will see just how crucial it is to protect substantial areas of forest in every watershed.

What happens on the South Mountain doesn't stay on the South Mountain, it runs downhill. Everything is connected.

Conserving forests and wetlands addresses climate change and biodiversity loss and your municipal taxes and driveways in your community and insurance costs and your neighbours' peace of mind and the possibility of passing on a livable planet to your kids and grandkids. Everything is connected.

It can feel overwhelming. It is overwhelming, the scale of the threats we are facing at a time when many are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. But there is also relief and joy in coming together to work toward a common goal, a goal that will in a small but measurable way make a difference at every scale, from local to global.

In Annapolis County, while the citizen scientists have been scouring the forests for at-risk lichens, Save Our Old Forests (SOOF) has drawn people together in this common cause: Do what you love and do it to save our old forests.

Volunteers cook for SOOF Soup Sundays; musicians play old-time dance music to a community hall alive with laughter. Hikers hike, paddlers



A drone shot of Goldsmith Lake on the South Mountain. **MALACHI WARR**

paddle, birders bird. And always, people are learning about old forests in general and about the proposed Goldsmith Lake Wilderness Area in particular.

Youth from Lsit'kuk (Bear River First Nation) have visited the oldest old-growth forest we have found so far and learned the Mi'kmaw names for many of the tree species as we went.

The Municipality of Annapolis County and the towns of Annapolis Royal and Middleton support the effort to protect the area, as does our MLA. The citizen scientists report all our finds to the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, as well as keeping Tim Halman, the minister of environment and climate change, up to date on everything relevant to the conservation value of the area. Indeed, we have invited him to visit so we can show him the old-growth for-

est we showed the Mi'kmaw youth.

This is what a collaborative effort to protect an area looks like. Already, in Kings County there is a similar effort underway to protect the Chain Lakes Wilderness Area. In Halifax County, a huge amount of work has gone into protecting the Ingram River Wilderness Area.

Support from local businesses is key for all these efforts. Communities from Antigonish to Yarmouth are identifying areas they most want to see protected in their communities. Nothing feels better than coming together to take positive action in the face of a looming threat.

The province has already taken one huge step in the right direction. The PCs ran on a pledge to protect 20 per cent of our province by 2030, "outbidding" the Liberals by three percentage points. To their great credit, as soon as they formed government, the PCs put that pledge into legislation. An in-

terim target of protecting 15 per cent by March 2026 is also in place.

This government has emphasized the need for a Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy, recognizing the crucial role members of the public will play. In the spirit of collaboration, we extend an invitation to Premier Tim Houston to come out and see the beautiful area around Goldsmith Lake we are working so hard to protect.

If hiking isn't your cup of tea, please join us at SOOFSTOCK 2024, the second annual music festival, taking place Aug. 23-25 at the West Dalhousie Community Hall, pay what you can.

Come and join a bunch of people willing to set aside their differences to work together. Because this is an emergency and that's what we do. We act together when we have to.

Nina Newington of Mount Hanley is a member of the Citizen Scientists of Southwest Nova Scotia.