



## **Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes**

What We Heard Interim Report #2

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Halifax Regional Municipality

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## **BLUE MOUNTAIN BIRCH COVE LAKES – WHAT WE HEARD INTERIM REPORT #2**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report provides a summary of the comments and feedback received during engagement efforts completed in Timeframe 2 to further inform Stantec’s continued approach to evaluating the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes (BMBCL) area for Parks Canada’s national urban park initiative. Engagement efforts included a virtual public engagement workshop held on April 13<sup>th</sup>, a series of in-person targeted interviews held between May 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>, and a second key participant engagement session (first held in Timeframe 1) held on June 15<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of these meetings was to gather information from members of the public and to seek feedback on the following study pillars: recreation conditions, ecological conditions, archaeological and cultural resources, land use and settlement analysis, and governance.

The virtual public workshop on April 13<sup>th</sup> involved members of the public, key stakeholders, organizations, and partners that reflected a diversity of interests and was hosted by Stantec on the Microsoft Teams platform. At this meeting, Stantec introduced this assessment phase of the BMBCL national urban park initiative and asked participants to share their knowledge on and ideas for the BMBCL area.

The targeted interview sessions were in-person, small group interviews, which followed a prescriptive question and answer format designed to facilitate a deeper and more technical level of discussion of the proposed park area. The meetings were hosted by Stantec in the Halifax Regional Municipality’s (HRM) boardroom located in Alderney Landing Dartmouth.

The second key participant session included an updated discussion of “what we have heard to date” and provided the opportunity for stakeholders to provide confirmation or additional considerations to the information previously collected. At the second participant session, an outline of Stantec’s findings were presented and offered participants the opportunity to provide feedback on the findings that will be used to inform the pre-feasibility background and recommendations of the comprehensive study.

Additional information on these engagement efforts is described in the following sections.

## **2.0 PUBLIC WORKSHOP AND SURVEY**

### **2.1 PREPARATION**

Stantec planned and conducted a workshop-style meeting open to members of the public. Stantec sent a virtual save the date notice on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022, to 42 participants representing 32 groups identified by the HRM as key participants in inform members of the public meeting. Additionally, HRM advertised the public workshop on the City’s project website and social media channels (Figure 1). A number of elected officials also shared news of the event on their own social media pages.





Figure 1 Post on the Public Meeting from HRM’s Twitter

## 2.2 PUBLIC WORKSHOP ATTENDANCE

The public workshop was held on April 13<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 – 9:00 pm and was attended by 88 individuals, primarily attending as members of the public as well as some of the key participants identified previously.

## 2.3 PUBLIC WORKSHOP LOGISTICS

The meeting started with an introduction by Douglas Reid, Planning Coordinator with HRM Parks and Recreation. Stantec then introduced the consultant team, demonstrated the technology to be used over the course of the evening, provided an overview of the work plan and engagement timeline, and explained its approach to completing the comprehensive background study on the BMBCL area and vicinity. A copy of the presentation slides prepared by Stantec is included in Appendix A.

After each area of background study approach was presented by the Stantec team, a related question was posed to attendees who could respond in chat, form-based formats, as well as using live-mapping using the ArcGIS mapping applications produced by Stantec. The consulting team acknowledges that multiple participants had trouble using the live-mapping application and that not everyone was able to provide their input to their satisfaction.





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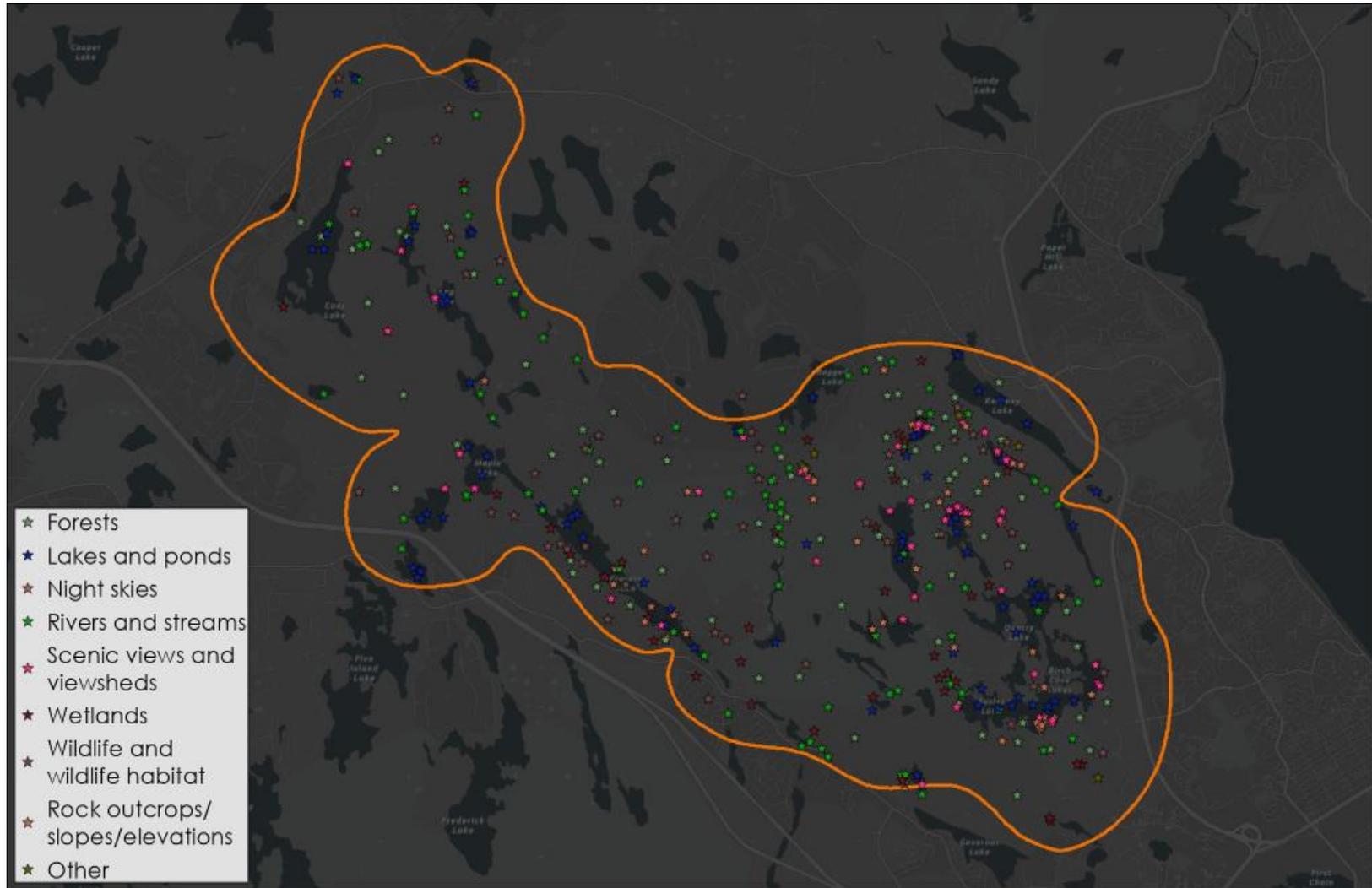


Figure 3 Ecological Features of Importance Live Mapping Results



## 2.4.2 Recreational Conditions

Stantec provided an overview of the proposed approach to the recreational conditions analysis. This includes analyzing recreational use, connectivity, potential for anthropogenic impacts and how we propose to identify high priority areas for restoration and increased connection to existing trail systems. Stantec also noted the methodology of these identified areas that will be studied and why we will be placing a particular emphasis on the potential impact of Highway 103 and the proposed Highway 113.

