

Nature Trust Protects Land, Fulfills Conservation Dream in Cape Breton

October 25, 2017 [Halifax] – The Nova Scotia Nature Trust announced today the protection of two new conservation lands on the Bras d’Or Lake, Cape Breton. Generously donated by Alastair Saunders and Chris Corston, the new conservation lands build on a mosaic of Nature Trust protected areas in Cape Breton preserving rare island and coastal habitats, wetlands and old-growth forests. The land gift also fulfils a mother’s dream, keeping a treasured piece of family land wild, forever.

The new conservation lands include 80 acre MacRaes Island, a beautiful forested island, ringed with pebble beaches and wetlands. With few islands in the entire Bras d’Or, it contributes significant island habitats important for a diversity of birds and other wildlife. The Lime Hill property begins on the nearby shoreline, extending up Marble Mountain to the proposed North Mountain Wilderness Area. It encompasses 100 acres of old growth forests, brooks and marshes, providing an important ecological corridor, and potential hiking trail opportunity, connecting the lake to the inland mountain wilderness. Both properties are part of the internationally recognized Bras d’Or Lake UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, they add to a growing network of lands in the watershed that are protected by the Nature Trust, the Province and other conservation partners.



View on MacRaes Island.

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Saunders’ late father, Richard, was Head of Anatomy at Dalhousie University and his work often took him to Cape Breton, at times accompanied by his wife. Saunders’ late mother, Moya Cameron Macintyre, immediately fell in love with the area, and in 1950 they acquired two properties. The land so closely resembled her childhood home in the Scottish highlands, she affectionately called the Lime Hill property “Ardmoy,” Gaelic for Moya’s Hill. Saunders recalled his mother’s love of the natural world as inspiring his own appreciation of nature. Her shelves were filled with field guides of every aspect of nature—flowers, birds, insects, trees—and the writings of Thoreau.

The family’s sense that the lands were special was confirmed when the Province approached them to buy MacRaes island in the 1970s. Bald eagle populations were endangered across North America at that time, and being home to an eagle’s nest, the island’s protection was critical. While not ready to part with her land, the offer reaffirmed his mother’s connection to the land and her conviction to ensure its preservation.

While the state of the roads in those days and the absence of a causeway made Cape Breton a difficult journey for Haligonians, Saunders noted, “It made my mother happy to know that even if

she could not visit the lands she dreamed of often, they remained as they were--her little piece of Scotland, wild and free.”

The lands, and his mother’s dream for them, passed on to Saunders. When he discovered the Nature Trust, he was inspired to take action.

“When we learned of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, we knew we had found the group who could preserve the woods and waters and living creatures of Ardmoy and MacRaes Island as my mother would have wished,” said Saunders.

After visiting the site with the Nature Trust this past August, Saunders and his wife were convinced that preserving this pristine wilderness was the right thing to do.

“We know that with the Nature Trust, my mother’s dream is in good hands,” said Saunders.



Alastair Saunders and Chris Corston on MacRaes Island in August

The Nature Trust has been working to protect important land for conservation in Cape Breton for over 20 years, beginning with the Washabuck Conservation Lands, protected by the late conservation icon Rudy Haase in 1997. In all it has protected 11 conservation lands, encompassing over 1,500 acres in Cape Breton.

“This generous gift of land from Alastair and Chris adds to a growing assemblage of significant conservation lands on the Bras d’Or, and across the island,” said Nature Trust Executive Director, Bonnie Sutherland.

She highlighted another important element of the conservation story, the heart connection. “While the conservation achievements like this are so important and exciting, we also find real magic in being able turn peoples’ connection to the land, their wish to preserve the special places they love, into action,” noted Sutherland. “Alastair’s beaming smile when we sailed into MacCraes island, knowing his mother’s dream was coming true, that was a magical moment.”

Whether it’s helping people protect their own land, make a donation or include the Nature Trust in their will, Sutherland said it is truly inspiring helping people to discover that they can be a part of protecting Nova Scotia’s natural legacy.

Information on how to make a tax-receipted donation to the Nature Trust and to join in protecting Nova Scotia’s natural legacy is available at www.nsnt.ca or by calling the Nature Trust at (902) 425-LAND.