

Hardy and Barbara Eshbaugh: Leaving a Conservation Legacy on the Beloved St. Mary's River

Waternish, NS (August 9, 2014) – The Nature Trust is delighted to be announcing a new protected area on the St. Mary's River this Saturday, at a community celebration on the river. Life-long naturalists and passionate conservationists Hardy & Barbara Eshbaugh are generously protecting their 160 acre riverfront property by conservation easement.



The beautiful riverfront land is located near Waternish, on the main branch of the St. Mary's in Guysborough County. It is home to over a kilometre of river shoreline and both extensive upland forests and mature Acadian floodplain forest, a forest type that is rare in Nova Scotia. These floodplain forests, which once lined many Nova Scotian rivers before large-scale clearing for forestry and agriculture, are a critical part of river health. They help to keep rivers cool, clear and fast flowing.

Protecting these remnant forests is an important part of restoring the St. Mary's River ecosystem and ensuring it can sustain important species including Atlantic Salmon and nationally endangered Wood Turtles.

The property also supports important habitat for a diversity of bird species, including several which are on Canada's endangered species list: Common Nighthawk, Canada Warbler, Barn Swallow, and Eastern Wood Peewee.

The property has been in the Eshbaugh family since 1922 when Dr. Eshbaugh's grandfather purchased the land as part of his family logging business. When financial times were tough, a savvy local lawyer saved the family losing the property by arranging the sale of shares for American hunters and anglers to use the property for a few weeks every year. Thus the *Club for the Well-being of Men* was formed. The land and lodge became part of the treasured cultural and recreational heritage of the St. Mary's, which continues to this day.



In 1967 the Club disbanded and property ownership was passed on to Dr. Eshbaugh, and he has been a passionate steward of the land ever since. He has fond memories of visiting the property every summer with his father and his uncle and cousin, and as testament to his connection to the land, when he married, he and his young bride, Barbara, honeymooned on the property. They have spent as much time there as much as his busy career as a botanist travelling to many remote and fascinating parts of the planet, and a highly regarded, award-winning conservationist and professor at the University of Miami allowed. He even used the lands as an outdoor classroom and 'living laboratory' for the very fortunate students of his Natural History of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland course.

Asked why he chose to protect the property, Dr. Eshbaugh replied, “One doesn’t often get a chance to make a significant difference for the environment, but placing conservation easement on the Waternish property that has been a part of my family since 1922 feels right. I think both my grandfather and my father and their respective families would have been pleased to see this happen. Hopefully future generations of Nova Scotians will be able to enjoy this beautiful and serene place that has brought my family, friends, and former students such joy.”



The Eshbaughs will continue to own the property and intend to pass it on to their children one day, but the conservation easement ensures that whoever owns the property many years from now, its natural values are protected, forever.

The area has been a conservation focus for the Nature Trust since 2006, with the launch of the “St. Mary’s River Conservation Legacy Campaign” and the first conservation lands on the river, generously donated by the late A.M. Sandy and Shirley Cameron. The Eshbaugh property is the fifth Nature Trust conservation site on the river, bringing the total protected areas close to 600 acres, together protecting towering old growth hemlock forests, picturesque waterfalls, rich floodplain forests, habitat for endangered wildlife from song birds to turtles, and favourite feeding sites for bald eagles as well as treasured fishing and paddling areas.



With proposed protected areas designation of surrounding Crown lands (in the new Parks and Protected Areas Plan), and ongoing efforts of other conservation partners focused on salmon, species at risk and watershed health, significant progress is being made in protecting this ecologically unique and important freshwater gem.

“With much of the land, especially the important floodplain and old growth forests along the St. Mary’s in private ownership, the river’s long-term health and sustainability depends on the effective stewardship of private lands,” says Nature Trust Conservation Coordinator, Peter Green. “The Eshbaughs’ generosity and vision in protecting their land marks another important milestone in protecting the natural legacy of the river.”

The Nature Trust plans more conservation on the river, with additional lands already being explored for protection later this year. This conservation success and the Nature Trust’s freshwater legacy work on the river is possible thanks to generous funding by the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust, Keurig Canada, Banrock Station Wines, the David and Faye Sobey Foundation, the RBC Blue Water Project and many other supporters, conservation partners and volunteers.

The property celebration takes place at 1849 Waternish Road, in Waternish. The event includes the official signing of the conservation easement, honouring of the Eshbaughs and celebration of the property protection, information about other Nature Trust conservation efforts on the river, and a guided nature walk on the new conservation lands, led by Nature Trust staff and conservation volunteers.

The Waternish easement is the Nature Trust’s 65th conservation site, bringing our protected areas network to over 8300 acres.

