



Joint News Release

Significant milestone reached in landmark PEI conservation project

Offshore island's future secured through collaboration between Nature Conservancy of Canada and Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq

Alberton, PEI (April 19, 2023) – Conservation achieved through collaboration with Indigenous Peoples is an important form of Reconciliation. This Earth Week, the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) are working toward this shared goal on the northwestern shore of Prince Edward Island.

Today the organizations announced a major step forward to protect Kwasawe'k (pronounced “gway-sah-way-g”), also known as Oulton's Island, a culturally and ecologically significant island located near Alberton, in Cascumpec Bay.

Generous donors from across the country have rallied to help NCC purchase the privately owned site. Since the campaign launched last fall, supporters have raised 97 per cent of NCC's \$1.3-million goal. Currently, NCC is focused on raising the remaining funds to ensure the island — now protected — is cared for, in collaboration with the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq (PEI Mi'kmaq). Through a unique agreement, the island will ultimately be transferred to the Epekwit Assembly of Councils, who will continue to conserve and care for Kwasawe'k forever.

Kwasawe'k features nearly 85 hectares of salt marsh, freshwater wetlands and Wabanaki (Acadian) forest. It is also a nesting ground for great blue heron, double-crested cormorant and bald eagle, and provides important habitat for migrating waterfowl and small animals, like snowshoe hare and red squirrel. NCC first identified Kwasawe'k as an important priority for conservation in the 1980s.

NCC and the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq wish to acknowledge the generous supporters who have helped make this project possible, including the Evans Family Foundation, the Hewitt Foundation and the Government of Prince Edward Island. People interested in learning more and contributing can visit oultonsisland.ca.

Kwasawe'k is an example of how NCC is working with partners to accelerate the pace of conservation in Canada.

In the face of rapid biodiversity loss and climate change, nature is our ally. There is no solution to either without nature conservation. When nature thrives, we all thrive.

Quotes

“We have reached a large milestone in working together toward the protection of Kwesawe’k. This project is of great significance ecologically, but also culturally, and demonstrates Reconciliation in action by working with the Mi’kmaq toward partnered conservation and the eventual return of land. We are eager to see what the island holds, what it can tell us about our past, and what we can do to preserve its natural integrity into the future. I look forward to continued collaboration with our partners at NCC to protect this beautiful island in perpetuity.”
— *Darlene Bernard, Lennox Island First Nation Chief & Epekwitk Assembly of Councils Co-Chair*

“As former residents of PEI, and as individuals who share a passion for wilderness and a strong desire to see meaningful Reconciliation with the Indigenous community in our lifetime, we welcomed this opportunity to work with Nature Conservancy of Canada in the preservation of Kwesawe’k (Oulton’s Island).” — Jim and Carolyn Evans, of the Evans Family Foundation

“We are excited to be at this point in the project; to be able to secure Kwesawe’k for conservation. We look forward to exploring the island with our Mi’kmaq partners for the next couple of years, after which we will return Kwesawe’k to its original land stewards. This project has shown us what is possible when we work together, sharing goals to protect and celebrate important ecological and cultural spaces. I am proud to play a small part in this incredible story of partnership.” — *Lanna Campbell, NCC Program Director in Prince Edward Island*

Facts

- The Mi’kmaq word Kwesawe’k translates to “end of the island cape” or “end of the headland.”
- Since time immemorial, the Mi’kmaq have stewarded and maintained the health of what is now PEI. The area surrounding Kwesawe’k is home to important cultural and archaeological sites.
- NCC and the Epekwitnewaq Mi’kmaq have been working together to care for nearby conservation areas on the Cascumpec and Conway Sandhills since 2009.
- The Epekwitk Assembly of Councils is the joint forum that oversees and governs organizations that act in the shared interest of Abegweit First Nation and Lennox Island First Nation.
- Cascumpec Bay/Alberton Harbour is part of a globally recognized Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). KBAs are highlighted on a global scale for ecological integrity. The area is an important feeding stopover site for waterfowl, such as greater yellowlegs, great blue heron, semipalmated sandpiper, semipalmated plover, common merganser, black duck and bald eagle.
- Wabanaki (Acadian) forest is predominantly characterized by jack pine, black spruce, white spruce and white birch trees.

About

[The Nature Conservancy of Canada \(NCC\)](#) is the country's unifying force for nature. NCC seeks solutions to the twin crises of rapid biodiversity loss and climate change through large-scale, permanent land conservation. As a trusted partner NCC works with people, communities, businesses and government to protect and care for our country's natural areas. Since 1962, NCC has brought Canadians together to conserve and restore more than 15 million hectares. In the past two years, NCC has influenced the protection of more than 1 million hectares (almost twice the size of Prince Edward Island), coast to coast to coast. Over the next few years, the organization will double its impact by mobilizing Canadians and delivering permanent, large-scale conservation. To learn more, visit natureconservancy.ca.

Established in 2019, L'nuey is an initiative that focuses on the advancement, implementation and protection of the constitutionally entrenched rights of the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq (Mi'kmaq of PEI). L'nuey's mission is to address both past and present imbalances between Mi'kmaq and non-Mi'kmaq people in Prince Edward Island.

The work of L'nuey is guided by three responsibilities: negotiations, consultation and governance development. In turn, each responsibility is supported by the capacity to professionally communicate its activities to the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq and public.

L'nuey is the evolution of many years of collaboration and hard work by the Abegweit and Lennox Island First Nations on shared interests, and it will continue to build this foundation for an improved quality of Mi'kmaq life here on PEI, and ultimately self-government for the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq.

L'nuey means "*Belonging to or pertaining to the Mi'kmaq People as a whole,*" and its tagline doubles as its mission: **Moving towards a better tomorrow.**

We encourage you to learn more about L'nuey, the PEI Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative, at lnuey.ca.

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