Participants were then asked to identify on a live map “***What recreational activities take place within the BMBCL Area***”. In total, there were 418 data points added to the map. The location and count of responses is shown in Figure 4.

Based on the responses to the live mapping exercises, the following activities were identified to occur within the proposed park.

- Swimming and hiking
- Canoeing and kayaking
- Camping
- Skating
- Cross country skiing
- Biking
- Angling
- Snow shoeing
- Art and photography
- Meditation and forest bathing
- Botany and nature studies
- Outdoor education
- Bird watching

“Other” responses included hiking, trail running, geocaching, and off-leash dog walking/hiking.

These responses help validate existing knowledge that there are a variety of both land and waterway-based activities currently enjoyed throughout the area as well as several scenic areas favoured for their meditative qualities and to produce art and photography.



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Figure 4 Recreational Features Live Mapping Results



### 2.4.3 Archaeological and Cultural Study

Stantec staff shared the proposed approach to the archaeological and cultural study, which involves a desktop study as well as site reconnaissance as it relates to potential resources including those related to Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities. During the session, Stantec staff shared with participants their two-fold approach that involves background research, including a review of historical data, as well as preliminary field assessments and site reconnaissance.

To gain feedback, participants were asked two form-based questions:

- A) ***“Are there known important/sensitive cultural elements that you would identify within the Study Area?”***
- B) ***“What cultural elements are priorities in gathering additional research during this study?”***

In response to Question A, a total of 44 responses were received with 11 indicating that “yes” known cultural elements have been identified within the study area and 33 indicating that “no”, no known cultural elements have been identified within the study area.

In response to Question B, 50 responses were received including responses indicating traditional use, Indigenous knowledge, and heritage, traditional trailways, African Nova Scotian use, post-contact resource use sites including mining and forestry and post-contact settlement including cabins, trails, and roadways. Word cloud responses to the question are shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Archaeological and Cultural Word Cloud

Feedback regarding archaeological and cultural resources, including the information identified above, has supported both the background and field evaluations by assisting in the prioritization of areas for evaluation and through contributions to the body of knowledge which will inform the background research components.



#### 2.4.4 Land Use and Settlement Analysis

Stantec gave meeting participants an overview of their approach to land use and settlement analysis, summarizing the four-step approach:

1. A land use inventory which will document and describe different land use and calculate the land areas devoted to each use surrounding the park. The land use inventory will also look within the park to account for differences between land cover and land use.
2. A review of land-use related policy and regulations in HRM that surround and include the park.
3. A summary of development activity and land development trends taking place in the area to help explain existing land use patterns in more detail and assist in gauging development pressures on lands abutting the study area.
4. A report summary of the foregoing research and analysis to describe the land use and development implications for the study area and its surroundings.

Participants were then asked: “**Which existing access points are used when visiting the BMBCL area**”. In total, there were 160 data points added to the map. The location and count of responses is shown in Figure 6. Not surprising, a number of access points appeared on the eastern end at some of the more commonly known entrances, but also noted that generally, people access the park at various places along the entire perimeter of the study area.



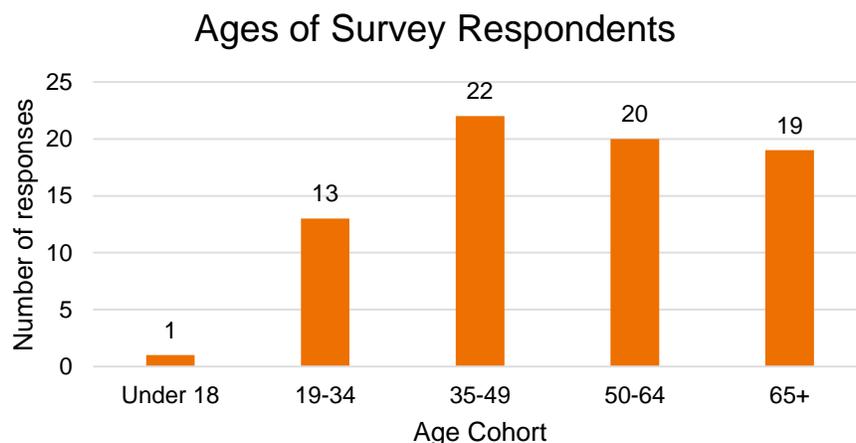
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Figure 6 BMBCL Existing Access Points







**Figure 8** Ages of Survey Respondents

Acknowledging the HRM’s diverse fabric of individual communities, the survey prompted participants to self-describe their place of primary residence. Resultingly, responses showed a broad distribution across the municipality (Table 1) with the most common responses being Halifax (16), Hammonds Plains (13), Bedford (12), and Timberlea (7).

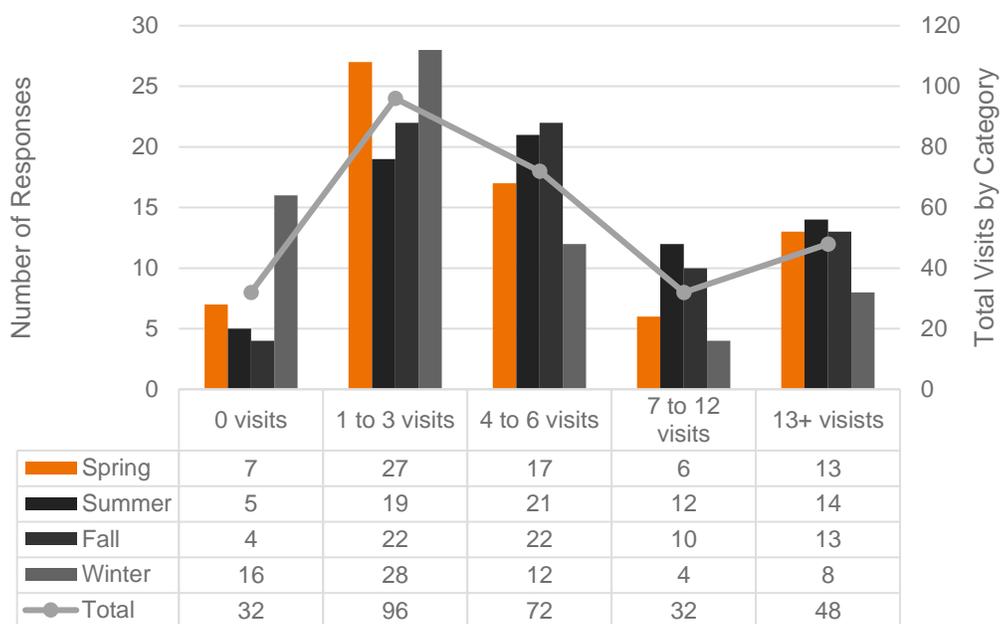
**Table 1** Self-identified Community of Primary Residence

