



# Shelter Cove

*Coastlines are being bought up—this time it's for Nova Scotians*

by Donna D'Amour

The desire to preserve wilderness for future generations of Nova Scotians has brought together, for the first time, two of the province's most active conservation groups: the Nova Scotia Nature Trust and—through the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund—the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters (NSFAH). Their common ground: love of the land. The literal common ground, 145 acres on the eastern shore near Tangier, one of Nova Scotia's last unroaded, pristine coastal headlands.

Shelter Cove is the focus of Nature Trust efforts to set aside an unspoiled coastal area from development, ensuring its ecosystem health and its continued availability for traditional recreation.

Currently, less than five per cent of Nova Scotia's coastline is under protection, while nearly 95 per cent is in private hands and quickly being developed. Conservationists recognize that coastal wilderness areas are in danger of being lost if action isn't taken immediately.

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust works with private landowners and other partners to protect and manage significant natural areas throughout the province—about 2,600 acres since 1994. Last fall the Trust put out a call for funding partners for the Shelter Cove project, and this spring hunters and trappers responded with a donation of \$50,000, gathered through fees on licences and granted through the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund. The fund was an initiative of the NSFAH; it is managed by the Department of Natural Resources, with three of the five positions at the voting table held by representatives of the NSFAH. One of the conditions of the donation, as with all Habitat Conservation Fund donations, is that land acquired continue to be accessible for hunting and fishing.

There are those who might be surprised by the partnership between the Fund board and the Nature Trust, which is itself not surprising: much has been made of the differences between environmentalists—often regarded as exclusively preservationist—and hunters, who have traditionally driven

Something for everyone: Shelter Cove will stay in the hands of Nova Scotians for beach-going, boating, angling and hunting.

conservation. In today's conservation community, however, it's becoming obvious that extreme views are in the minority—at least in this part of the world.

"This new partnership between the Nature Trust and the hunting and angling community is important for land conservation in Nova Scotia. It's a really positive step," says Bonnie Sutherland, executive director of the Nature Trust. She adds "It helps people see that the Nature Trust is not just about environmentalism or environmentalists, that we're about saving land, saving the places people love. Those places can be rivers that are important for salmon or coastlines that are important for sea kayakers. It's about land and people."

Tony Rodgers, executive director of the NSFAH, is also happy about the new partnership: "Conservation is the key role of our organization, like all sporting groups. Sustainability is the guiding principle. We recognize that without good habitat all the other activities we want to participate in won't happen. And we're losing that habitat."

"The fund has the ability to purchase land for Nova Scotians, but it doesn't have the structure in place to manage the acquisitions. We need experts in ecological assessment and long-term use planning for that, and the Nature Trust brings that knowledge to the relationship. We're proud to support their efforts."

## Shelter Cove Wilderness Area



A prime candidate to be snatched up and made private, like so much Nova Scotia coastline.

The Federation, which celebrated its 75th year in operation last year, is an umbrella organization for 32 clubs, with a total of 6,500 members and supporters. These clubs have dozens of ongoing projects, from watercourse restoration to pruning apple trees in remote regions for wildlife habitat. They also raise money to donate to projects carried out by other groups.

"The provincial government did a study on mainland moose and they needed radio collars. Our members raised quite a bit of money to provide those," Rodgers says. "We have a strong relationship with the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Inland Fisheries, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; now we're pleased to partner with the Nature Trust for land conservation."

Rodgers says that when legislation was being drafted by the province to protect wilderness areas, traditional uses like hunting and angling activities were allowed to continue. That makes perfect sense to Rodgers: if—after centuries of hunting, fishing and trapping—the land is still considered pristine enough to be a wilderness area, it's obvious that conservation has always been attended to.

Shelter Cove is another example of how Nova Scotians have used the land wisely.

"When you've got eyes on the land, you've got stewardship. People become good stewards by looking after the places they love," says Rodgers.

Bonnie Sutherland adds, "Our community partners bring us local knowledge of places we're trying to save—partnerships are essential to what we do."

Besides providing expertise, a community presence, and financial contributions, volunteers can help steward the Nature Trust's protected areas. And, the information about available lands that are suitable for preservation comes from people who know their local areas.

Land has to be of ecological interest to qualify for protection by the Nature Trust. Shelter Cove has that in spades.

Dr. Martin Willison, a professor of Biology and Resource and Environmental Study at Dalhousie University, was one of the team who assessed the site for ecological merit. "It is quite rich," he says. "It is a typical headland; it sticks well into the ocean so it is very exposed. Part of the area is unmodified; it has a very interesting

old-growth forest. The trees are small but old, a stunted kind of growth because of the exposure."

The richness is in the diversity of the area: it has beaches, sand dunes, rocky cliffs, a salt marsh, and woodland. Dr. Willison discovered one of Nova Scotia's rare plants growing there, "beach groundsel". The area also has the usual wildlife: deer, rabbits, coyotes, osprey, and seabirds such as eider and harlequin ducks.

The Friends of Nature Conservation Society has been taking care of Shelter Cove for more than 20 years, and wanted to see it come under the professional care and management of the Nature Trust. Martin Rudy Haase started Friends of Nature here in 1968, continuing the work of a group he founded in Maine in 1954 before moving to Nova Scotia. He was the first donor of a conservation easement to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, and has continued as a donor of other lands, and as a board member and local volunteer. Bonnie Sutherland calls him a pioneer in the environmental movement in Nova Scotia.

The budget for acquiring and protecting Shelter Cove was set at \$638,000. Thanks to an organized, united effort by a lot of people, the Nature Trust has nearly completed the campaign. "Thanks to Mr. Haase's vision many years ago, and the hard work and generosity of our conservation partners, volunteers and corporate and individual funders, including the Habitat Conservation Fund, Shelter Cove's future as a pristine coastal wilderness is now secure" says Sutherland.

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust will hold a public celebration at Shelter Cove on July 29, 2006 to mark another piece of Nova Scotia's coastal wilderness "wild forever."

For more information, check out the Nature Trust website: [www.nmnt.ca](http://www.nmnt.ca)

Nature Trust