

# Port Rexton Habitat Conservation Plan



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 Port Rexton was identified as having ecologically valuable and unique habitat located within and adjacent to 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 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 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 Port Rexton 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 Port Rexton 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

The Municipality of Port Rexton is located at the northern end of Robinhood Bay, part of the communities known as Trinity Bight, with a current population of around 500 people (Figure 1). Port Rexton is a community steeped in history with a close connection to the land, home to the impressive, internationally recognized Skerwink trail that boasts remarkable views of both coastal and forested habitat. A salmon river also runs through the municipal boundary of Port Rexton, which supports a strong angling and fishing tradition in the community.



Figure 1: Port Rexton.

The Municipality of Port Rexton is within the *Maritimes Barrens* Ecoregion, and in the *Northeastern Barrens* Subregion. This region is characterized by barren ecosystems, interspersed with peatland and forest. Most of the geological composition of the *Maritimes Barrens* Ecoregion is ground moraine coupled with glacial erratic, while wetland ecosystems are dispersed throughout the area, comprised of hundreds of ponds, mixed with slope bogs, basin bogs, and fens. Natural areas within town planning boundaries contain significant wildlife habitat and wildlife, including waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, mammals, and salmon. Forests in the ecoregion are dominated by species types like the typical Balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), followed by Black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and some White birch (*Betula papyrifera*). In the riparian area, Alders (*Alnus incana*) are common, while in peatland ecosystems, Sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*), Rhodora (*Rhododendron canadense*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and Low-Bush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) are abundant.

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, we undertook



an assessment of the Town's municipal planning boundaries using habitat classification mapping, land use tenure mapping, biodiversity databases, and field-based assessment. Together we identified several relatively large intact wetlands, rivers and forested wildlife habitats within planning boundaries that warranted additional conservation measures as would be provided under a Habitat Conservation Agreement.

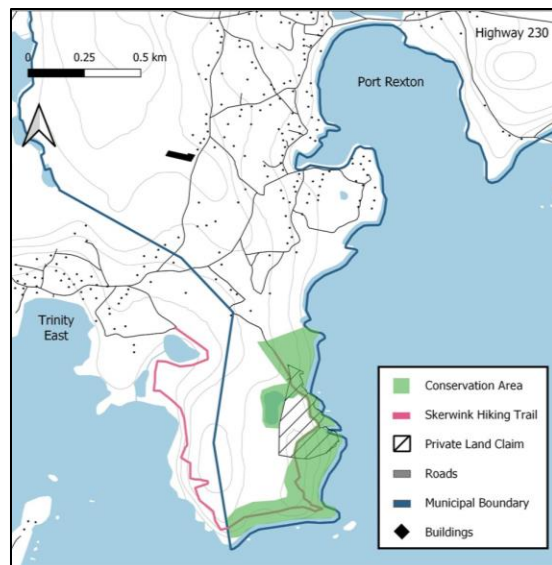
### **Skerwink Trail Conservation Area:**

This Conservation Area buffers the coastal headlands of the Skerwink Peninsula and encapsulates most of the internationally recognized Skerwink Hiking Trail (Figure 2). Located on the southern tip of Port Rexton, this area is comprised of coastal, wetland (small inland pond) and forest habitat. The proposed CA is a recognized birding hotspot with over 77 different bird species identified at this location, including species like Black guillemots, Double-crested cormorants, Northern waterthrush, White-Throated sparrow, and Boreal chickadees. The provincially vulnerable Northern goshawk has been observed in the area.



**Figure 2- Coastal headlands and wetlands found along the Skerwink trail.**

Most of the designated Conservation Area is municipally zoned "Conservation" along the coastline, with a small inland area being zoned "Rural". The area is approximately 37 hectares in total. There is one private land claim in the proposed CA that overlaps with the Port Rexton municipally owned Skerwink trail. This land falls within Conservation municipal zoning but is uninhabited and has been included in the CA (Figure 3).