Community	Number of Responses	Community	Number of Responses
Bedford	12	Kearney Lake	1
Birch Cove	1	Kingswood	4
Clayton Park	2	Lakeside	1
Cole Harbour	1	Lewis Lake	1
Dartmouth	4	Rockingham	3
Fairmount	1	St. Margaret’s Bay	1
Fairview	1	Stillwater Lake	1
Halifax	16	Timberlea	7
Hammonds Plains	13	Wellington	1
Hubbards	1	Williamswood	1
Hubley	1	Kearney Lake	1



### 2.5.1 Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lake (BMBCL) Area Visitation

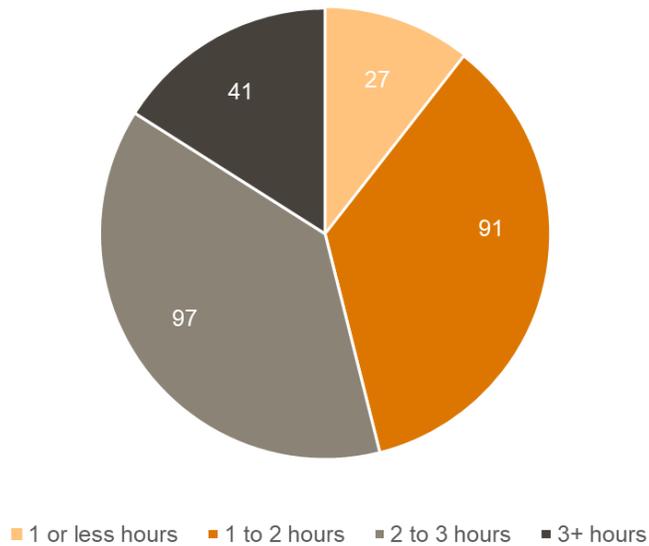
Questions were posed to develop an understanding of current usage and visitation patterns of the BMBCL area. Questions focused on the number of visits per season, time spent during each visit, and method of arrival transportation. By a close margin, survey respondents reported the Fall months (September, October, November) as the most popular season to make at least one visit (67), however the Summer (66) and Spring (63) months followed closely (Figure 9). In contrast, respondents reported the most instances of zero visits in the Winter with 16. The survey also indicated that the most common number of visits per year across all seasons is between one and three (96) with the least number of visits being even between zero per year and more than 13 (Figure 9).



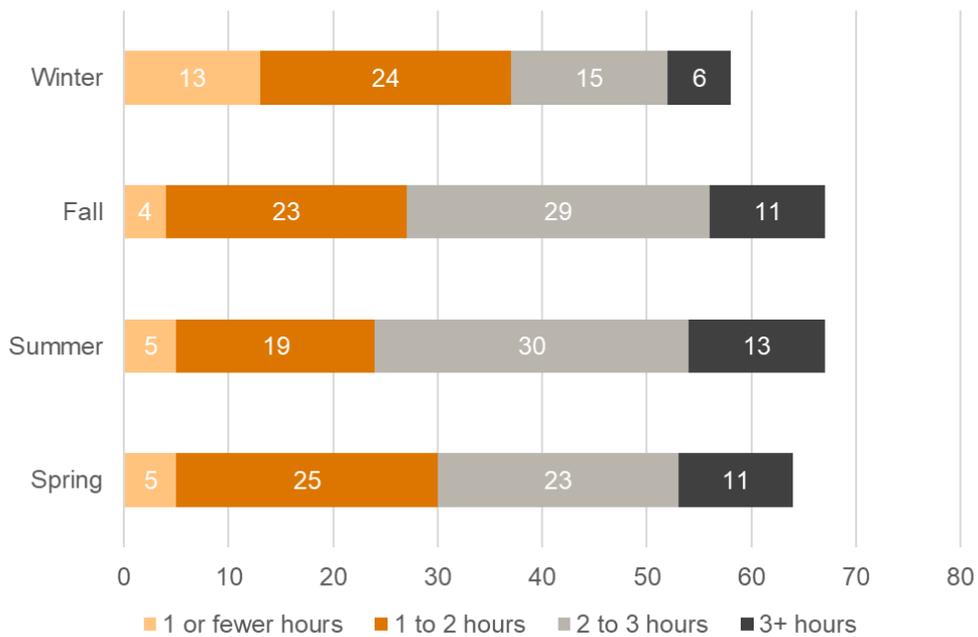
**Figure 9 Number of BMBCL Area Visits by Season and Total by Category**

Across all seasons, it was most common for respondents to spend between two to three hours (97) in the area during their visit which is followed closely by one to two hours (91)(Figure 10). When expressed by individual season, responses most frequently indicated a preference for one to two visits in the Spring (27), four to six in the Summer (21), four to six and one to three in the Fall (both 22), and one to three in the Winter (28)(Figure 11).





**Figure 10 Hours Spent During Visits Across All Seasons**

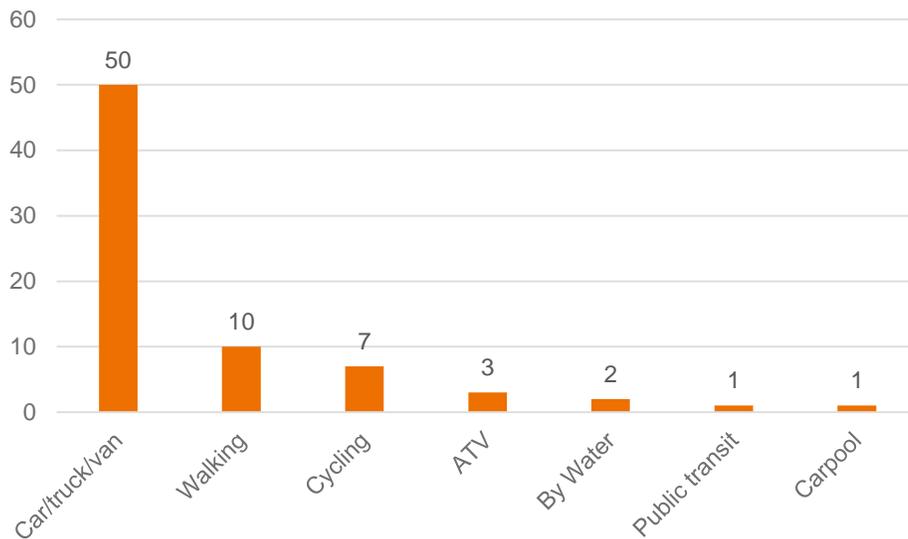


**Figure 11 Hours Spent During Visits by Season**

Respondents reported use of a wide range of transportation methods to arrive at the BMBCL area. By a wide margin, private vehicle was expressed the most (50) followed by walking (10)(Figure 12). Other mode choices were indicated to a lesser extent which included cycling, ATV, by water, public transit, and carpooling.

