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Forever green: N.S. buys Irving land

\$40-million deal puts 26,000 hectares of woods, coastline in public's hands

By EVA HOARE Staff Reporter

Thu. Feb 4 - 4:54 AM

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WILD THINGS:

Some of the species and plants on lands purchased:

- American marten
- Eastern ribbon snake
- Olive-sided flycatcher
- Tidewater mucket (a mussel)
- Red-top panic grass
- Hairy swamp loosestrife
- Downy rattlesnake plantain
- Large round-leaved orchid
- Skunk cabbage
- Broad waterweed
- Flatstem pondweed
- Variegated horsetail
- Eastern white cedar
- Creeping sedge
- Bristly crowfoot
- Tall hairy groovebur
- Loesel's twayblade
- Alderleaf buckthorn

Beautiful tracts of Nova Scotia wilderness, once owned by a forestry giant, are now in provincial hands and a bevy of conservation, recreation groups and municipalities couldn't be happier.

The province announced Wednesday it had completed the \$40-million purchase of 26,000 hectares of coastline, lakefront and forest land in Annapolis, Digby, Yarmouth and Cumberland counties from J.D. Irving.

"The two key benefits are access and to prevent the scary types of development that people are worried about, with mansions popping up on all these backcountry lakes," said Kermit deGooyer, from the Ecology Action Centre.

The centre is one of numerous members of the Buy Back Nova Scotia coalition, formed a year ago to urge the province to acquire more land from industry.

Mr. deGooyer said the provincial government got a very good price — about \$600 per acre — which includes oceanfront and lakefront parcels of land.

While about half of the land will be legally protected, such as a stretch of coastline between Joggins and Cape Chignecto in Cumberland County, other parcels will be used for recreation, community and tourism use, and fishing and hunting by Mi'kmaq.

"The government responded to the aspirations of a broad spectrum of Nova Scotians," said Mr. deGooyer. "It's something for future generations."

A large portion of the Tusket River watershed in Yarmouth County, containing very rare plants, is also now owned by the province.

"This is a big step in the right direction. . . . Irreplaceable parts of our natural history will be protected," said Chris Miller, national manager, Wilderness Conservation and Climate Change for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

Dan Earle, who's with the Buy Back Nova Scotia group, said its members are "delighted" with the government's deal, and hopes the momentum continues.

"We'd like to see the province continue to purchase land that they put into managed use," Mr. Earle said. "I saw the map and it looks like some critical pieces were bought."

Mr. Miller also hopes the government keeps its eyes on some more real "gems" that come up for sale.

Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs co-chairman, Chief Gerard Julian of the

Paq'tnkek First Nation, said in a government news release that all lands are a "priority" for the Mi'kmaq.

Natural Resources Minister John MacDonell said a sound investment has been made.

"Economically, an investment in land is always smart," he said in the release.

About 8.5 per cent of the province's land mass is protected, but government has legislated that the number will rise to 12 per cent by 2015.

Mr. Miller said about 15 per cent of the land in Nova Scotia is currently owned by forestry companies.

(ehoare@herald.ca)



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