

# CNF NEWS RELEASE



## CONSERVATIONISTS HOPE TO AVOID INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT

A tiny speck of land off the New Brunswick coast is the centre of a growing controversy involving sea captains, the governments of Canada and the United States and naturalists from both countries. Machias Seal Island is a 15 acre (6 hectare) patch of rock and sparse vegetation, with birds everywhere.

The big problem is that the island's birds are too attractive to birdwatchers, photographers and curiosity-seekers. The site is designated a Canadian federal migratory bird sanctuary, and regulations limit visitors to 25 per day. For several years, two sea captains, one from New Brunswick and one from Maine, have brought visitors to the island, sharing the 25-person quota between them. In recent months however, two more American captains have been bringing tourists, and a number of private boats have been visiting the site. Arctic terns, the most numerous birds on the island, are sensitive to disturbance and have been declining in numbers. The island also provides a home to puffins, razorbills, petrels, sandpipers and swallows. Its puffins are the southernmost colony within reach of large numbers of Canadians and Americans.

The situation is complicated by a dispute between Canada and the United States over ownership of Machias Seal Island. Canada, which has maintained a lighthouse on the island for 151 years, claims sovereignty, but concern over fishing and mineral rights in the area has led the U.S. to dispute this claim. Canadian wildlife officials have attempted to enforce controls on access. However, some of the sea captains have taken the position that the site is within U.S. waters and freely available to American visitors. The situation has led to unpleasant confrontations between the sanctuary warden and those attempting to land visitors.

The Canadian Nature Federation, which has an observation blind on the island is trying to bring a halt to the conflict and eliminate the threat to the bird colonies. Gregg Sheehy, spokesman for the Nature Federation, said, "The island may look pretty small on the map, but to the birds that breed there it is a vulnerable home. Overuse by tourists threatens the sanctuary, and it is vital that we have enforced standards for controlling visitors."

The Nature Federation is working with conservation groups in New Brunswick and the U.S. to resolve the conflict among users and control access to the island. Sheehy stated, "I feel confident that with cooperation all around we can work out a fair agreement that will protect the birds while allowing naturalists from both countries to enjoy the beauty of the area."

For further information, please contact:

Gregg Sheehy  
Canadian Nature Federation  
75 Albert St., Suite 203  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 6G1  
(613) 238-6154

Mary Majka  
Mary's Point Rd., R.R. 2  
Albert, New Brunswick  
EOA 1A0  
(506) 882-2100

