

## Network in renewal in Nova Scotia

ZACK METCALFE *Endangered Perspective*



Shown here is an old-growth eastern hemlock on the St. Mary's River. (Zack Metcalfe)

Nova Scotia witnessed a rebirth over the Sept. 22 weekend, a gathering the likes of which hasn't been seen in over a decade, all in the name of our natural heritage.

The Nova Scotia Environmental Network fell on hard times in 2011 when their federal funding was cut under the Harper government, with only infrequent provincial support to make up the gap. The network, which brought together businesses, government departments, conservation organizations and concerned citizens for the sake of co-operative environmental action and education, found itself suddenly without oxygen, and has been slow to adapt.

Kelly Schnare has been an active member of the quieted network for two years now, working in one of its many caucuses on specific environmental issues; her focus is water. For sometime now, she and colleagues have been planning the network's reinvigoration, a substantial undertaking for which they've been in search of reliable funding. And earlier this year, they had some luck.

With a grant from our provincial Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, the network was able to host their weekend gathering in Truro, not only renewing memberships for engaged individuals and organizations, but pushing for new members altogether.

"It was like a family reunion," said Schnare, putting the number of participants around 100 for their first day alone, among them representatives from the departments of Environment and Natural Resources, Mi'kmaq Conservation Group, Nova Scotia Community College, Ecology Action Centre, Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and innumerable environmental leaders unaffiliated with any particular group, among many others.

This event was meant, in part, to breath life back into the network and showcase, through workshops, presentations and simple conversation. Schnare said the purpose of the network is not to advocate for environmental issues or even to speak on behalf of its members, but instead to broker and disseminate information to everyone involved, better equipping them to take action independently and together. It takes the technical language of the minister of environment and makes it accessible to conversations over the kitchen table, as Schnare put it.

She left the weekend feeling optimistic for the network's near future. It's her express intention to host another such unifying event next year, except double the size, and to maintain the weekly/monthly newsletter which keeps the network informed. As well, they've continued to solicit new members, particularly to join their board and lead their caucuses.

The chief obstacle to keeping their momentum is, of course, funding, said Schnare, as their grant from the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage was a one-time thing. But the potential for provincial funding does exist and they're pursuing it vigorously.

Personally, I'm enthusiastic about the revival of this network. Time and again I've spoken with charities, NGOs and solitary people trying to preserve their small corner of Nova Scotia; and in every possible instance they suffer from a lack of partners, public awareness, resources and simple outspoken support. The Nova Scotia Environmental Network could make that difference, and keep us all on the same page when it comes to debating the issues of the day. Their contributions won't be made with direct action, but instead with the facilitation of ideas and dialogue. As Schnare put it, we have strength in numbers, a strength that we sorely need to leverage.

**Zack Metcalfe is a freelance environmental journalist, an author, and writer of the Endangered Perspective. He operates out of Halifax, Nova Scotia.**