

# WILLIAMS LAKE

May, 2014

## CONSERVATION COMPANY

[www.williamslakecc.org](http://www.williamslakecc.org)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, MAY 14 AT 7:00 P.M.

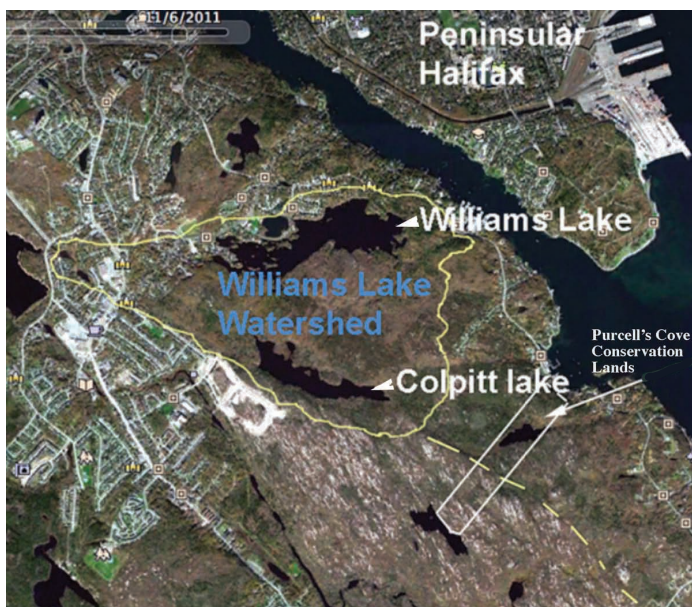
CAPTAIN WILLIAM SPRY CENTRE  
10 KIDSTON ROAD

### EVERYONE WELCOME

The WLCC is a non-profit volunteer organization. We welcome everyone who shares the WLCC's mandate to preserve the health of Williams Lake to come to our Annual General Meeting.

### TALK ON PLANT COMMUNITIES IN THE WILLIAMS LAKE BACKLANDS

At this year's AGM, Dr. David Patriquin, a well-known local biologist and Co-chair of the Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization (WRWEO) as well as an active member of the N.S. Wild Flora Society and the Halifax Field Naturalists, will present a talk on plant communities of the Williams Lake Backlands and how they reflect the history of fires and unique features of the area. The AGM is an opportunity for everyone to learn more about recent issues such as proposed rezoning and developments that pose risks to Williams Lake and its watershed, including Colpitt Lake. The AGM is also a time to hear about the year's activities of the WLCC and for you to bring forward your concerns and observations.



Google Earth Map of Williams Lake Watershed and adjacent Purcell's Cove backlands (Purcell's Cove Conservation Lands are also indicated) (Hill and Patriquin, 2014)

### WEBSITE

To find out more about the WLCC and our activities, check us out on Facebook:

Williams-Lake-Conservation-Company

or on our website: [www.williamslakecc.org](http://www.williamslakecc.org)

Among other items you will find links to colour versions of the newsletters and a printable membership form.

### STUDY FINDS HISTORY OF FIRES HAS SHAPED PLANT COMMUNITIES IN THE WILLIAMS LAKE BACKLANDS

Dr. David Patriquin and wetlands expert Dr. Nick Hill undertook a study of the plant communities in the Williams Lake Backlands (WLB) during this past year. The study, commissioned by the WLCC, was funded by WLCC membership fees and support from the HRM Community Grants Program as well as by significant hours of unpaid efforts by the study's contributors.

Of note, the study found populations of fire-dependent species such as Jack Pine and Broom Crowberry in the WLB, indicative of a history of recurrent fires in the area. Most of us will be aware of recent fires that have ravaged parts of the Backlands. As part of the study, carbon dating of core samples taken from bog areas in the WLB showed evidence for a much longer history of fires in this area, dating back to at least 1250 years ago, even before European settlement. The study authors conclude that the Jack Pine/Broom Cowberry Barrens community in the WLB is "nationally unique to Nova Scotia, globally rare and of high conservation significance".

Dr. Patriquin will present a talk on the study findings at the WLCC AGM on May 14th and the complete report of the study is available for download from the WLCC website.