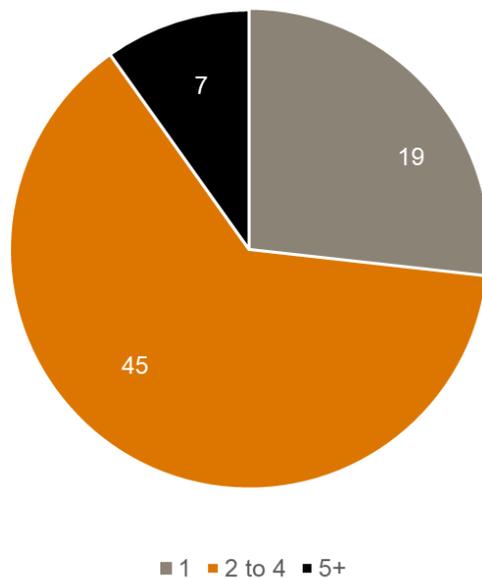


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**Figure 12 Transportation Method of Arrival**

Predominately, survey respondents indicated a tendency to visit in groups of at least two or more (52) compared to individually (19)(Figure 13). Most frequently, results show these groups are between two and four people (45) with a smaller proportion opting for larger groups of five or more (7)(Figure 13).



**Figure 13 Visit Group Size**



## 2.5.2 Topics of Interest

One of the surveys key objectives was to identify the topic of greatest concern amongst community members. Between both surveys, respondents were asked to identify any additional features that were not addressed during the public meeting presentation and the natural features they most appreciated about the BMBCL area. These responses were open-ended and prompted participants to input custom responses. Table 2 displays these responses sorted by general theme and their frequency. Overall, respondents identified a range of thematic interests but addressed natural features such as forests, water bodies, topography, views, and wildlife to be of greatest concern. However, not all participants choose to provide a response and some responses covered more than one theme.

**Table 2 Self-identified Important or Most Appreciated Aspects of the BMBCL Area**

Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency
Forests	44	Noise	6
Lakes and Ponds	42	Highway	1
Slope and Elevation	42	Geology	1
Scenic views and viewsheds	36	Safety	1
Wildlife and Habitat	34	Escape from urban life	1
Rivers and Streams	32	Seasonality	1
Wetlands	28	Biodiversity	1
Night skies	21	Waterfalls	1

Similar questions then asked survey participants to identify important or sensitive cultural elements within the BMBCL area from their personal knowledge and experiences. Likewise, these responses were open-ended and were sorted by general theme or topic area. Data was not obtained from all respondents and some responses covered more than one theme. As Table 3 identifies, themes covered the appreciation or desire to protect general heritage of the BMBCL area, its wetlands, recognition of Indigenous Peoples and history, presence of existing community-led projects and caretaking, anticipated archaeological artefacts, sensitivity due to land subsidence or former sub-surface excavation operations, and the danger of allowing developments that infringe or impose on the character or sensitivity of the area.

**Table 3 Self-identified Important or Sensitive Cultural Elements in the BMBCL Area**

Theme	Frequency
Heritage	3
Wetlands	3
Indigenous Peoples	2
Existing community projects	1
Archaeology	1
Land Subsidence	1
Imposing development	1



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One of two surveys also elaborated on the perceived priority of cultural elements within the BMBCL boundary. Themes of these limited number of responses (n=3) included the preservation of resident lifestyle, importance of Indigenous consultation, and attention to sensitive environments.

### 2.5.3 Governance

Park governance refers to the system and structure by which the BMBCL area may be managed and controlled. Surveys asked respondents to optionally provide any points of elaboration on what they consider to be the critical factors in achieving good park management and governance. As with the previous open-ended questions, the responses were sorted by general theme. Again, some participants choose to identify more than one topic within their response which are totalled individually.

As Table 4 demonstrates, the topic of public sector participation with an emphasis on transparency at all stages of park management was remarked in the greatest number of responses. Particularly, respondents expressed opinions around public involvement as direct stakeholders and being accountable to the people who use the park and the preservation of the natural environment. Following this, respondents indicated a strong emphasis on prudent trail maintenance and upkeep as an integral component of park stewardship. Further, other responses included themes concerning public education and ongoing participation to enhance the longevity and overall experience of park users, and the importance of signage to discourage inappropriate or unsafe activities. Respondents also indicated a desire to see wayfinding or navigational signage for safety and to keep visitors in the intended pathways and trails. The need for a long-term management commitment and vision was also stated as vital for the park's stability. Several respondents felt that parks governance should be multi-generational and would not be sustainable without ongoing management and monitoring.

**Table 4 Self-identified Factors for Good Management and Governance in the BMBCL Area**

Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency
Public Sector partnership and transparency	9	Public safety	3
General trail upkeep/stewardship	5	Water access and recreation	3
Public education, participation, and experience	5	Pet control and accommodation	2
Signage and wayfinding	4	Forest management	1
Long-range planning and management	4	Erosion and flooding	1
Controlling development	3	Indigenous partnership	1
Conservation and biodiversity	3	Wildfire prevention	1
Legislative protection	3		



### 2.5.4 Other Comments

Each survey concluded with an opportunity for respondents to provide any additional comments they felt are relevant to the BMBCL Area. Responses included a range of themes including elements respondents felt was absent from engagement sessions, aspects of management they felt needed emphasis or other general concerns or considerations. These responses were once again distilled into themes with some responses covering more than one. Not all survey participants choose to provide additional comments.

While there were a range of comments (Table 5), the response related to controlling imposing development in or around the BMBCL area was most frequently heard and noted of importance. Of these comments, many respondents felt that private development or highway construction would impede the park’s environmental protection and value for recreational use. Further, other comments expressed a need to improve the public engagement process with several stating that it should be ongoing and not singularly a preface to the planning process. In addition, other respondents felt that the virtual engagement method did not suit the needs of the project and may not have captured an accurate representation of public opinion. Further comments introduced themes of access to water, hiking, and overall recreation, the prioritization of habitat protection, and a desire to widen stakeholder identification and involvement.

**Table 5 Other Comments on the BMBCL Area Planning Process**

Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency
Control imposing development	6	Permit more development	1
Improve public engagement strategy	4	Conservation and Biodiversity	1
Water access, hiking, and recreation	3	Implications of private land ownership	1
Habitat protection	2	Access points and parking	1
Increased stakeholder involvement	2	More parking	1
Wildlife management	1	No park development in the back country	1



### 3.0 TARGETED INTERVIEW SESSIONS

#### 3.1 TARGETED INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Following the public workshop session, Stantec conducted targeted, in-person interviews, with those identified as subject matter experts on the various pillars of the feasibility study. These participants were identified by the HRM and included 21 individuals from 10 separate organizations. In preparation for the interviews, HRM staff provided a meeting boardroom meeting location and sent invites to the various parties.

#### 3.2 TARGETED INTERVIEW ATTENDANCE

The targeted interviews occurred during five separate sessions across three days, May 12, 13 and 16, 2022. Meeting attendance included 21 individuals from 10 separate organizations, including: Ecology Action Centre, Friends of BMBCL, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization, Nova Scotia Nature Trust, NS Crown Share Land Legacy Trust, Canoe Kayak NS, Nature NS, Maskwa Aquatic Club, Leave No Trace Canada as well as a department official from Recreation NS.

