

## **New Context, Focus & Funding**

At the last AGM we adopted a new Climate Change context and Wetlands focus for our land conservation and stewardship mission and activities. Since the AGM, our commitment and success in pursuing this new focus has provided KCC with invaluable new connections and funding, which have in turn led to a generally more stable funding situation and a much greater impact for our work. We are now going into the final phase of the Shaubac Wetlands Carbon Project (SWCP) that will take us deeper into the local community with the goal of engaging friends and neighbours in our efforts to safeguard and care for ecologically important local lands for the environment. This will involve further providing wetlands assessment and species-at-risk identification training for those interested, as well as increasing the lands under protection in the Shaubac and Feltzen South areas.

The successful bid for funding from the ***Sustainable Community Challenge Fund*** (SCCF) provided us with both the new context and the funding required for the current direction. As we go into these final four months of the project, and thanks to the services of Strum Environmental, we now have groundbreaking, authoritative data on local wetland carbon storage and essential eco-services. ***According to Strum's finding, the 40 acres of protected wetlands assessed by them are currently storing some 4,240 cubic tonnes of carbon, which Prof. Somers has calculated to be the equivalent of carbon emitted by approximately 3,379 passenger vehicles for an entire year.***

In addition, according to Strum's WESP-AC assessments, our wetlands are performing well compared to all other wetlands in Nova Scotia in terms of providing safe habitats for species at risk, and natural protection against flash floods, droughts, and forest fires. With first-hand, authoritative information such as this, it becomes easier to demonstrate the importance of protecting our wetlands and the lands that house them as a vital means for reducing the loss of habitats and human lives due to the ravages of global warming. It's certainly more feasible to protect wetlands such as these than to create the conditions for nearly 4,000 local community members to stop driving for a year!

Also highly noteworthy has been KCC's growing and ongoing collaboration with the WFN's Ecology Group in developing the project. Our work with the WFN and its Earth Keepers has taught us much about our relationship with the land, and has connected us to the invaluable human and funding resources of the Kespukwitk/Southwest Nova Scotia Priority Place – one of 11 designated priority places for species-at-risk across Canada.

In turn, this has led us to new relationships with Environment & Climate Change Canada (ECCC), the Southwest Nova Biosphere and the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute (MTRI). As a result, in support of our successful land acquisitions in Feltzen South, we received 2-year funding support from ECCC for KCC's operations and land acquisitions (\$414,600 for 2023-24 and \$392,000 approved for 2024-2025), for which the *Crown Share fund* has continued to give strong ongoing matching funds (\$386,400 so far in 2024), and for which the *SW Nova Biosphere* contributed generous matching funds in the amount of \$41,000.

The Feltzen South acquisition has protected a further 80+ acres of unspoiled lands that house well-functioning wetlands. The lands adjoin the Feltzen South Commons and Ovens Nature Park to provide a wonderful 350-acre green corridor, and are now ours to care for, learn from and share with the community.

We also teamed with MTRI to introduce the organization to MODL staff resources as part of MTRI's outreach to municipalities, generating new and beneficial interactions on all sides, and adding a new dimension to KCC's collaboration with MODL.

KCC has been accepted as a partner in the new **Federal-Provincial NS Nature Agreement** (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/integrated-nature-initiatives/nature-agreements/canada-nova-scotia-nature-agreement.html>), which will provide us with \$300K in funding over the next two years for strategic land protection (eligible for Crown Share matching funding). The goal of this project is to place under protection a further 80 hectares of ecologically significant lands over the 2 coming years, the land protected being counted towards government climate change land conservation targets. This funding amount includes an allowance of 20% of the total award for KCC staff and expenses.

It should be noted again **that both the ECCC and NS Nature Agreement grants are potentially ongoing -- dependent on performance -- and include generous allowances for both KCC staff and expenses; and ii) for a land acquisition war-chest – a strategic financial reserve that will allow us to seize ongoing acquisition opportunities in a timely fashion while we go about raising the funds to complete the transaction.** Funding for the organization's core operating costs is quite rare, and without it, the boots-on-the-ground impact of small community-based conservation organizations such as KCC is greatly limited. **For all of the above reasons, we are immensely grateful to the WFN and our new conservation partners and funding agencies for the support they are bringing to KCC.**

In terms of local challenges that concern KCC, we were able to provide leadership at many levels in clarifying the issues involved in the construction that occurred on Kingsburg Beach, particularly by collaborating with MODL's Mayor, Council and planning staff in formulating a strong appeal from the Mayor to the Minister regarding further development in this protected area.

