

Five Bridge Lakes Candidate Wilderness Area Consultation Begins

Environment

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Paddlers and picnickers, hunters and hikers, birders and butterfly chasers -- anyone interested in wilderness conservation -- can comment on Nova Scotia's next protected wilderness area.

Five Bridge Lakes Candidate Wilderness Area is 8,266 hectares (20,425 acres) of Crown lands between highways 103 and 333, in western Halifax Regional Municipality.

"We are protecting a scenic and rugged landscape of forests, barrens, and interconnected lakes and wetlands, very near our largest urban population," said Environment Minister Sterling Belliveau. "This is an ideal addition toward our goal of protecting 12 per cent of the province by 2015."

The area is home to a small population of Nova Scotia's endangered mainland moose, rare plants, and uncommon birds such as the olive-sided flycatcher. There are also pockets of old red oak and old red spruce forest.

"I encourage Nova Scotians to share their views of this special area," said Mr. Belliveau.

A coalition of community groups advocated for nearly a decade to protect the area. They include local residents, naturalists, hikers, conservationists, canoeists, anglers, organized off-highway vehicle riders and others.

The area features the well-known Bluff hiking trail, canoe routes, old roads and other trails. Some lakes are popular spots for trout fishing.

Last October, the province announced its intention to designate the area as protected under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act. The public consultation that begins today is part of that process.

Public information open houses on the candidate area will be held:

- Wednesday, March 10, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., at Dalhousie University's Student Union Building in Halifax
- Wednesday, March 24, 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., at the St. Margaret's Centre in Tantallon
- Saturday, March 27, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at St. Timothy's Church in Hatchet Lake.

Information displays will be set up at local libraries with a newsletter and map of the candidate protected area.

They are also available at www.gov.ns.ca/nse/protectedareas, or by calling 902-424-2117.

Written comments will be accepted until April 30. They may be sent by mail to: Department of Environment, Protected Areas Branch, P.O. Box 442, Halifax, N.S., B3J 2P8, and by E-mail to protectedareas@gov.ns.ca.

A socio-economic study also will be released for public comment.

Please make sure to participate, show up at the meetings where you can and be sure to register your support to designate (i.e. protect) the WHOLE of the area.