#### 3.3 TARGETED INTERVIEW FORMAT

During the targeted interview sessions, the guiding questions in Table 6 were used to facilitate discussion.

**Table 6 Targeted Interview Probing Questions**

Recreational Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building on the information we have heard to date, have we captured the activities occurring in the area?</li> <li>2. Are there any challenges / concerns with these activities occurring in the area? Or any specific areas where there are recreational concerns?</li> <li>3. How do you see the balance between developing recreational park features, and the preservation of sensitive environmental features?</li> <li>4. What opportunities do you see to recreation in the area?</li> <li>5. Should any specific types or areas be considered “off-limits” for recreation? Why?</li> </ol>
Ecological Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building on the information we have heard to date, have we captured the ecologically important areas?</li> <li>2. What are any challenges / concerns with preserving these important areas? Are there areas where there are concern with habitat protection and human use?</li> <li>3. Based on correspondence, we understand landscape connectivity is an important element to the park planning. What opportunities do you see for the protection of habitat in the area?</li> </ol>



**Table 6 Targeted Interview Probing Questions**

Land Use and Settlement Analysis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building on the information we have heard to date, have we captured the nearby settlement impacts to area?</li> <li>2. A strip of land running alongside Kearney Lake and the 102 Highway would put a potentially dense development on the edge of BMBCL. Where are the other areas of concern for potential residential encroachment on the park?</li> <li>3. How can HRM balance the need to facilitate development of private lands at the park interface without impacting the future of the park as you see it?</li> <li>4. We understand that the development pressures on surrounding lands are ongoing and increasing. What are there any challenges / concerns with adjacent development activities on the use of the area as a park? Are there specific areas of concern?</li> <li>5. The Halifax Charter requires private lands zoned as parkland to be acquired by the Municipality within one year (considerable challenges). Other than amending the timeframe for acquisition, what options might there be to direct the future parkland use of the BMBCL area as you see it?</li> <li>6. What opportunities do you see for the area?</li> </ol>
Archaeological and Cultural Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building on the information we have heard to date, have we captured the cultural aspects of the area?</li> <li>2. Are there any challenges / concerns with the protection of cultural resources?</li> <li>3. How do you see the balance between developing recreational park features, and the preservation of historic / cultural resources features?</li> </ol>
Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you see the park being managed?</li> <li>2. What do you see the role of the organizations / public in park management?</li> </ol>

### 3.4 TARGETED INTERVIEW FEEDBACK

The following sections summarize the results of the targeted interview sessions. A summary of these findings was provided to targeted interviewees (Appendix D).

#### 3.4.1 Recreational Conditions

When discussing recreational conditions in the BMBCL study area, Stantec staff asked, “**if we have effectively captured the activities occurring?**”, “**what are the risks and opportunities of recreation in the area?**”; and “**how do we strike a balance between ecological integrity and recreational enjoyment?**”. In response to these guiding questions, most participants stated that while recreation should be planned for and accommodated, ecological preservation and integrity should be considered at the forefront of park planning.

We also heard from many participants that recreation alone does not effectively capture what the proposed park area is used for, and that for many users, enjoyment of the area goes far beyond physical recreation. As one participant put it, “people access the park on the best and worst days of their lives, to think, to celebrate, to mourn”. While participants agreed that the physical recreation activities taking place were adequately captured, participants commented that the personal connection and spiritual value should also be noted.



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When discussing the traditional activities that occur in the proposed park, similar responses were received from each group, and included hiking, biking, snowshoeing, canoeing, kayaking, photography, dog walking, running, camping and more, with the full list available in the meeting notes (Appendix D).

When discussing challenges and risks posed by recreational activities in the proposed park, many participants noted that an over-use, a lack of sanctioned trail planning, unsanctioned camping and motorized vehicles were the primary risks.

When discussing opportunities for the proposed park, the responses were numerous and included opportunities for a front country – back country model which provides greater accessibility and wider trails closer to primary access points with trails / areas of increasing difficulty closer to the interior of the park. Additional opportunities raised included effective trail planning, formalized entrances and exits, enhanced accessibility for those with disabilities, and opportunities for the park to host education and outreach groups. The full list of responses is provided in Appendix D.

When asked about if areas or activities should be off-limits within the BMBCL, most respondents indicated that motorized use should be limited if not outright banned within the park boundaries. Participants recognized the difficulty of enforcing a ban, however, are concerned with the level of noise and destruction associated with one recreational activity which disproportionately impacts the enjoyment of several others.

### 3.4.2 Ecological Conditions

When asked about ecological conditions in the BMBCL study area, most groups emphasized that ecological integrity, especially in the core wilderness areas and back country, should be prioritized over development. Several groups noted that the existing development pressure is shrinking the potential land-base for a park and have recommended purchasing, preserving and conserving core wilderness areas first, before building out the front-country for greater use.

The concerns related to connectivity and ecological conditions related to the existing development pressures on lands near to the existing Highway 103 as well as the proposed Highway 113 bypass, over-use by recreational groups, use of the area by motorized vehicles and ATV's and the fragmentation of both terrestrial and aquatic habitat.

Opportunities noted for the area include supporting recovery plans for species at risk, creation of wildlife corridors for mainland moose and other species, maintenance of and a greater understanding of old growth forests, wetlands, watercourses, lakes, and other areas of ecological importance. Participants in the interview sessions also expressed an opportunity to preserve the unique view and soundscapes in the area, to protect “quiet areas” free from urban noise and dark skies not impacted by light pollution.

When discussing landscape connectivity, most groups once again agreed that a front country – back country model would benefit the protection of species at risk as well as the connected ecosystems in which they rely on. Groups also identified the wetland and watercourse systems as well as the opportunity to enhance connectivity through the purchasing of additional conservation lands.



### 3.4.3 Archaeological and Cultural Resources

When discussing the archaeological and cultural resources within the BMBCL area we heard a great deal about the history of the area with a primary focus on historical Mi'kmaq land use. Many groups followed up by expressing the opportunity for the park to bring Mi'kmaq voices and stories to the fore-front and for the park to be a setting in which their stories may be shared.

Participants also provided a great deal of information regarding post-contact land use including development history of the area which included sawmilling, logging, quarrying, hunting, fishing and more. Participants noted that trails of indeterminate age are still in use today and that the area likely hosted pre-contact travelways and canoe portage routes. Information about more recent use of the area including older hunting and fishing camps, cabins and trailways was provided.

### 3.4.4 Land Use and Settlement Analysis

Targeted stakeholders characterized the context of the study area: the BMBCL area has been faced with development pressure for many years and that there are concerns of development pressure along all sides of the study area, including pressure that directly abuts or is in proximity to the designated wilderness area. We heard that development has outpaced park creation and park planning and that because of the pressures for development, there is a need to engage in both land use and park planning at the edges outside of the immediate park area. We have heard a number of participants agree that conservation values should come before the planning of land for future development and access at the interface and that an ecological lens should be used to view all development proposals at the park edges.

Of particular concern from participants are the impacts of development on the current and future use of the park. These include view/soundscape impacts, development creating edge effects, heat island effects caused by large, paved areas near the park, the continued loss of trees and forests, impacts on water quality to lakes, ponds, and watercourses in the park, and wind effects.

