

## 2021 Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest Report

by Dan Hutt (Chair) and Christie Verstraten (staff)

Activities at Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest were subdued in 2021 due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. But things started to pick up with the Annual General Meeting on August 8<sup>th</sup>. The AGM was held outdoors at the site of the former Otter Pond's Visitor's Centre which was destroyed by Hurricane Dorian in 2019. Replacement of the Visitor's Centre and adding a cabin for overnight accommodations are one of the project's highest priorities. The first OPDF Board meeting took place Oct. 30<sup>th</sup>. After introduction of the new Directors, Wade Prest led the group on a tour of an area where windfall from Hurricane Dorian was salvaged.



*OPDF Directors tour a site where windfall from Hurricane Dorian was salvaged in 2020*

This year Otter Ponds published a ten-year report covering the establishment of the project in 2010 and achievements through 2020. The report, written by OPDF's staff person Christie Verstraten, is available on the Otter Ponds publication page at [otterponds.ca/publications](https://otterponds.ca/publications)

In late 2020 Conform Limited of Middle Musquodoboit was contracted to harvest the timber blown down by Hurricane Dorian. The operation wrapped up in January, 2021 with Conform shipping a total of 2000 tonnes of timber sold to local saw mills Taylor Lumber, Ledwidge Lumber, and Elmsdale Lumber. Ninety-eight cords of firewood were sold to Conform for retailing to domestic users in eastern HRM.

During the Dorian salvage operation, the Department of Natural Resources conducted safety and environmental audits on the Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest (as Crown Land licensee) and Conform Limited (as contractor). These audits were completed with no infractions found.

In August the OPDF Board was approached by CBC to make an episode about the project for Land and Sea. The shooting took place at Otter Ponds Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>. Activities that were filmed included interviews with Kate Campbell, Wade Prest, Dan Hutt, Christie Verstraten and Dale Prest, owl research, trail maintenance, and visits by the Young Naturalists Club and the Halifax Partnership group. The episode aired Feb 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022. It's available for streaming via CBC Gem (Season 21, Episode 12): [cbc-gem/land-and-sea/s21e12](https://cbc-gem/land-and-sea/s21e12)



*Wade Prest explains a harvest operation to DNR staff during a safety audit at Otter Ponds Dec. 2020*



*Karen McKendry leads a Young Naturalists Club group being filmed by CBC for Land and Sea.*

Looking ahead to 2022 and beyond, OPDF has several goals. One is to establish on-going forestry demonstrations in support of the new Family Forestry Network (FFN). Another is to make contact with First Nations organizations such as Ulnuweg in order to understand aboriginal land use concepts. And rebuilding the Visitor Centre and a cabin are key to future engagement with the OPDF user community.

A recent development that may impact OPDF is interest from Atlantic Gold in exploring for gold on the OPDF property. Exploration activities such as drilling have the potential to impact forestry plans and operations. Atlantic Gold have promised to work closely with OPDF in planning and mitigating any on-site activities.

## 2021 Events:

- January: Dorian harvest completed as covered above.
- July 29<sup>th</sup>: OPDF talk at Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute in Queens County by Matt Miller as part of MTRI's summer webinar series
- July: D&V Contracting of Advocat New Brunswick was hired to grade the roads at Otter Ponds.
- Aug 8<sup>th</sup>: AGM and tour of Dorian salvage harvest sites
- Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>: Climate-adaptive silviculture workshop, led by Megan de Graaf. Megan is a forest ecologist specializing in carbon management and climate adaptation in the Acadian Forest. The workshop was organized by NSWOOA (on behalf of the Family Forest Network) as part of the Common Ground project in partnership with Community Forests International and Ulnooweg.
- Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>: CBC Land and Sea filming at Otter Ponds.
- Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>: Young Naturalists Club tour - Karen McKendry, Mike Murray and Dan Hutt led two volunteers and 16 participants from YNC on a hike on Otter Ponds Brook to Hawboldt's Farm Hill Trail where the kids, aged 3 to 12, learned about ecology and biodiversity.
- Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>: Halifax Partnership tour and corporate team building event - Christie Verstraten and Mike Murray led 25 participants on a hike on North Pond Bluff Trail, followed by lunch at the visitor shelter landing and some trail maintenance work on the Other Ponds Marsh Loop.
- Oct. 30<sup>th</sup>: OPDF Board meeting onsite with tour for new directors.



*2021 Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest Board Meeting, October 30<sup>th</sup>.*

### Future events:

- Conserving Bird Species at Risk in Working Forests workshop with Cindy Staicer: originally scheduled for Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021, but postponed to June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022
- Tour for UPLAND Planning + Design, a local architecture firm: scheduled for May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022
- Tour and trail maintenance for WILD Outside, a youth conservation program run by the Canadian Wildlife Federation: scheduled for July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022
- Two other requests from small groups: to be scheduled soon

### Trails:

- Trail work parties took place on Sept. 12<sup>th</sup>, Oct. 20<sup>th</sup>, and Nov. 21<sup>st</sup> 2021.
- The German Lake Hill Trail, North Pond Bluff Trail, Otter Ponds Brook to Hawboldt's Farm Hill Trail, and Otter Ponds Marsh Loop were all cleared for use. Other trails remain blocked by Dorian windfalls.
- A small bridge and a section of corduroy was installed in a wet area of North Pond Bluff Trail.



*Volunteers build a simple bridge across a brook on the North Pond Bluff Trail, Nov. 2021.*

### Research:

- Dr. Cindy Staicer is doing research on Beneficial Management Practices for five bird species at risk in Nova Scotia's working forests. Otter Ponds is a great research site for this work as two of the species have previously been recorded: Olive-sided flycatcher and Canada warbler. Dr. Staicer visited Otter Ponds on July 10<sup>th</sup> and put up two audio recorders with her husband Alan Pinder, Christie, and volunteers Jasmine and Erin. While on-site we heard and spotted both an Olive-sided flycatcher and a Canada warbler. A field workshop was planned for late October, but had to be postponed until June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022.



*Alan Pinder (left) and Dr. Cindy Staicer (right) doing bird research at Otter Ponds in July 2021.*

- Ben Faulkner and Marisa Fitzpatrick, NSCC environmental engineering technology students, are developing a soil carbon sequestration model. They are interested in using OPDF as a test site.
- Dr. Alana Westwood teaches Forest Ecology & Management at Dal and would like to bring her students for a tour and potentially collaborate on a research project. More on her research is available at [westwoodlab.ca](http://westwoodlab.ca)
- Randy Lauff of St. FX University is studying Boreal owls and Northern Saw-whet owls at Otter Ponds. Randy and Jacob Prest checked the owl boxes on June 10<sup>th</sup> and discovered a Northern Saw-whet owl nest with five eggs! Randy returned in early August to check on the nest and band the babies. Wade assisted him in banding five owlets. Usually there is at least one egg per nest that doesn't hatch, but they all did this time.



*A Northern Saw-whet owl being tagged at Otter Ponds by Randy Lauff of St. FX University, August 2021.*