

Coastal island prioritization: a collaborative, flexible and representative approach to conservation planning

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Coastal islands are of recognized importance in Kespukwitk and elsewhere throughout the province for supporting unique ecosystem functions, including habitat for species that are sensitive to mainland pressures. Conservation planning initiatives aim to maintain or restore these values through island protection and stewardship, yet prioritizing islands for directed conservation efforts is often complicated by an incomplete understanding of their ecological values and associated threats. Here, we present an approach to advance coastal island conservation planning through development of a collaborative “prioritization toolkit”. The study area is the province of Nova Scotia, Canada, where development of islands is currently low in comparison to other coastal regions globally and opportunities for whole-island conservation still exist but are declining. Coastal islands in the region are abundant overall, but vary substantially in distribution, ecology, geology, exposure, and history of human use across diverse sections of coastline. To focus conservation prioritization efforts, a baseline inventory of coastal islands was established using GIS and information on 12 themes related to ecological importance and threats is summarized at the island level to help inform the prioritization of islands within the context of a representative approach to ecosystem planning. The toolkit helps advance the framework required for collaborative conservation planning in Kespukwitk and elsewhere, including island prioritization, addressing knowledge gaps, and coordinating efforts around research, monitoring and stewardship of coastal islands.

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