We further heard that there several planning tools that could be used to mitigate impacts, and in some cases, be used to facilitate park access, including subdivision design, land dedication, service boundary limitations, density trading, new zoning designations, strategic and proactive land acquisitions, and policy and regulatory incentives aimed at maintaining ecological and wilderness areas.

Some of the input we received suggested that with an overall park plan in place that considers land outside the immediate study area, there could be opportunities to work with the development community in the design and development of the park.

### 3.4.5 Governance Models

Like the other study pillars, ecological integrity was viewed by targeted participants as the overarching guiding principle to park governance, regardless of the eventual governance model that gets chosen. Similarly, we heard that conservation should be at the heart of park governance and management and that conservation principles should carry over into the future vision for the park.



We showed targeted stakeholders example park governance models. They recognized the variety of governance options available, including opportunities to combine models, but did not endorse any individual one specifically. The consensus was that it is too difficult to determine a model without the foundation of a park plan that sets out the collective goals and objectives for the BMBCL area. We did hear that:

- There is value in a central governance model that considers input from the public, stakeholders, and landowners but retains decision-making authority to limit the politicization of decisions.
- A co-governance model involving the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia could be an appropriate model and a possible conduit for reconciliation.
- Governance and management should involve both public and private landowners who own lands dedicated to conservation/park use and that there is a keen interest from environmental stakeholder groups to be involved in park governance.

Overall, we heard that a major challenge will be organizing people and bringing moving parts of a national urban park together: knowing who is leading the way, who is making decisions, and how the relationships work. In terms of priorities, we heard that a management agreement for the trail network is needed as soon as possible due to the number of informal and unplanned trails in existence and being created by different user groups.

## 4.0 SECOND KEY PARTICIPANT SESSION

### 4.1 KEY PARTICIPANT PREPARATION

In preparation for the second key participant session Stantec sent a virtual invitation to 42 participants on Thursday, June 9, 2022. Those invited represented the 32 separate groups as identified by the HRM as “key participants” at the onset of the project. Following the meeting invite, a second email containing a reminder and an advance copy of the presentation was sent on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Stantec’s virtual meeting invitation is included in Appendix E.

### 4.2 KEY PARTICIPANT ATTENDANCE

The virtual meeting was held on June 15, 2022, between 7:00 - 8:30 pm and was attended by eight key participants plus two Stantec staff and one representative of the HRM. The attendance rate by identified organizations was 19% leading to the potential need for additional engagement efforts to be conducted to ensure participants sentiments were effectively captured.



### 4.3 5 PILLARS UPDATE

During the second key participant meeting, Stantec staff provided a summary of the information contained within Sections 2 and 3 of this What We Heard Report. Following the recap of the five pillars of the study, Stantec staff requested feedback from attendees to confirm that their previous sentiments were effectively captured and to provide an additional opportunity to have their thoughts and opinions and resources captured.

### 4.4 FEEDBACK RECEIVED

Following the “what we heard” recap and project update from Stantec, meeting participants were given an opportunity to provide additional feedback on the findings that were presented and ultimately used to inform the pre-feasibility background and recommendations of our comprehensive study.

1. The overarching need for a park plan and park planning process should be identified in the report. In this context, there should be representation from property owners including the Province and Nature Trust.
2. Ecological integrity should take precedence for all pillars. The way in which ecological integrity is framed should be consistent in all matters of background study.
3. The need to look at other jurisdictions on collaborative models of governance that provide for a variety of user groups, accessibilities, and experiences for inspiration. Victoria Park (Truro) was cited as an example.
4. On recreation, it was noted that dog walkers are contributing to ecological degradation (impacts to ground nesting birds and wildflowers) and that given the low-impact, high ecological value that is being placed on the area, that recreational opportunities should be limited to non-motorized ones. The front/back-country model was identified as the ideal recreational experience for the BMBCL area.
5. Consultation should be held with individuals involved in cited examples of park governance models to evaluate how they are working.
6. Emphasis on the Stantec study in providing specific recommendations.
7. Zoning needs to consider land surrounding the park so that any hard development infrastructure be required to consider the park’s development.
8. That HRM should establish an annual budget for priority and strategic land acquisition related to the BMBCL park and its realization.
9. That the proposed Highway 113 is not appropriate and no longer serves its originally intended purpose.
10. That Parks Canada should play a prominent role in the creation and management of the park due to the special significance of the area and the recognized standard of quality, branding, ecological values, and experiences offered by Parks Canada.
11. There are opportunities to synergize the results of the BMBCL Comprehensive Study with HRM’s new Regional Plan.



## 5.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Stantec would like to thank all participants and stakeholders who took the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise with us on the work that is being conducted to support the pre-feasibility assessment of BMBCL as part of Parks Canada's national urban parks program. Feedback and input we received is strongly appreciated and will be used to inform our approach to the various areas of background study. Our thanks are also extended to HRM, Parks Canada and the Province for providing us with this opportunity and supporting the engagement process and offering their advice.



**APPENDIX A**  
**Meeting Presentation Slides**



Halifax Regional Municipality  
Blue Mountain-Birch Cove  
Lakes Comprehensive Study

## Workshop

## Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Project Pillars
3. Information Gathering
4. Wrap-up

BMBCL Comprehensive Study

## Introductions

BMBCL Comprehensive Study

## Study Area / Information Gathering







**BMBCL Comprehensive Study**  
Archaeological and  
Cultural Resources

disabled indeterminate stories  
portage portage culture camped hunted  
connections traditional  
hunting portages values  
streams areas built  
artifacts mi'kmaq routes  
l'nu birch channels cups  
log biocultural age  
indigenous old  
fishing canoe cabins access drinking  
fished generations dams  
water cove remains quarrying historical  
found settlers accessibility  
driving petroglyphs forgotten  
used

**BMBCL Comprehensive Study**  
Wrap-up

**APPENDIX B**  
**Virtual Public Meeting Q & A**



## April 13, 2022 – BMBCL Virtual Public Meeting Questions and Answers

### General (Q1 - Q7)

#### **Q1: Is there a list of the “Key Participants” available?**

A: A list of key participants was provided to Stantec by HRM. This list was used to invite identified representatives associated with different organizations / key stakeholder groups, for the session held in March and an updated list will be used in later sessions. The original list included representatives from the following organizations:

- Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes
- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
- Ecology Action Centre
- Halifax Field Naturalists
- Nature NS
- Sierra Club
- Leave No Trace Canada
- Bird Friendly Halifax
- Nature Conservancy Canada-NS
- Hike NS
- Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization (WRWEO)
- BLT Rails to Trails
- Halifax North West Trails Association
- Maskwa Aquatic Club
- Kingswood Ratepayers Association
- Haliburton Highbury Homeowners Association
- NS Crown Share Land Legacy Trust
- NS Trails Federation
- Recreation NS
- Canoe Kayak NS
- Immigrant Settlement Association NS
- NS Communities Culture & Heritage (Parasport NS)
- Diversity with Nature (Dalhousie Univ)
- Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP)
- Nova Scotia Power
- Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre
- Confederacy of Mainland Mi'Kmaq
- Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources
- Nova Scotia Nature Trust

#### **Q2: Will the interim report be made public?**

A: Yes, reports will be made available through the BMBCL Homepage.