## **The Coming Year**

So, what does all this mean for the coming year?

Over the past year, the wetlands project has served as a means of expanding our understanding of KCC's land conservation mission and to increase the impact of the very significant role that we, as a land conservation organization, can play at this moment in time.

It has been an unpredictable journey — a steep learning curve— with no guarantee of success as we've broken new ground to rapidly get up to speed on the chosen climate emergency framework. **But we've made it through to a very welcome, more stable situation, with some \$734,000 of funding confirmed for the coming year that is eligible for KCC land acquisitions, staff and operating expenses,** plus real potential for enhancing our local land protection impact at a modest but steady and sustained pace for many years to come as we prepare plans for reaching out to additional new funding partners, to relevant policy-makers and to local communities with our newfound knowledge and convictions.

## Priorities & Recommendations for 2025

If the hallmark of the past year has been breaking new ground, by contrast, the overriding goal that must guide our priorities over the coming year is **consolidation**.

***In taking stock of the experience of our expanded activities to date, the Board has ascertained that KCC cannot responsibly continue the course outlined above supported by volunteer resources alone.***

Our experience with the legacy of many, many years of functioning with volunteer efforts, combined with the scope and complexity of our activities and commitments today, has made it clear that KCC's current activities require operational guidance, clearer governance and a more consistent compliance practice that are beyond the capacity of our all-volunteer Board. **The Board has thus concluded that the choice before KCC is either to i) increase the time and level of expertise of KCC's available human resources; or ii) to reduce the current scope of activity to a level that can be responsibly handled by volunteer-only resources.** The latter choice would essentially mean drastically reducing our current proactive approach to land acquisition, stewardship and community engagement while we work to focus on strengthening KCC's operations as best we can with whatever skills Board members happen to have, plus whatever volunteer expertise we can find to work with us.

Knowing what it has taken to arrive at this point with current resources, we understand the value of the momentum we've created and how difficult it will be to rebuild should we bring it to a sudden halt at this stage. ***We are thus proposing to take full advantage of the funds accumulated for the coming year, which includes allocations for contracting personnel, to engage a full-time, experienced Operations Manager, who will focus on strengthening KCC's financial management, governance and compliance practice and operations in general, while sustaining our community engagement and land stewardship work.*** We feel that this step is now needed to provide the bedrock for any solid progress that will be made beyond the initial successes summarized above. **In making our recommendation, fortunately we have a year ahead of us backed by solidly confirmed funding -- that is available specifically for KCC land acquisitions and personnel -- to make this happen.**

Once in place, the Operations Manager will take on responsibility for KCC's daily operations management and on-the-ground activities, supporting the organization's current modest, ongoing land acquisition and stewardship activities while putting a priority on systematising the management and consolidation of KCC's operations. This position will also provide much-needed continuity between Board Chair shifts to ensure that our ongoing activities remain up-to-date and compliant with legal and regulatory requirements.

This will allow the Board Chair to focus on the development of KCC's strategic direction and important compliance policies, as well as supporting board members in utilizing their own Board level skills and experience to steer the organization on the issues that are of prime importance to KCC's basic mission and direction and aid Board members in bringing valuable, relevant connections and new members to our Board from their own spheres of influence.

Lastly, but most importantly, the Board Chair will be more able to properly lead the Board in carrying out regular reviews of the organization's vision and mission, while remaining vigilant with regards to the legal and ethical roles and responsibilities of the board of directors and leading in formulating

policies and procedures to ensure sustainability and ongoing success, including ensuring that procedures are in place for effective recruitment and onboarding of new board members.

**In carrying out the search for candidates for the new managerial position, the Board will aim to cast the net wide, particularly amongst our newfound conservation community,** to attract individuals with connections to the area, **and who have the demonstrated experience and qualifications for the job.** We'll be looking also for candidates with an "altruistic" work ethic – in other words, whose interest in working with us comes notably from their passion for the mission and goals of our organization.

## **Conclusion**

We have a quieter and steadier – but no less important — year ahead of us, dedicated to creating a strong foundation for our organization, while sustaining our community engagement work and ongoing land conservation at a modest level. **We look forward to another year of diligent and inspiring work with KCC's growing number of members, volunteers and conservation community supporters to make this happen!**