

# **Blomidon Naturalists Society**

## **Strategic Planning Discussion Paper**

BNS Board  
November 2020

The Blomidon Naturalists Society (BNS) was inaugurated in 1974 and is centered in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia. It is a charitable organization of natural history enthusiasts and nature lovers. Activities focus on education and knowledge sharing, connecting people to nature and each other, and facilitates projects to protect and support a healthy environment.

### **Mission**

The Blomidon Naturalists Society inspires love and wonder for the natural world. We advocate for its conservation and protection and bring its diverse communities together in outdoor exploration, education, and stewardship. The BNS welcomes everyone who is curious and wants to learn about the natural world.

### **Location**

The Annapolis Valley is a distinctive region in Nova Scotia, situated between the North and South Mountains. To the east, vast mud flats of the Minas Basin are exposed twice a day by the receding tide, and host millions of shore birds in late summer early fall, when they fatten up for their long migration south. This area is part of the Acadian Forest ecoregion and contains few pockets of remaining old growth stands. Prior to European settlement, old growth Acadian Forest would have covered most of the Annapolis Valley.

The Valley has a rich history. For thousands of years, Mi'kmaq lived here sustainably. Arriving in the early 1600's, Acadians made dykes, farmed the land, were deported, and later returned. Subsequently, Planters and United Empire Loyalists, refugees after the American Revolution, came to Nova Scotia. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19th centuries, black slaves and freemen arrived in Nova Scotia from the United States, and African Nova Scotians now number over 20,000.

It is important to explicitly recognize that we live on unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq First Nation.

Today, the Valley consists of farmland, forested areas, and moderate-sized urban areas with a vibrant diversity of cultural and ethnic groups. Known for its apple orchards, there is now a growing number of vineyards. Much of the farmland consists of cash crops (corn and soy) as well as large vegetable producers; chicken farming is an important industry. Organic farms producing food for the local communities are beginning to appear, supported by local Farmers Markets. There are still many patches of forest scattered across the valley.

The valley is a magical area where people feel connected to and love nature.

## **Vision**

BNS will be an inclusive organization, attracting and welcoming people of all backgrounds. The Society will be recognized as a leader in the Valley for nature outings and events, education, and environmental protection. We will be a vibrant group offering a welcome, relevant forum for all who love and care for nature in our region. In addition, we will undertake a major project that builds the naturalist's community. This project will address key local issues such as how climate change and resource extraction are affecting our local ecosystems.

We will also be financially stable, with a strong volunteer and supporter base and a renewed focus on engaging youth.

## **Philosophy**

The BNS offers programs that inspire a love for, an understanding of, and a drive to steward nature. When you love something, there is a natural tendency to want to be a steward of it; however, effective steps to become a steward requires understanding and action. Understanding comes from experience and education. Action comes from passion and commitment. Thus, the three pillars of the BNS are Love, Education, and Stewardship.

## **Pillars of Activity**

1. ***Instilling a love for nature.*** We do this by connecting people to nature around the Valley. We organise free outings and events open to all as well as offer outdoor nature programs geared at specific audiences, especially children and youth.
2. ***Educating about nature.*** We educate through our various nature outings and programs which are led by knowledgeable and passionate individuals, as well as through monthly meetings and presentations on current issues, research and topics of interest. We also produce a regular newsletter and occasionally publish resources relevant to our region. Most recently we published a beautiful field guide to “*Wildflowers of Nova Scotia*” as well as “*A Natural History of Kings County*” and “*Within View of Blomidon.*”
3. ***Acting as a steward of nature.*** We work collaboratively with other groups and organisations to protect and support our environment. We have supported legal action to hold our government accountable to its own statutes (Species Act Risk Act). Currently, we are helping to finance the legal action to maintain Owl’s Head as a protected area and to not be sold for development of a Golf Course. We organise a bi-annual litter clean-up and are aspiring to support a community climate capacity building project – pending funding. We will continue to leave the door open for projects in which we can take action and enable others to take action to ensure we have a natural world to love and learn from into the distant future.

## **Audience**

The BNS has been a membership organization since its inception. However, membership gives the impression of exclusivity and status. Membership also involves a fee which may prevent some people from joining. BNS meetings and field trips have always been open to the public.

Thus, we propose that people who attend meetings, workshops and field trips will be asked to join our mailing list and will be considered members to satisfy the current by-laws.

