

# Stewardship

by Jackie Waddell & Fred Horne

Ninety percent, and perhaps more, of Prince Edward Island is privately owned, while the remaining ten percent is owned by either the Federal or Provincial Governments. In all other provinces the private ownership fraction is smaller (seventy-five percent in Nova Scotia), and in the Territories this ratio is completely reversed.

The remaining natural areas on P.E.I. are also largely in private hands. Few natural areas are completely in government ownership (Murray River Pines, Brudenell Pines, and Townshend Woodlot for example). The Island, therefore, offers ideal conditions for a private stewardship program since vast tracts of crown land cannot be set aside as natural areas or wilderness preserves.

The Island Nature Trust is currently operating a Landowner Contact Program co-operatively funded by Wildlife Habitat Canada. Private Stewardship is the main focus of this program since most landowners do not wish to give up ownership of their property and acquisition of all natural areas is not a feasible option. Individual interviews with over 200 private landowners on the Island have been conducted. A tremendous exchange of information occurs in each interview. Landowners are often the best source of information on the natural history of their property, and the Nature Trust staff offers a variety of protection tools to the owner. These tools can be permanent or temporary and can be put in place through either the Trust or the Provincial Government.

The Natural Areas Protection Act now allows the Province to designate private land (with the co-operation of the landowner) as a natural area once long term or permanent protection has been voluntarily put in place by the landowner.

Protection can take the form of a lease, landowner agreement or a restrictive covenant. The latter is a permanent protection tool that has not found wide use in Canada. In the United States the similar "conservation easement" has been used to perpetually protect millions of acres of wilderness preserves, natural areas, farmland and other open spaces. Differences in common law practices make the application of perpetual protection for natural areas more difficult in Canada. Legislation similar to the Natural Areas Protection Act and the Museum Act is still needed in many provinces.

Acquisition has been the most popular and strongest form of protecting special places in the past. Because fee simple acquisition brings with it the entire bundle of rights to a property, it ensures control of the use of the property. With the application of other forms of protection, only a portion of these rights is under the control of the conservation agency or government and only for the term specified in an agreement or management plan.

The values of private ownership are well recognized throughout Canada and in our province. The Island Nature Trust believes private stewardship must go hand in hand with private ownership. With the gradual acceptance of long term or perpetual protection that relies on continued private stewardship, landowners may rest assured that present natural areas will always be just that - natural!