Fall in the WLB Jack pine/Broom Crowberry /Huckleberry Barrens (Hill and Patriquin, 2014)



*Rhododendron canadense* flowering by Colpitt Lake in June  
Photo courtesy of Melanie Dobson

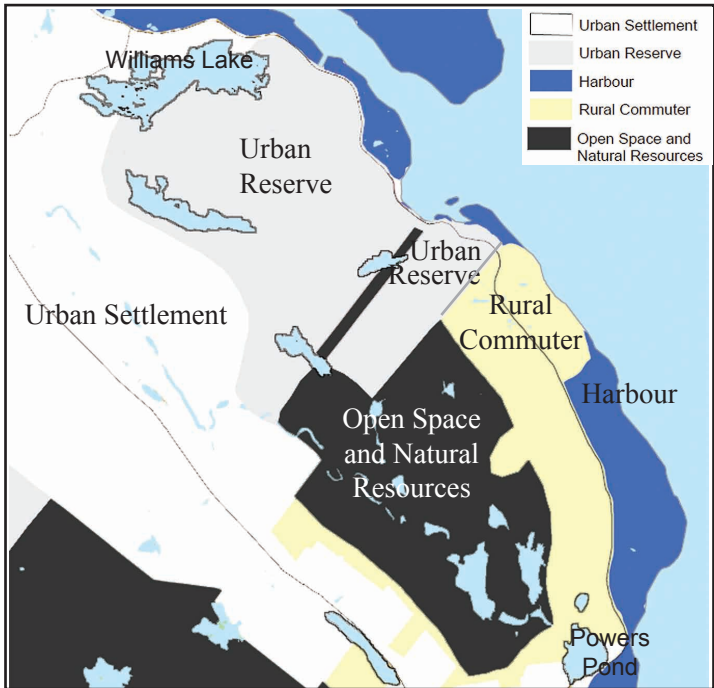
### COME JOIN THE WLCC

The Board needs your input and also new members. Is your area represented on the Board? The WLCC depends on its volunteers. Please contact any of the Board listed at the end of this newsletter to volunteer or suggest a name. We encourage you to attend the AGM and look forward to seeing you on Wednesday, May 14th.



## AFTERMATH OF THE SEWER AND WATER FEASIBILITY STUDY

On October 29, 2013, Regional Council finally declared an end to the study looking at feasibility of extending central water and sewer services to Purcell’s Cove. The consultant’s report on the study was tabled and councilor Steve Adams said he would not bring the report back to council. This decision came as a relief to the majority of landowners in the servicing study areas who had repeatedly expressed no interest in seeing services extended. A survey of all landowners carried out by the study’s community steering committee was consistent with earlier resident petitions in showing the majority did not want services and in addition clearly did not want development in the area as a means of reducing the cost of extending services. One positive outcome from the aborted study was the rallying of the community in support of protection of the Purcell’s Cove/Williams Lake Backlands from unwanted development. The community overwhelmingly expressed a desire for the Backlands to be protected as natural parkland with trails or to be maintained as natural landscape. The WLCC and other community groups have now joined forces to work towards this vision by becoming members of the Backlands Coalition.



Zoning of Backlands and adjacent areas under current Regional Plan



View from dam end of Williams Lake  
Photo courtesy of Melanie Dobson.

## 5-YEAR REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL PLAN (RP +5)

During public meetings of the Sewer and Water Community Steering Committee (CSC), designation of the Purcell’s Cove/Williams Lake Backlands as Urban Reserve under the 2006 HRM Regional Plan future land use was frequently mentioned. The Regional Plan is the blueprint setting out how Halifax will look in 25 years from now; where development should occur and what areas will be protected as park and greenbelt. For the 25-year period of the Plan, development on Urban Reserve land is limited to single-family dwellings on existing lots provided that a private on-site sewage disposal system and well are provided on the lot. Urban Reserve designation of the Purcell’s Cove/Williams Lake Backlands in 2006 indicated that the area was not being considered for development for the next 25 years, consistent with Purcell’s Cove not being designated as a growth area under the Plan. The Regional Plan is currently undergoing a protracted 5-year review (RP+5). Many individuals and groups, including the WLCC, have participated in the review process. In a disturbing development, after the collapse of the Sewer and Water Study process (triggered by the sudden resignation of four community members of the CSC), a request was made on behalf of a small number of landowners by their legal representative to have consideration of rezoning of their properties in the Purcell’s Cove/Williams Lake Backlands included as part of the Regional Plan 5-year Review Process.

The landowners (two CSC members who resigned, and three of whom are developers) are making the case that they have lost property rights because Central Services are not going to be extended along the Purcell’s Cove Road at this time and that the intent of the Urban Reserve is to “sterile large tracts of land for park and open space”. HRM Planning staff had already rejected an earlier request from one of the landowners, Clayton Developments, for rezoning of their land to Urban Settlement on the grounds that “a greater understanding of the environmental constraints is required”. On February 25th, Regional Council passed a motion to refer the RP+5 Review to a Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting to be held on May 20th, 2014, at which time Councillors will discuss and debate a series of requested amendments, including the amendment to consider the implications of re-designating the Backlands from Urban Reserve to Urban Settlement or Rural Commuter. These amendments have been described by members of the Community Design Advisory Committee as “hostile and directly aimed at undermining the growth controls established in the 2006 Regional Plan”.

