

# York Harbour Habitat Conservation Plan



Prepared: March 2025



## Preface

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) some of the wildlife habitat that is in greatest danger of being negatively impacted is found within municipal planning boundaries. On this basis, the primary focus of the NL Eastern Habitat Joint Venture (NL EHJV) is to conserve such valuable wildlife habitat through Habitat Conservation Agreements with municipalities. The Town of York Harbour was identified as having ecologically valuable and unique habitat located within its municipal planning area. The intent of this Habitat Conservation Plan is to outline the scope of the 2025 Habitat Conservation Agreement designed to enact long-term conservation of areas of important wildlife habitat found within Town planning boundaries. Centrally, the Plan outlines the following objectives:

- (1) Presenting an assessment of the habitats and wildlife species designated for conservation.
- (2) Protection and enhancement strategies which will maintain and/or increase wildlife use in designated areas of wildlife habitat.
- (3) Describing potential engagement initiatives designed to increase Council and public awareness of the value of “their” habitat in conserving wildlife.
- (4) Supporting Council in conserving these habitats through informed development decision-making in partnership with community residents.

## Acknowledgements

The Agreement signatories would like to thank the following partners for their financial and administrative support in the continued implementation of the Municipal Habitat Conservation and Stewardship Program:

- Stewardship Association of Municipalities Inc
- Environment and Climate Change Canada
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Foundation for the Conservation of Atlantic Salmon
- Wildlife Habitat Canada

## Section 1: The NL Eastern Habitat Joint Venture

Human development has resulted in the destruction or alteration of many types of habitats all over the world. The number and diversity of North America's wildlife species has been declining over the latter half of the twentieth century. Natural wildlife habitats are regularly lost to urban, industrial, and agricultural expansion.

Recognizing the importance of habitat conservation to waterfowl populations, in 1986 Canada and the United States (later followed by Mexico) signed the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). This committed these countries to a long-term partnership to protect wetland habitats. Twenty-four 'joint ventures' have been subsequently established across North America to achieve the objectives of NAWMP. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) formally committed to its participation in the **Eastern Habitat Joint Venture (EHJV)** in 1989.

The **EHJV (ehjv.ca)** conserves, enhances, and restores wildlife habitat for birds found across the six eastern Canadian provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI, and NL. Each province implements the partnership slightly differently, with each provincial program coordinated by a separate program manager and involving the cooperation of international partners, including government agencies and non-governmental conservation groups. In NL, the program is administered by the provincial Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (Wildlife Division). Other NL partners include the Stewardship Association of Municipalities, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service (a branch of Environment and Climate Change Canada), Birds Canada, Intervale Associates Inc and the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

As its primary contribution to the EHJV in NL, the provincial Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture created a "municipal habitat conservation and stewardship program" to help municipalities conserve important wildlife habitat found within planning boundaries. The program signs formal agreements with municipalities so that when future land use decisions are made, the value of that wildlife habitat will not be forgotten and that future activities will not have negative impacts on the lands ability to sustain wildlife. Since 1993, over fifty municipalities have signed Municipal Habitat Conservation Agreements in NL becoming important links in a chain of conservation areas in NL and indeed, across North America.

## Section 2: Roles of Habitat Conservation Agreement Signatories

The Town of York Harbour signed a Habitat Conservation Agreement in 2025 (Appendix A). Upon the signing of the Agreement, each signatory committed to certain responsibilities:

**The Province:** The NL Department of Fisheries, Forestry, and Agriculture, through its Wildlife Division, is expected to:

- Draft a Habitat Conservation Plan (this plan) in consultation with the Town.
- Work with the Town on the review of any future developments which would impact the designated “Conservation Areas” keeping sustainability and wildlife and habitat conservation as the primary objectives.
- Support Council and local groups in implementing the Habitat Conservation Plan as opportunities allow; often with support of the partners of the NL Eastern Habitat Joint Venture. This can include assisting in carrying out, where appropriate, wildlife and habitat conservation education, restoration, or enhancement projects.

