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Protection for HRM's wild side

Park will be first urban wilderness area in province

By MONIQUE MUISE

The provincial government has announced plans to designate another protected wilderness area, this one right on the doorstep of Halifax.

The swath of land, to be dubbed the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area, will be the first urban wilderness area created in Nova Scotia, Environment Minister Mark Parent said Wednesday.

The area is to encompass 1,350 hectares of Crown land between Highway 103 and the Bicentennial Highway, adjacent to Bayers Lake Business Park.

It is home to a number of lakes and wetlands, red oak and red spruce trees, and a number of rare animal and plant species.

"This new area will provide a significant green space for HRM residents to experience Nova Scotia's wilderness only a short transit ride from our urban core," Mayor Peter Kelly said in a release.

The land is expected to be officially designated a protected zone by the end of this year.

This will shield it from any future human encroachment, including the development of roadways, residential areas or commercial properties.

Mr. Parent said people will be able to use the area for hiking, swimming, canoeing, cross-country skiing, angling and outdoor education.

The Environment Department is inviting Nova Scotians to comment on the urban wilderness proposal, and will be hosting a series of public consultations in early July.

Wednesday's announcement comes on the heels of the designation of a 280-hectare protected area near Halifax Stanfield International Airport, about 14 kilometres from Halifax.

The province has promised to protect 12 per cent of public land in Nova Scotia by 2015.

(mmuise@herald.ca)

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