### **Donations**

Without a membership fee the society will give up a source of funding. Therefore, we will encourage people interested in the BNS and the work we are doing to donate an amount suitable to each individual either monthly or yearly (see **Input Required below**).

### **Structure**

The BNS is managed by a board consisting of 5 to 12 members, including a Past President, President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer, and Directors. We also endeavour to have a full-time employee whose title will be Program Director who answers to the Board.

Board members, together with interested individuals, will be encouraged to join various committees. Ideally, these committees will be composed of 1 to 2 board members and 1 to 2 members from the public.

Committees may include: Events, Communication, Projects, Newsletter, Diversity and Inclusion, others?

### **Revenues**

Revenues, we propose, will come from a combination of donations, grants, annual Calendar sales, Publications, and Paid workshops.

### **Communications**

We propose to advertise meetings, field trips, workshops, webinars etc. via a regular monthly e-newsletter. Information will also be shared on Facebook and other social media. Riley Scanlan, our Program Director has been busy on the BNS Facebook site and we now have over 700 followers.

The future of the quarterly monthly printed BNS Newsletter is up for discussion. There have been expressions that it is too costly to produce, suffers from a time-lag between events and their occurrence, and is an outdated means of timely communication. We need a thorough discussion of the future of the Newsletter, and we need input from the current membership (see **Input Required below**).

### **Programming**

Natural history includes insects, mushrooms, birds, wildflowers, etc. The physical environment includes weather, geology, and climate. Ideally, we will try to create program themes, keeping in mind our three Pillars of Love of Nature, Education, and Stewardship. We will attempt to invite speakers who can provide various perspectives, from Mi'kmaq traditional knowledge to science.

For example, programs could focus on the separate themes of natural history, the physical environment and human impact. All monthly meetings, webinars, field trips and workshops would then focus on one of these themes at a time and adhere to one of the Three Pillars of Activity discussed above.

- A field trip in a forest will get people excited about forests as an ecosystem.
- A webinar will focus on the dynamics of a forest including typical species, succession, connections, species groups and the significance of disturbance.
- A presentation will focus on some aspect of forests such as the role of fungi.
- Another presentation might examine how forestry affects the ecology of forests.
- These presentations and activities could lead to public action including analysis of forestry statistics and writing to the Minister of Lands and Forestry and other decision makers.

People giving monthly presentations, webinars, and field trips would be entitled to receive honoraria. Workshops are perceived to be full-day events, and teachers/presenters will be paid for their services.

The BNS should strive to increase awareness of current and potential effects on the environment through larger project funding. The Society has already applied for funding from the Climate Action and Awareness Fund, and the Canadian Experience Fund.

### **Input required**

In summary, we want the BNS to be an inclusive organization that is financially resilient.

Currently the BNS is a membership organization, which puts on monthly presentations and occasional field trips and produces a quarterly printed and bound Newsletter and an annual calendar. Occasionally the society produces a book/guide (recently the Wildflower guide).

Annual income with the current membership fee is about \$9,750

- membership @ \$30 bringing in \$3,750
- Calendar sales @ \$15 netting \$6,000.
- 

Last year Wildflower guide @ \$20 about a profit of \$4,000 but this income stream will peter out.

Income without a membership fee, is reduced to \$6,000.

Expenses total about \$17,500

- printing of Newsletter \$4,500,
- -Merritt Gibson Student Award at \$2,000,
- Flying Squirrel Adventures \$3,000,
- Administration \$2,000
- employee subsidy \$6,000.

## **Issues:**

- 1 - Membership signals exclusivity and a membership fee may prevent some people from joining the BNS - do we eliminate membership?
- 2 – How do we fund the BNS?
- 3 - A quarterly printed and bound Newsletter is outdated (everything is moving towards being on-line) and is out of date in terms of announcing programs and field trips. Do we move to exclusively communicating on-line?

## **Options for discussion:**

### Issue #1

- A. reduce membership, e.g. \$15/yr. \$5/yr.
- B. eliminate paid membership

### Issue #2

If we reduce membership or eliminate membership, would you be willing to make a monthly or yearly donation to the BNS

- C. Yes
- D. No

### Issue #3

#### Communications

- E. Biannual printed and bound Newsletter, possibly with reduced frequency, to those who opt to pay for it, and content posted on-line for free.
- F. Newsletter printed as pdf and distributed at cost to those who opt to pay for it.
- G. Newsletter only on-line ( we will need to pay someone to do the layout and proof read)