**The Town:** The Town of York Harbour and its Mayor and Council are expected to:

- Ensure that the designated “Conservation Areas” are protected from destruction or degradation keeping habitat sustainability as the primary objective. The Town is to contact the NL EHJV Program Manager at the Wildlife Division to allow a 30-day written review of future proposed development activities.
- Incorporate the Habitat Conservation Plan into the Municipal Plan, through the next Municipal Plan Review or by making amendments to the present Municipal Plan. The goal is to appropriately zone “Conservation Areas” to avoid unsustainable use.
- Participate in the activities of the Stewardship Association of Municipalities Inc (SAM). Our goal is to partner to implement, over time, and as opportunities allow the amended Habitat Conservation Plan in the community with the assistance of the NL EHJV partners.

### Section 3: Areas of Designated Wildlife Habitat

Incorporated in 1972 and located on the southern shore of the Bay of Islands, York Harbour is a beautiful coastal community between the neighboring municipalities of Lark Harbour and Humber Arm South, having a population of approximately 350 people (Figure 1). The impressive long-range mountains can be spotted north of the town, defining the area with beautiful scenery contrasted against the rugged ocean. The Town lies within the Serpentine Range Subregion of the Western NL Forest ecoregion. The Serpentine Range Subregion is more mountainous than other subregions in the Western NL Forest ecoregion, comprised largely of serpentine rock upland from the coast. Within the town itself, aside from rocky talus covering barren slopes, much of the habitat is black spruce coastal forest.



**Figure 1- Town of York Harbour, NL**

Municipalities may have many excellent reasons to conserve undeveloped land, including for example, flood risk protection, buffer waterways, allow for recreational use, or buffer residential development. Our primary focus in identifying habitats for inclusion within this Habitat Conservation Agreement/Plan is an area's documented importance to wildlife. With this primary focus in mind, an assessment was undertaken of the Town's municipal planning boundaries using habitat classification mapping, land use tenure mapping, biodiversity databases, and field-based assessment.

## York Harbour Lagoon Conservation Area

The York Harbour Lagoon is found right along the shoreline/rocky beach of the Bay of Islands, except for a small tributary that flows under Main Street into the lagoon from the southwest boundary of the Town (Figure 2). The designated Conservation Area is approximately 14.5 hectares in total and lies within the town's only land use zone – “Mixed Development”. There is generally a 30m buffer applied from the water's edge of the inflowing tributary and around the lagoon itself. However, in some areas, the buffer has been reduced in width to exclude pre-existing private land parcels (Figure 3).



Figure 2- West end of York Harbour Lagoon in summer.

Much of the Conservation Area is Marsh/ Shallow Water and has been designated a “Significant Wetland” by the Wildlife Division (Figure 4). On the citizen science platform eBird, 64 bird species have been identified in the lagoon, including the Red-necked phalarope, a federal species of conservation concern. The area also provides habitat for species considered either imperiled or vulnerable under the provincial General Status of Wildlife program, including Common eider (S3- Vulnerable), American wigeon (S3), Northern pintail (S3) and Great blue heron (S2- Imperiled). The surrounding vegetation provides suitable habitat for songbirds, including Song sparrow (S3), and EHJV priority species Semipalmated sandpiper and Common tern.



Figure 3- York Harbour Conservation Area.





**Figure 4- York Harbour Lagoon marsh in winter**

Although not a part of the designated Conservation Area, the marine environment into which the lagoon empties is known to be valuable eelgrass habitat. Eelgrass is a group of aquatic grass species that provide food and shelter for many animals, including fish and waterfowl. These waters are also considered an Atlantic salmon marine refuge by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), as they provide important resting habitat for migrating Atlantic salmon. As an identified marine refuge, one limitation to support conservation within the area is that all pelagic fixed fishing gear is prohibited by DFO.

A threat facing the integrity of the wetland, as identified by the Town/residents, is ATV/off-road vehicle use in and around the lagoon. Vehicles in the water can destroy vegetation, an important resource that is used by wildlife for many things including shelter and a food source. Disturbance of the land can lower water quality, as erosion of sediment and subsequent dispersal into the lagoon usually prevents sunlight from reaching aquatic plants which is necessary for their growth. Conservation of the buffer that borders the marsh and the tributary is important to ensure intact habitat is readily available for such species. Without a buffer, pollution and sediment can more readily enter the marsh, and the temperature regulating effect that vegetation cover has on the water would be lost.