**Q3: Is there going to be a discussion about what we wish for the future for this park?**

A: The national urban park project is in the pre-feasibility assessment phase and the current scope of work being undertaken by Stantec is to collect background information to inform further planning efforts within the study area. Stakeholder and public engagement on specific proposals identified with park development would potentially occur in subsequent phases of the national urban park initiative if there was a decision to proceed.

**Q4: Will there not be another public session to look at the feedback and report?**

A: For this stage of the pre-feasibility assessment, another general public session is not planned. The report will be made available on the BMBCL Homepage. Feedback can be submitted through the contact provided on the webpage.

**Q5: Will these links be shared in a follow-up, not possible to copy URL.**

A: Participants of the public meeting have received a follow-up email the following day with the links provided.

**Q6: Will the presentation slides be available online?**

A: Yes, presentation slides are available on the BMBCL Homepage.

**Q7: What is the timeline for releasing your study results? Will this be a public document?**

A: The complete background report is anticipated to be completed by Fall 2022. Yes, the study results will be a public document, made available on the BMBCL Homepage.

**Recreation (Q8-Q11)**

**Q8: Why is hiking not on the list?**

A: This was an oversight, and hiking has since been added to the list of recreational activities.

**Q9: You made a comment about looking for other trails, rather than sanctioned trails. You do realize that there are NO official trails anywhere in BMBCL. Every existing trail needs to be carefully evaluated by certified trail planners and many will need to be closed off as they are creating huge environmental damage.**

A: Yes, it is understood that there are no official trails within the BMBCL study area. Trail planning is outside of the scope of the work being completed by Stantec; however, the existing environment information being collected will help inform future park planning.

**Q10: What is the purpose of each question - This question will not capture what the public is doing and because no actual trails then certainly a lot of the public may want to use this nature area but can't due to mobility or access issues.**

A: Stantec has developed questions around each of the pillars being considered in the background report, including recreation, environment, culture, land use and governance. Information provided in response to these questions will help inform the background conditions in the area as well as focus efforts for future exploration.

**Q11: The activities that take place are knowable from many web sites - why would the knowledge of guests in this meeting have any value?**

A: Information is being collected from a variety of sources to gain a holistic understanding of the current use of the BMBCL area. This includes online resources, engagement with key participants, as well as field data collection and mapping. The objective with carrying out a workshop open to all members of the general public was to provide an opportunity for individual feedback which may not necessarily get captured through the identified stakeholder organizations.

### **Environment/Ecological (Q12-Q13)**

**Q12: Where is DECC's Protected Areas and Nova Scotia Nature Trust? NS Environment own most of the land and the Nature Trust has and continues to play a significant conservation role.**

A: These parties are both identified as key participants. Along with Parks Canada, the Halifax Regional Municipality, the Kwiilmu'kw Maw-klusuagn Negotiation Office, the Province through DECC (Department of Environment & Climate Change) are involved in the pre-feasibility assessment, and the Nova Scotia Nature Trust have been invited to be involved in meetings to date. The following map identifies current provincial parks, wilderness areas and nature reserves:

<https://www.novascotia.ca/parksandprotectedareas/plan/interactive-map/>.

**Q13: What are the intentions of BCBL in regard to the backcountry still owned privately?**

A: It is Stantec's understanding that no decisions with respect to BMBCL backcountry have been made at this time.

### **Cultural/Archaeological (Q14-Q17)**

**Q14: Where will you be doing the testing (e.g., shovel testing)?**

A: A field reconnaissance (archaeological survey or "walkover") of the Study Area will be undertaken in any potential areas of archaeological sensitivity or areas of elevated archaeological potential identified during the course of the historical background study and areas of modern disturbance within the Study Area. All work will be completed in compliance with Nova Scotia's Archaeological Resource Impact Assessment (Category C) Guidelines (2014) as well as the *Special Places Protection Act* (Chapter 438 of the Revised Statutes, 1989).

**Q15: Re: "Are there known important / sensitive cultural elements that you would identify within the Study Area?" – Do historical areas count?**

A: Yes.

**Q16: Will you be consulting with Parks Canada's Indigenous stakeholders / Will more specific Mi'kmaq consultation happen after this public project?**

A: Parks Canada is reaching out to local Indigenous communities to explore interests and opportunities to collaborate on the national urban parks program.

Additionally, prior to any designation of any candidate sites, a formal consultation process will also be implemented to ensure Indigenous people are partners in the designation process.

**Q17: Can you expand on what you mean by cultural elements? How are you defining culture?**

A: Cultural elements, or cultural resources, as defined in the Parks Canada Resource Management Policy means "a human work, an object, or a place that is determined, on the basis of its heritage value, to be directly associated with an important aspect or aspects of human history and culture. The heritage value of a cultural resource is embodied in tangible and/or intangible character-defining elements".

### **Land Use (Q18-Q19)**

**Q18: Does 'land use' include both pre- and post-colonial use?**

A: The focus of the pre-feasibility study with respect to land use will be on current land use, including both developed and undeveloped land, and of settlement types in the Study Area and vicinity.

**Q19: Will the Province and Halifax put the so called "shovel ready 2022" housing development on the Hwy 102 corridor on hold until this study and consultation are completed?**

A: This is one area that has been selected for a study under the recent provincial announcement. Further determinations are to be about such studies.

# **APPENDIX C**

## **Governance Model Factor Responses**

**What are important factors for good park management and governance?**

- Diversity
- Secure funding
- Transparency
- Equity
- Relationship building
- Inclusion
- Transparency
- Public transparency
- Collaborative approach.
- Public participation
- Long term preservation
- Transparency
- Evidence-based ecological stewardship
- Community advisory group
- Legally designated as a protected area
- Capacity
- Transparency
- Co-management
- Long term preservation
- Protected in perpetuity
- Next-generation thinking
- Oversight
- Dollars to commit to project
- Collaboration
- Public participation
- Site knowledge
- Conservation-first
- Legally designated
- Public participation
- Legally designated
- Sustainable funding
- Dollars to commit to project
- Adequate parking and good protection for the area
- Public participation
- Security
- Co-management
- Funding
- Collaborative approach
- Funding
- Citizen members
- Citizen members
- Funding
- Need for central authority that can make day to day decisions without considerable consultation i.e., the authority is clear on its mandate and terms of reference
- Inter-governmental coordination
- Ecological stewardship
- Cooperation
- Conservation-first
- Public transparency
- Transparency
- Public participation
- Clarity of the roles of all the partners

Free  
Cooperation  
Land purchases  
Transparency  
Should be similar to Keji  
On-going connection with the many publics that do and will have an interest in good management  
To date, public participation has been minimal to non-existent  
Listen to public input  
Yearly review by scientist  
Regular public input/feedback  
Ecological integrity #1 priority  
Should be similar to Keji  
Public transparency  
Co-management  
Yearly review by scientist  
Immediate trail management  
Public stewardship  
Public input  
Park development experience  
CPTED principals  
Industry representation  
Public consultation  
Public consultation  
Public consultation  
Connection with the many publics  
Monitoring  
Public participation  
Long-term planning  
Public stewardship  
Legally protected.  
Access links to community  
Collaborative approach  
Public involvement  
Funding  
Funding  
Science  
Citizen members  
Public Participation  
Ecological function  
Respecting the wilderness  
Inclusivity (all species)  
Strong guiding principals  
Connectivity with area  
Enforcement

