



August 5, 2020

Ms. Kathleen Fralic, Engagement Lead
Planning & Development, Halifax Regional Municipality
Bayers Road Centre, 7071 Bayers Road, 2nd Floor Towers
Halifax, NS B3L 4P3

Re: Protecting Sandy Lake – Sackville River in the Regional Plan

Dear Ms. Fralic,

I write on behalf of Hike Nova Scotia concerning an important ecological area requiring protection in the context of the Regional Plan review and the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGPN).

Hike Nova Scotia (Hike NS) has been encouraging and promoting hiking, walking and snowshoeing throughout Nova Scotia since 2007. Hike Nova Scotia is the voice of the hiking community in Nova Scotia with a membership representing over 2,200. Our reach goes even further on social media where we enjoy 36,700 Instagram followers, 23,345 Facebook followers, and 7,295 Twitter followers.

Hiking and walking are growing activities and Nova Scotians identified them as their top physical activities in a 2016 provincial-municipal survey. Hiking and connecting with nature improves physical health, mental health, social well-being, economic prosperity and environmental protection. The tourism industry is heavily reliant on hiking, as one of the top three outdoor tourist activities. Outdoor enthusiasts like hikers stay longer and spend more than most other types of tourists in Nova Scotia.

The proposed Sandy Lake- Sackville River Regional Park (SL-SRRP) is a prime hiking destination. Hike NS fully supports the efforts of Sandy Lake - Sackville River Regional Park Coalition to ensure protection for the ecological unit which is the Sandy Lake-Sackville River watershed, including its submission to the RP+10 review (<https://www.sandylakecoalition.ca/rpsubmission>).

Preserving and restoring habitat

We understand how interconnected the entire area is from an ecological perspective. Recent studies by scientists and park planners indicate any further development within the Sandy Lake/Marsh Lake watershed will negatively impact the existing park assets through to the Sackville River, and will affect flooding conditions along the river, including the Bedford floodplains.

- The forest supports a full suite of Old Forest Species and fully 22 of 23 vertebrates associated with structural features of old Acadian forests have been found.
- The report, Avian Species at Risk Surveys of the proposed Sandy Lake- Sackville River Regional Park, cites 20 such species as “Species of Interest” to Federal and Provincial conservation bodies. This includes 13 species-at-risk (4 aquatic, 9 terrestrial).
- This wildlife survey also shows the area is uncommonly rich and diverse in flora and fauna that require policies to protect them. (<http://sandylake.org/avian-and-species-at-risk/>).
- After more than 35 years, and through the efforts of the Sackville River Association, Atlantic Salmon are returning to the watershed. In fact, salmon are now being found in Sandy Lake, which is a significant



conservation success.

Now is a crucial decision-making point

We understand an application for Secondary Planning for lands immediately west of Sandy Lake is imminent by at least one developer. This creates a new urgency for us to find solutions that protect the Sandy Lake-Sackville River watershed.

In particular, in 2018, Clayton Developments reached out to HRM suggesting they would be willing to trade their lands to protect the watershed, if HRM would be agreeable. We and the SL-SRRP see this as a potential solution and 'win-win' for all sides.

At this time, we ask that:

- The SL-SRRP be expanded by 1,800 acres (refer to Map 1 in the SL-SRRP submission). Research the SL-SRRP boundary in the RP+10 process so that new boundaries based on science are established to encompass all remaining essential watersheds to be protected and managed as a regional park for all time. That would mean finding "win-win" solutions that serve both the community and present landowners needs.
- The Halifax Green Network Plan (HGPN) be included in its entirety in the RP+10.
- All requests in Sections A, B and C of the SL-SRRP Coalition submission be addressed and implemented within the RP+10 review.

Conservation work still to be achieved

We are thankful HRM has shown leadership with the recent passing of HalifACT and for the HGPN Map 5 amendment to the Regional Plan's conservation design development agreement.

HRM's acquisition of 160 acres next to Marsh Lake for the park in 2015 gives us some assurance the city indeed wants to expand and secure the park area.

Hike NS looks to the RP+10 to expand the existing boundary to protect and enhance the existing watershed for all time. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

Janet Barlow, Executive Director
Hike Nova Scotia

cc: Mayor Mike Savage, HRM Council members, Leah Perrin, HRM Planning, Sandy Lake - Sackville River Regional Park Coalition