**Figure 3- Skerwink Trail Conservation Area**

## Salmon Cove River Conservation Area:

Salmon Cove River is a managed, class 2 scheduled salmon river on the eastern municipal boundary in Port Rexton (Figure 4). The Conservation Area follows the river, starting upstream from the Highway 230 overpass, ending at the northern edge of the municipal boundary at First Pond and is approximately 8.5km long. There is a 200-metre buffer applied from the edge of the western riverbank, but a private land claim (Peninsula Pastures Inc.), approximately 2km upstream from Champney's Arm, limits the buffer in this area to 15 meters in width (per *Provincial Lands Act – Section 7(1) the crown lands reserve*) (Figure 5). There is an old bridge approximately 3 km upstream from the outlet of the river, associated with the old Newfoundland Railway system, that has also been excluded from the Conservation Area.



Figure 4- Salmon Cove River

Maintaining an intact riparian buffer around the river helps sustain the health of the river. Atlantic salmon are a cold water, pollution intolerant species that are sensitive to habitat degradation. Removal of vegetation, destruction of habitat and development within the riparian buffer means less suitable available habitat, which in turn could lead to population declines within the river.

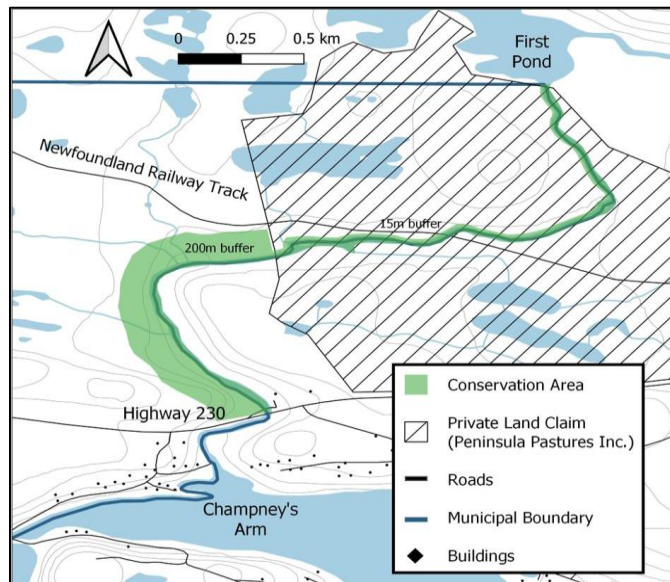


Figure 5- Salmon Cove River Conservation Area

## **Section 4: Conservation Leadership by Port Rexton**

### **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 Port Rexton**

**THIS AGREEMENT** made in the Municipality of Port Rexton, 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 Honourable the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (herein called the "Minister")

- of the one part -

**AND:**                            **THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF PORT REXTON**, 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;

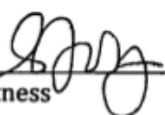
**NOW THEREFORE IT IS AGREED BY THE PARTIES AS FOLLOWS:**

1. The lands herein delineated and designated as Conservation Areas (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). The Municipality in passing regulations or by-laws related to the protected areas so designated under the Municipal Plan or amendments thereto and which may affect the Conservation Area(s) shall do so in consultation with the Minister and in keeping with the principals of this Agreement.
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.
8. Each of the parties hereto agree that they will exercise their best efforts to further develop management measures for more effectively carrying out of their mutual intentions as expressed in 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.

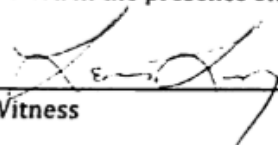
**SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED**

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

Witness 

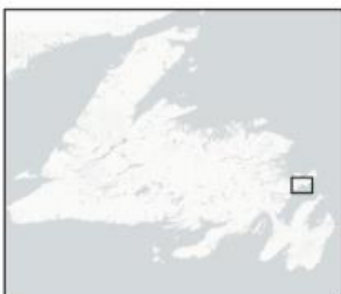
  
HONOURABLE GERRY  
BYRNE, MINISTER OF FISHERIES,  
FORESTRY AND AGRICULTURE

**THE SEAL OF** the Municipality of Port Rexton, hereunto  
affixed in the presence of:

Witness 

  
THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF  
PORT REXTON

**Skerwink Trail Conservation Area**  
 Municipal Habitat Stewardship Agreement  
 Municipality of Port Rexton, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada



EHJV  
Eastern Habitat  
Joint Venture

PCHE  
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Municipalities

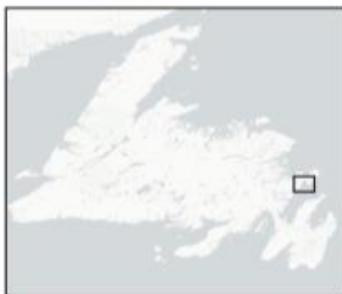
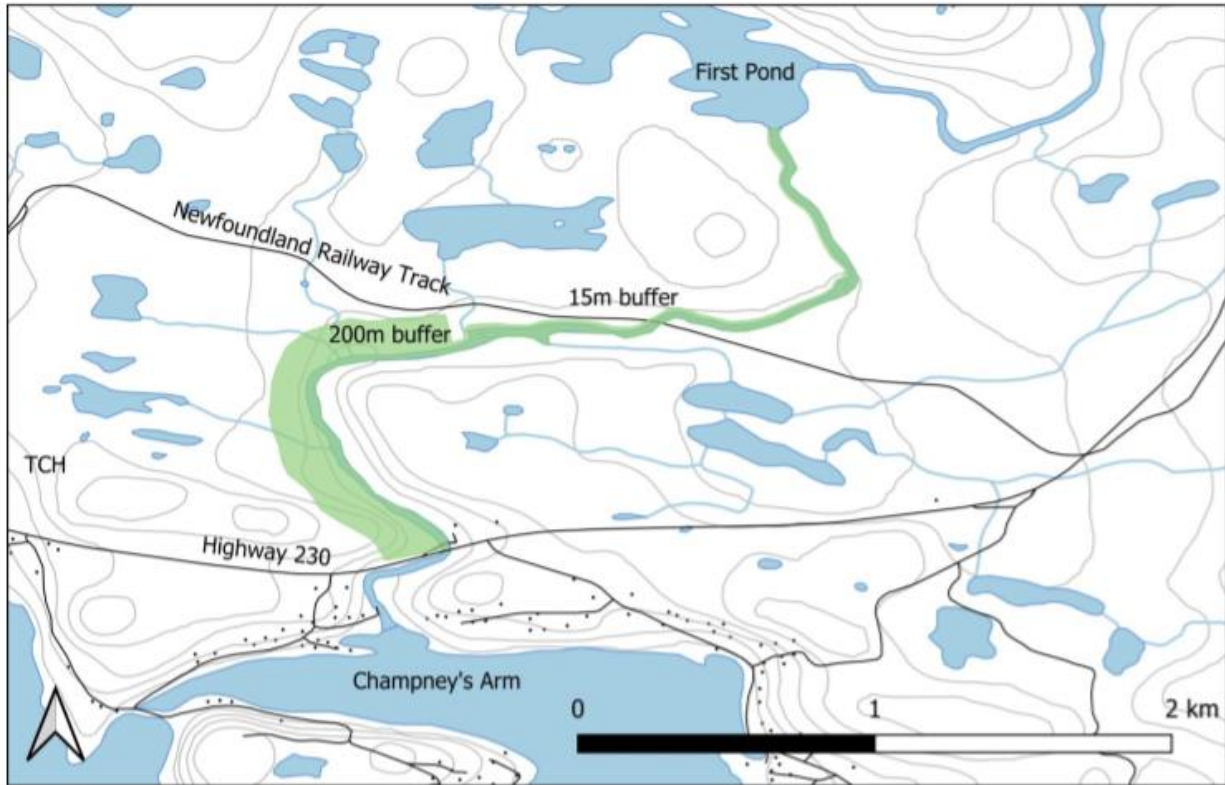
PORTREXTON  
Municipality of Port Rexton

Newfoundland  
Labrador

November 2022  
Projection: WGS 84



**Salmon Cover River Conservation Area**  
 Municipal Habitat Stewardship Agreement  
 Municipality of Port Rexton, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada



EHJV  
Eastern Habitat Joint Venture

PCHE  
Programme de conservation des habitats de l'Est

Stewardship  
Association  
Municipal  
Associations

PORTREXTON  
Municipality of Port Rexton

Newfoundland  
Labrador

November 2022  
Projection: WGS 84