# **APPENDIX D**

## **Targeted Interview Meeting Notes**

## BMBCL: Targeted Interview Sessions

Topic:	Discussions (Challenges & Opportunities / What We Heard)
<b>Recreational Conditions Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hiking, biking, snowshoeing, kayaking, canoeing, photography, bird watching, running, camping etc. shared with the participants and largely agreed that those were the primary recreational activities occurring.</li> <li>• Effective planning of and maintenance of trails holding them to an appropriate development standard.</li> <li>• Current trailway and water access are not properly managed and area leading to ad-hoc / unsanctioned trail development.</li> <li>• Questioning the need for larger parking lots vs. multiple smaller parking lots</li> <li>• Plan for year-round access</li> <li>• Need to strike an effective balance between ecological preservation and recreational enjoyment.</li> <li>• Directing and planning of recreational conditions as to not interfere with wildlife corridors.</li> <li>• Opportunity for education and outreach to work with community members and stewardship groups.</li> <li>• Opportunities to have defined primary and secondary access points.</li> <li>• Opportunities for formalized entrances/exits to direct the flow of individuals.</li> <li>• Opportunities for an interpretive centre, kiosk, playground, seating, trash receptacles.</li> <li>• Opportunities to enhance accessibility for those with disabilities.</li> <li>• Opportunities for canoeing and kayaking routes.</li> <li>• Opportunities for back-country camping.</li> <li>• Opportunities for those in urban areas to enjoy nature.</li> <li>• Opportunities for enjoyment and escape from urban areas.</li> <li>• Opportunities for the park to be connected to public transit &amp; transport infrastructure</li> <li>• Concerned with motorized vehicle use via ATV's</li> <li>• Concerned with unregulated camping.</li> <li>• Concerned with the potential for forest fires.</li> <li>• Concerned with the potential for over-use and "loving it to death".</li> </ul>
<b>Ecological Conditions Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis placed on ecological integrity of the wilderness area/core back country.</li> <li>• Preference discussed for the park to exhibit a front/back country model whereby experienced users are allowed to access more remote areas of the park and more casual or recreational users are encouraged through features and design to stay within the more populated / impacted areas of the park.</li> <li>• Ecological and wildlife connectivity with value for mainland moose corridors.</li> <li>• Maintaining water quality and understanding habitat fragmentation.</li> <li>• No motorized vehicles</li> <li>• Preservation of view/soundscapes</li> <li>• Conservation values ahead of planning for development and access</li> <li>• Considered with development pressure on all sides.</li> <li>• Challenges exist in developing something of this scale within an urban setting taking not consideration the development vs conservation value of the land.</li> <li>• Ensure that recreational use is not elevated to a point in which it degrades the ecological conditions.</li> <li>• Desire to emphasize species at risk, ecological areas of importance, old growth forest, unique eco-units.</li> <li>• Opportunities to support recovery plans for species at risk.</li> </ul>

Topic:	Discussions (Challenges & Opportunities / What We Heard)
<b>Land Use and Settlement Analysis Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to engage in planning of edges outside of the immediate park area. The BMBCL area has been faced with development pressure for many years and there are concerns of development pressure along all sides, abutting directly with the wilderness area. Development has outpaced park creation and park planning. There is a strong concern regarding the cumulative impact of development and cumulation of development pressure.</li> <li>• Many participants agreed that conservation values should precede the planning of land for development and access at the interface and that an ecological lens should be used to view all development proposals at the park interface.</li> <li>• Participants do not want development to affect view/soundscapes from within the park. In addition to view and noise impacts, there is concern for the creation of edge effects, heat island effects, loss of trees, water quality impacts, and wind effects. Participants suggested the consideration of future zoning restrictions on development in the periphery in addition to rationed height restrictions.</li> <li>• There are opportunities to work with the development community to prove the benefits of nearby park access and have the private sector actively contribute to its design and development.</li> <li>• A variety of planning tools should be considered including subdivision design, land dedication, service boundary limitations, density trading, new zoning designations, strategic and proactive land acquisition, and policy and regulatory incentives to maintain ecological/wilderness areas.</li> </ul>
<b>Governance Models Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example park governance models were shown to participants (five models: advisory committee, stewardship, third-party administration, partnership agreement (equal authorities), and partnership agreement (single authority)).</li> <li>• Like the other pillars, ecological integrity was viewed as a guiding principle to park governance. Participants see conservation at the heart of governance and expect it to carry over into a vision for the park.</li> <li>• Participants recognized the variety of governance options available, including opportunities to combine models, but did not endorse any one specifically, noting the difficulty in determining a model without the foundation of a park plan. The notion was that a proper governance model should know the collective goals and objectives for the BMBCL area before identifying the framework for governance.</li> <li>• Participants saw value in a community-involved central authority, with a decision-making structure that avoids or limits politicization of decisions.</li> <li>• A co-governance model involving the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia was identified as an opportunity and conduit for reconciliation.</li> <li>• Diversity and inclusion should be fundamental to governance and management of the park.</li> <li>• Governance and management should involve landowners; additionally, there is interest from stakeholder groups to be involved in capacities that include independent panels, advisory committees, and councils.</li> <li>• A management agreement for the trail network is needed as soon as possible due to the number of informal and unplanned trails in existing and being created by different user groups.</li> <li>• A major challenge will be organizing people and bringing moving parts together: knowing who is leading the way, who is making decisions, and how the relationships work.</li> </ul>
<b>Archaeological and Cultural Resources Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We heard a lot about the history of the area including its development history (quarries and sawmills) with a special thank you Don Gordon for the comprehensive history of the Riley Road area.</li> <li>• We heard from almost every group about Mi'kmaq historical land use and the potential for the park to be a vehicle for bringing their voices to the forefront.</li> <li>• We heard about more recent development of the area (Industrial onward).</li> </ul>

# **APPENDIX E**

## **Second Key Participant Meeting Invite**

HALIFAX



## STAKEHOLDER UPDATE MEETING

Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes (BMBCL) Comprehensive Study  
Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from 7:00 - 8:30 PM

Dear project partners and stakeholders,

On completion of our first stakeholder session, public engagement workshop, and targeted meetings for the [Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes \(BMBCL\)](#) area as part of Parks Canada's [new national urban parks program](#), we would like to invite you to a presentation on the results of our engagement and update you on the overall project process.

The meeting will take place virtually on June 15<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 – 8:30 PM. A link to the virtual meeting, which will take place on the Microsoft Teams platform, is provided below. At the meeting, the Stantec Consulting team will present our findings in the context of the five areas of current project study: ecological, recreation, and archaeological/cultural conditions, land use and settlement, and park governance. Meeting participants will be given an opportunity to provide feedback on the findings that will be presented and ultimately used to inform the pre-feasibility background and recommendations of our comprehensive study.

Once again, we thank you for your time and commitment and hope to see you on June 15<sup>th</sup>.