Let us hope that on May 20th, our Councillors reject requests from developers for last-minute amendments and decide that the RP+5 Process, which has had input from the public and many other groups, is the mechanism for planning the future of our city. The public participation stage of the RP+5 Process is past and it is patently unfair to allow a few landowners to have special consideration of their land added to the process.

## WHY DOCUMENT THE BIRDS, FLORA AND WETLANDS IN THE BACKLANDS?

When the Sewer and Water Study consultant recommended a route through the Backlands as the preferred (cheapest) option for extending services to Purcell’s Cove, the cost of disturbing the wilderness was ignored; as if nothing of value would be lost. The studies commissioned by the WLCC are needed to document the natural value of the Backlands before decisions affecting its future are made.

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## PURCELL'S COVE/WILLIAMS LAKE BACKLANDS BIRD STUDY UPDATE

In 2012 the WLCC commissioned local well known and respected birder, Fulton Lavender to undertake a study of the birds in the Backlands. The report of his study can be found on our website. In early 2014 an update was provided by Fulton and 10 new species were added to the list of 52 bringing the total to 62. Importantly, the Chuck-will's-widow was one of the species added to the list. This bird is one of the 3 goatsuckers which traditionally lived in the area. The other two are the Nighthawk and the Whip-poor-will. The latter has not been seen or heard for several years although conditions remain stable for a return. The Nighthawk count was down in 2013. The importance and rarity of these species can be explored by googling nightjarsurveynetwork. Optimal times to find these species is also discussed.

The Williams Lake area remains an important spot for breeding and migratory birds. As Fulton stated, "this is the point where south meets north in the bird world."



Chuck-will's-widow  
*Photo by Dick Daniels (<http://carolinabirds.org/>)*

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## NEW RESIDENTS OF WILLIAMS LAKE

The baby snapping turtle below was one of 19 that hatched from a nest on the Williams Lake causeway one morning this past September. The mother (considerably larger with a shell over 15 inches in length) had been seen laying her eggs on the side of the road in June. Volunteers helped lower the babies the ~8 foot-drop down from the causeway and across to the lakeshore after each emerged from the nest. Clearly the mother had not factored in man-made barriers such as street curbs or receding water levels when she chose her nesting site.



Newly-hatched snapping turtle, Williams Lake  
*Photo courtesy of Melanie Dobson.*

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## THE BACKLANDS COALITION

At the WLCC AGM held in 2013 a motion was passed encapsulating the notion that alternatives to development should be explored. A committee of the executive was formed and it reached out to the Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust (FBWHT) to gain information regarding it's success story. In short, this group has secured a large tract of land which lies between Highway 103 and the 333. Tom Musial of FBWHT met with the WLCC committee and underlined the benefits of forming a coalition of groups. In response, meetings were held with four local groups with the goal of forming a coalition. Discussions focused on the area to be included and the drafting of a mission statement. The area was determined to be all the land bordering on Williams lake and continuing to Powers pond, Herring Cove. The mission statement:

To ensure no loss of wildlife habitat in the Backlands and to preserve them for natural, historical, cultural, conservation, educational recreational and common use.

On February 21 the Backlands Coalition was launched and it is comprised of 10 groups namely:  
Ferguson's Cove Neighbourhood Association  
Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust  
Halifax Field Naturalists  
McIntosh Run Watershed Association  
Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society  
Purcell's Cove Area Residents Acton Committee  
Purcell's Cove Neighbourhood Committee  
Redoubt Head Homeowners Association  
Williams Lake Conservation Company  
Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization

The Backlands Coalition (BC) has formed several working groups. One is currently working on three hikes in the area which will form part of the larger 2014 Jane's Walks. For details, please go to the BC website (<http://backlandscoalition.ca>).

The BC is co-chaired by two members of the WLCC executive, namely Paul Cashman and Kathleen Hall. Recently Paul and Kathleen met with Susan Corser, a senior planner with HRM. Both the Bird study and the Flora study were discussed and a request for the reports to be tabled with Regional Council was made. The Councillor for the area, Steve Adams tabled the reports with Halifax and West Community Council on March 26 and Regional Council on April 2. The intent is for these reports be considered by HRM planning staff and included in the 5-year review of the Regional Plan (RP+5) report expected to be available to the public on May 16.