Possible supports for the conservation and stewardship of this area include adding interpretive signs to highlight the important flora and fauna within, as well as signage to prohibit ATV use within the lagoon/reminder to stay on the existing trails. With the support of SAM and the NL EHJV partners, educational outreach through things like presentations to the local school and interpretive walks in the area can raise awareness of the impact that the use of ATVs has on important ecological areas, specifically regarding the lagoon. By York Harbour Town council officially recognizing this area for the significant habitat it contains, residents have an opportunity to strengthen the stewardship of an important area in our province.

## **Section 4: Conservation Leadership by York Harbour**

### **Incorporate the Habitat Conservation Agreement into Municipal Plan**

During the preparation of any draft Municipal Plan, or during the process of a future Municipal Plan Review or development regulations, Council will incorporate the Habitat Conservation Agreement and Plan concepts and maps into any resulting Municipal Plan or related Master Plan. The “Conservation Areas” **should be zoned Environmental Conservation or Protection**, or some similar consistent zoning designation within any future municipal planning documents as governed by the Urban and Rural Planning Act (2000).

### **Refer future proposed developments to the Wildlife Division**

Activities within the “Conservation Areas” will be managed whereby permitted activities do not result in the loss of wildlife habitat or wildlife populations. As such, wildlife conservation will be at the forefront of management decisions. When council reviews/approves land use permits, regulations, developments or by-laws which could impact Conservation Areas, **Council will first consult with the NL EHJV Program Manager** at the Wildlife Division, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture providing a 30-day notice period.

### **Engage residents in wildlife habitat conservation with support of the Stewardship Association of Municipalities Inc.**

Through the signing of the Habitat Conservation Agreement, the Town was provided an opportunity to become a participating member of SAM (Stewardship Association of Municipalities Inc, [samnl.org](http://samnl.org)). SAM is an incorporated, non-profit organization whose member municipalities together to secure, enhance, and restore important wildlife habitat and as a network of communities, contribute to provincial conservation of biodiversity. SAM also represents its municipal members on provincial issues related to wildlife and habitat conservation.

SAM maintains a public webpage about the Habitat Conservation Agreement featuring maps, photos, facts, and information on local attractions. This link can be included on the Town’s website; this will help increase residents’ knowledge and understanding of the agreement and program. To view examples of these pages, please refer to [samnl.org/membership](http://samnl.org/membership).



SAM meets each spring (May or June) and fall (September or October) with host municipalities rotating among members and regions. Identify a representative of the Town (mayor, councillor, staff, or involved resident) to attend at least one of these meetings per year (Figure 6). This will connect you to like-minded municipalities and link you to resources and training. You may also be interested in hosting a SAM meeting in the future; many municipalities enjoy this for the exposure it provides for their wildlife habitat and associated projects.



**Figure 6: A field trip to Cobb's Pond, Gander during a SAM Annual General Meeting.**

In addition to contributing to SAM membership, participating municipalities can avail of abundant environmental conservation resources on the SAM website: **[www.samnl.org/resources](http://www.samnl.org/resources)**. It is the Stewardship Association's mandate to help support the conservation efforts of its membership.

On an ongoing basis, SAM and its partners, particularly the Wildlife Division, actively support municipalities in engaging community residents in conservation awareness, and habitat enhancement and restoration projects. SAM staff regularly consult on, and facilitate support to municipal projects such as (but not limited to):

- grant funding applications.
- sustainable trail development and recreational infrastructure (bird blinds, boardwalks).
- educational outreach to and engagement of community groups.
- restoration of degraded and threatened habitats.
- enhancement of wildlife habitat through mechanisms such as nest box building or the placement of interpretive signage.
- scientific and technical assessment, and advice relating to municipal conservation programs.

