

## **Protecting lake shorelines in Kespukwitk, Southwest Nova Scotia, through ecological services, education, best management practices and promotion of restoration**

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Increasing development of shorelines on Kespukwitk lakes threaten habitat, species at risk, and the ability of ecological services to function efficiently. This increases the potential for negative climate change impacts and raises the need to be vigilant with regards to lake health. The establishment of the Kespukwitk Conservation Collaborative in 2017, along with the designation of southwest Nova Scotia as a federally designated Priority Place for Species at Risk has reinvigorated the efforts of conservation partners including recovery teams, Mi'kmaq First Nations, Indigenous organizations, non-government organizations, academic institutions, and federal and provincial government departments to conserve riparian zone and promote healthy lakes. Over the past two years, the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve Association have led 2 workshops, 1 webinar series, 2 field days, established a door knocking pilot project and a restoration project, and developed updated website content and educational materials. These efforts have culminated in the engagement of over 500 individuals within Kespukwitk in 2023-24. These efforts benefit a number of species at risk found within riparian zones, including Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora, Blanding's Turtle, Eastern Ribbonsnake, and Common Nighthawk, and help landowners maintain healthy lake shorelines. The growing momentum is essential for ensuring that the understanding of ecological services becomes common knowledge to all Nova Scotians. These projects have paved the way to begin restoration work on Kespukwitk lakeshores as soon as Spring 2025.

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