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Valuing biodiversity in our own backyard

By TAMARA LORINCZ

Environmental groups continue to lobby for wilderness protection for the Chignecto Game Sanctuary to safeguard its biodiversity.
CAN YOU name five species of trees in Nova Scotia's Acadian forest? Or identify five birds that return to our shores in the spring? What are five species at risk in this province?

Nova Scotia is home to an amazing diversity of plants and animals. Unfortunately, many species are endangered because of habitat destruction, pollution, invasive species and climate change. The Nova Scotia Environmental Network believes that the more we know about the biological diversity in our unique province, the more we will value and protect it.

Today is International Biodiversity Day, commemorating the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992. Canada was the first industrial country to ratify the CBD that committed us to greater conservation, monitoring, and education on biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources.

This year is the United Nations¹ International Year on Biodiversity. The special theme is biodiversity for development and poverty alleviation, and links to the UN's Millennium Development Goals. It recognizes that biodiversity is essential for human well-being.

In Nova Scotia, the Phase II Natural Resources Strategy Steering Panel, chaired by Constance Glube, released its final report this month, entitled A Natural Balance: Working Toward Nova Scotia's Natural Resource Strategy (www.gov.ns.ca/natr/ <<http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/>>).

The panel recognized that "our existence depends on healthy biodiversity and an Earth capable of sustaining life, including our own." It acknowledged that biodiversity is the foundation for environmental, social and economic prosperity in Nova Scotia.

In its report, the panel made key recommendations in four areas < parks, forests, minerals and biodiversity > to serve as a basis for a new natural resource strategy for the province. For biodiversity, the panel called for the

creation of a Biodiversity Act, the establishment of an external scientific advisory body, improved monitoring, and the development of biodiversity education programs from Primary to Grade 12.

The panel also highlighted the value of collaboration, co-ordination and co-operation with citizens and stakeholders.

Non-governmental organizations in this province have worked hard to promote biodiversity. In 2008, the Margaree Environmental Association prepared a study, Conserving Biodiversity in the Mabou Highlands, that outlined appropriate land-use planning to conserve Cape Breton's unique ecosystem; its recommendations await government adoption.

The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute created a Species at Risk in Nova Scotia Identification & Information Guide (www.merseytobeatic.ca <<http://www.merseytobeatic.ca>>). The Invasive Species Alliance of Nova Scotia has a new website about invasive species that threaten our native plants and animals (www.invasivespeciesns.ca <<http://www.invasivespeciesns.ca>>).

The Sierra Club Canada-Atlantic Chapter has been engaging students in classrooms across Nova Scotia with its Forest Friends and Coastal Caretaker education programs and its EcoBuddies program for Grade 10 students.

Saint

Mary's Community Based Environmental Monitoring Network gives citizens the skills and equipment to monitor biodiversity.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and Two Countries, One Forest continue to call on the government to give wilderness protection for the Chignecto Game Sanctuary area to safeguard its special biodiversity.

We share and are working toward the steering panel's vision that "healthy, diverse natural resources are nurtured and sustained for the economic, environmental and social benefit of all Nova Scotians today and in the future."

The public is invited to the biomass and forest biodiversity talk on May 31 at 7 p.m. in Loyola 170, Saint Mary's University in Halifax, and to the BioBlitz on June 5 at 10 a.m. at Crystal Crescent Beach.

We encourage Nova Scotians to learn more about biodiversity at www.nsen.ca <<http://www.nsen.ca>> .

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