With community engagement and the delivery of conservation programming, being a contributing member of SAM can increase environmental awareness and a build a more environmentally conscious community of stewards. In this way, the Town can be a leader in the province on wildlife and habitat conservation and conservation issues and we are excited to support your efforts as we broaden our existing partnership. It has been our experience that **community engagement and partnerships are the true strengths of any habitat conservation agreement.**

## **APPENDIX A:**

### **Habitat Conservation Agreement for the Municipality of YORK HARBOUR**

**THIS AGREEMENT** made in the Municipality of York Harbour, in the province of Newfoundland, this 14 day of April, 2025

**BETWEEN:**                    **HIS MAJESTY THE KING IN RIGHT OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**, as represented by the Honorable the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (herein called the "Minister")

- of the one part -

**AND:**                            **THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF YORK HARBOUR** municipal corporation pursuant to Section 15 of the *Municipalities Act, 1999* (herein called the "The Municipality")

-of the other part-

**WHEREAS** the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has entered into an Agreement with others for the implementation of the of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan through the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture;

**AND WHEREAS** the parties hereto recognize that the proper protection and management of coastal, wetland and upland habitats are fundamental tools in maintaining and enhancing the wildlife populations in the province;

**AND WHEREAS** the Minister proposed that certain important wildlife habitats within the Municipality be protected and enhanced through and with the cooperation of the Municipality in accordance with this Agreement and a Habitat Conservation Plan developed hereafter;

**AND WHEREAS** the Municipality has agreed to enter into this Agreement for the purpose of protecting and enhancing those areas of important wildlife habitat within the limits of its jurisdiction;

**NOW THEREFORE IT IS AGREED BY THE PARTIES AS FOLLOWS:**

1. The lands herein delineated and designated as a Conservation Area (being the lands outlined on a certain Schedule annexed hereto and marked "A") shall be managed in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Agreement including any Habitat Conservation Plan developed hereunder for better protection of wildlife.
2. Within the limits of its jurisdiction, the Municipality shall permit only those activities within the Conservation Areas that have no negative or adverse impact upon the land, or on the wildlife which utilize those areas.
3. The parties may establish other Conservation Areas as may be desirable from time to time. Conservation Areas shall be subject to the terms and conditions of the Habitat Conservation Plan developed to enhance and protect the land, and the wildlife which utilize those habitats.
4. The Habitat Conservation Plan shall be developed in cooperation with the Municipality and the Minister agrees to provide such advice and expertise necessary or advisable for the development of the Habitat Conservation Plan.
5. The Municipality agrees that in the preparation of a Municipal Plan, or any amendments to any existing Municipal Plan, the areas designated as Conservation Areas shall be recommended by the Municipality to be appropriately declared protected areas as it prescribed under subsection 13(3)(f) of the Urban and Rural Planning Act (2000) (or such other legislation in amendment or substitution therefore as may be brought into effect from time to time).
6. The parties to this Agreement, their consultants, servants or agents, shall have and exercise reasonable rights of access to the Conservation Areas for all purposes necessary or incidental to this Agreement and, in particular, but without limiting the generality of the foregoing, for the purpose of developing and carrying out the Habitat Conservation Plan.
7. If at any time during the term of this Habitat Conservation Agreement the Parties mutually deem it necessary or desirable to make alterations or additions to it, they may do so by means of a written agreement between them which shall be supplemental to and form part of this agreement.

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF** the parties have caused these presents to be executed in accordance with their respective rules and regulations the day and year first before written.

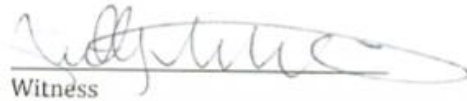
**SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED**

by the Honorable the Minister of Fisheries  
Forestry and Agriculture in the presence of:

Witness 

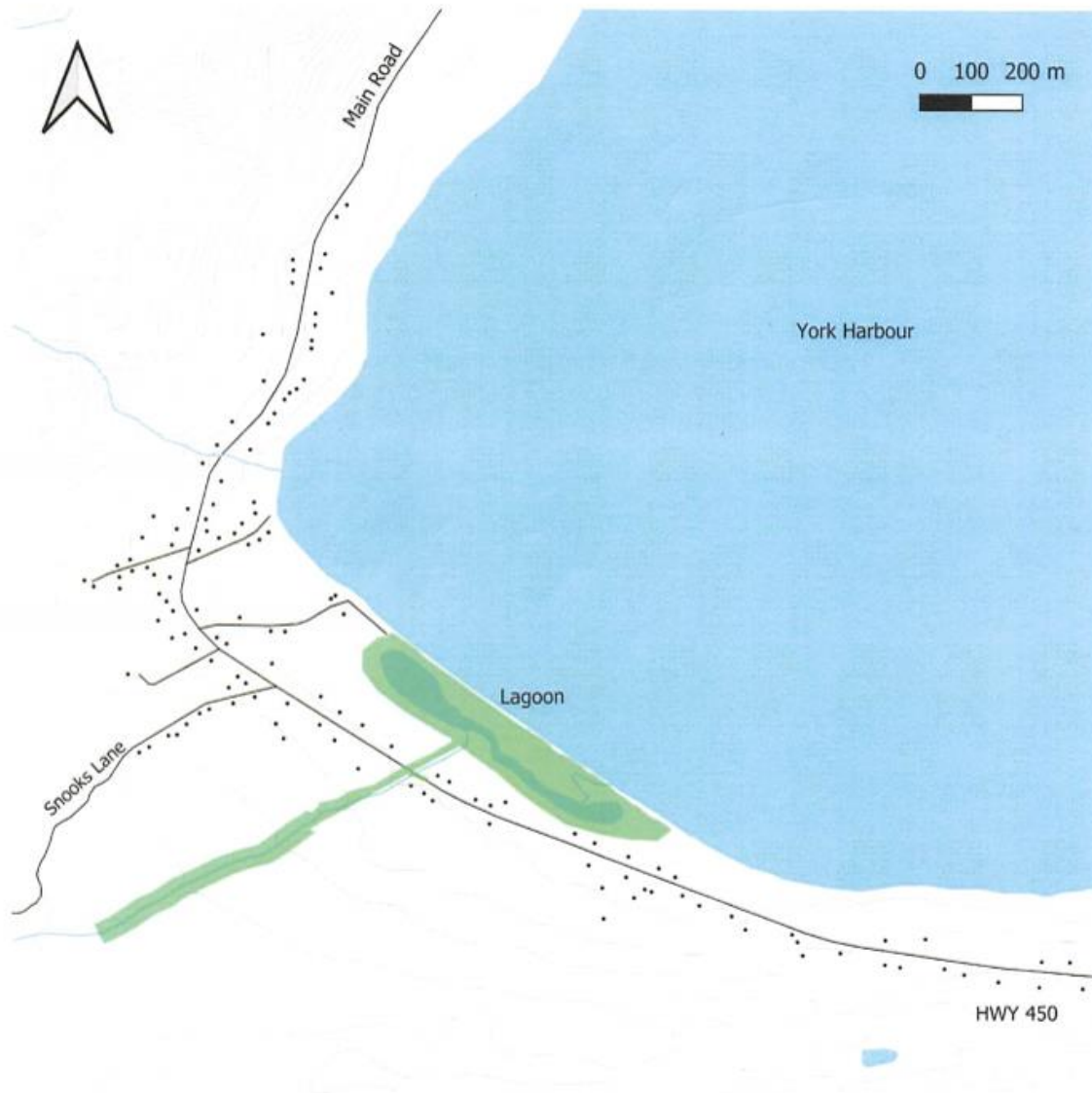
  
**HONOURABLE GERRY  
BYRNE, MINISTER OF FISHERIES,  
FORESTRY AND AGRICULTURE**

**THE SEAL OF** the Municipality of York Harbour, hereunto  
affixed in the presence of:

Witness 

  
**THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF YORK  
HARBOUR**

**Schedule A: Municipal Habitat Conservation Area**  
Municipal Habitat Stewardship Agreement  
Municipality of York Harbour, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada



Legend	
	Conservation Area
	Road
	Water
	Contour Line
	Building



April 2023  
Projection WGS 84