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## RAVENS CRAIG TRAIL UPDATE

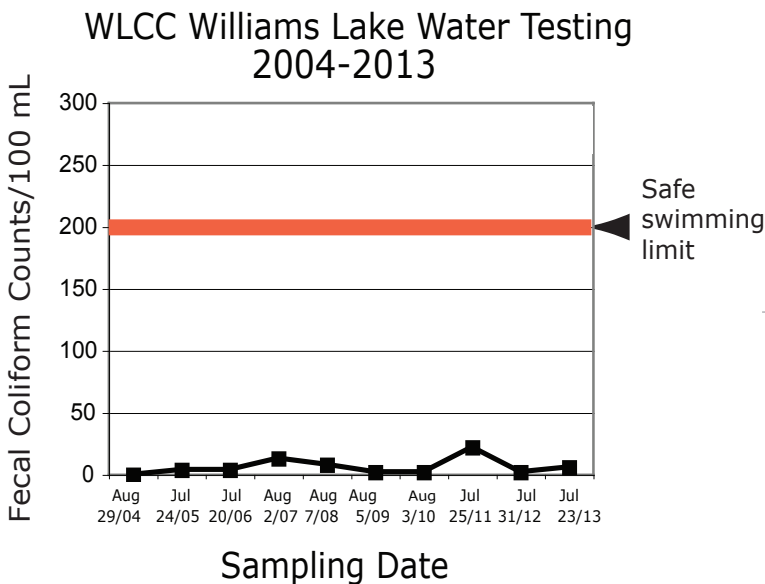
The third and final phase of the new Ravenscraig Trail is now complete. The trail starts on the Purcell's Cove Road opposite the Frog Pond car park, extends through the Fleming Park lands on the west side of the road, and over the heights, then branches to end up at either the Ravenscraig sportsfield or Ravenscraig Drive. The Ravenscraig and Area Trails Association thanks HRM for support and HRM Facility Development-Parks, Ecotech Landscape and Gardens (Phase 1), and Humphreys Landscape and Construction Limited (Phases 2 and 3) for trail design and completion. For a map and more information, look for the Ravenscraig Trail entry on the WLCC website.

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## WATER QUALITY MONITORING

The WLCC has been monitoring water quality in both Williams and Colpitt Lake for almost 20 years. WLCC results for samples taken near the dam end of Williams Lake at the peak of summer in recent years are shown below. (HRM closes supervised swimming areas if fecal coliform counts are above 200 per 100 mL). After such a long winter, we are more than ready to look forward to swimming in Williams Lake this summer.



## WHY IS OUR LAKE WATER CLEAR?

Unlike most brown water NS lakes where organic matter-containing water slowly feeds into the lake from surrounding swampy forests and fens, in our watershed, water moves more rapidly through the steeper terrain into the lake. This rapid runoff reduces the load of humic acids that give the dark colour but also means that sediment and nutrients, both detrimental to the health of lakes, have less time to be removed. At present, the water quality of Williams and Colpitt Lake depends on the small swamps, fens, vernal pools and boulder fields in the Backlands to slow the run-off and filter the water. Development in the Backlands would replace this delicate scrubbing network with impervious flat surfaces and speed water entry into the lakes. Water nutrient levels would rise and water temperature increase. For more information, see the Hill and Patriquin study of the ecology of the Backlands on our website.



Participants at the annual lakeshore clean-up  
*Photo courtesy of Karen Lyle*

## ANNUAL CLEAN-UP

Thanks to the small but dedicated group of volunteers (and 4-footed helpers, see opposite) who participated in the annual cleanup of the lakeshore area organized by the WLCC last fall. This year the event will be held in September as part of the national Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup Week. The date and other details will be posted on our website ([www.williamslakeecc.org](http://www.williamslakeecc.org)) and theirs (<http://shorelinecleanup.ca/en>).

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2013-2014

Paul Cashman • Litchfield Road • 431-0553  
Murray Coolican • Birchview Drive  
Marshall Conley • Williams Lake Road  
Melanie Dobson • Wyndrock Drive • 477-0668  
Kathleen Hall • Hall's Road • 477-4159  
Mark Harrington • Hall's Road • 209-5686  
Martha Leary • Redwood Avenue • 420-1520  
Karen Lyle • Wenlock Grove • 429-1742  
Andrew Ross • Wyndrock Drive • 477-7906  
Nick Ross • Kirk Rd  
Anne von Maltzahn • Wenlock Grove • 477-3353

## WLCC MEMBERSHIP

WLCC membership is \$20 per household and can be paid at the AGM or by returning the attached form. (The form is also available through our website at [www.williamslakeecc.org](http://www.williamslakeecc.org))

Heather Watts's history of the Williams Lake area is \$5 when renewing or joining, additional copies are \$10 each. The mandate of the WLCC is to protect the health of Williams Lake. **Everyone who shares this goal is welcome as a member!**

## MEMBERSHIP FORM \$20. (\$80. FOR 4 YEARS)

To: WILLIAMS LAKE CONSERVATION COMPANY, % Melanie Dobson  
11 Wyndrock Drive, Halifax, NS B3P 1R8

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

