



CONSERVATION GUARDIAN

VOLUNTEER MANUAL



**ISLAND
NATURE
TRUST**

October 2024

Thank You!

All of us here at Island Nature Trust want to thank you for your interest in becoming a Conservation Guardian! With your hard work and dedication we would not be able to accomplish the important things we do. You help keep our Island wild and healthy!

If you have any question at all, or would like more information on any of Island Nature Trust's other projects let us know and we will be able to help!

CONTACT INFORMATION

Address: 112 Longworth Ave, Charlottetown, PE

General Inquires: admin@islandnaturetrust.ca or (902) 892-7513

Guardian Program Inquires: engage@islandnaturetrust.ca

Species-at-Risk Inquires: species@islandnaturetrust.ca

Land Donation Inquires: conserve@islandnaturetrust.ca

Philanthropy Inquires: development@islandnaturetrust.ca

Follow us on Facebook [@islandnaturetrust](https://www.facebook.com/islandnaturetrust) or Instagram [@islandnaturetrust](https://www.instagram.com/islandnaturetrust)

Thank you to the PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund for supporting the creation of this document!



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ABOUT ISLAND NATURE TRUST

Island Nature Trust (INT) is a non-government, not-for-profit organization dedicated to protection and management of Natural Areas on Prince Edward Island (Canada). INT was incorporated in 1979 and is the Island's first and oldest private land trust.

We acquire lands through donation and purchase to be held in trust for future generations, managing these lands as an example of appropriate and sustained use while helping private land owners voluntarily protection. We work with government and private landowners to create a true natural areas network on Prince Edward Island, consisting of core protected areas connected by corridors. In addition to work on our properties we also have a robust species at risk monitoring program and education and outreach activities.

As of 2023, we own or lease over 10,000 acres including off-shore islands, diverse forests, wetlands, and coastal shores.



OUR CORE VALUES

- **Care and responsibility for the land:** We are committed to environmentally and socially responsible management of natural areas in PEI
- **Integrity and respect:** We are dedicated to integrity and respect in all dealings with staff, members, clients and partners
- **Excellence:** We are a professional, science-based, strategic-minded organization that is committed to excellence, efficiency and safety in all activities
- **Collaborative:** We work in good faith to achieve common goals through discussion and cooperation. Our approach to decision-making is transparent, consultative and fiscally responsible

GUARDIAN PROGRAMS

COASTAL GUARDIANS

Coastal Guardians monitor nests on the north and southeastern shores of PEI in the spring and summer, simultaneously, educating beach users on the flight of piping plovers. Volunteers choose a plover beach they wish to monitor – often this is a beach they live close to or visit frequently. Coastal Guardians are given training on how to identify piping plovers and other shorebirds, how to minimize disturbance to the birds while monitoring, and how to provide an educational opportunity to beach users in a non-confrontational way.

For more information about the Coastal Guardian program contact engage@islandnaturetrust.ca

CONSERVATION GUARDIANS

The Conservation Guardian program began in the 1990s and was reinvigorated in 2016. Conservation Guardians monitor properties owned by Island Nature Trust, and submit reports on human use or disturbance on the Natural Areas. Conservation guardians may also provide additional information on wildlife sightings, and rare or invasive species. Regular training events are offered to our volunteers to help them build and improve the skills.

Skills Required

- Good physical condition
- Good observational skills
- Passion for conservation
- Some knowledge of local wildlife and plant species is helpful but not required (training can be provided)
- Ability to read maps is useful, but not required (training can be provided)

STEPS TO BECOME A CONSERVATION GUARDIAN



STEP 1

Work with INT staff to determine a Natural Area best suited for you (based on proximity to you and organizational need).



STEP 2

Attend a group training session to learn how to monitor (1:1 sessions are possible in some circumstances)



STEP 3

You are now a Conservation Guardian and able to visit the Natural Area on your own.



STEP 4

Visit your Natural Area at least once per year. Submit a Monitoring Report for each visit.



CONSERVATION GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Thoroughly read this Conservation Guardian manual and make sure you understand the terms of your volunteer position
- Follow policies and procedures communicated by INT's Stewardship Team
- Maintain communication with INT Staff
- Visit your assigned property at least once per year
- Complete and submit a report form for each property visit even if you didn't see anything you would deem remarkable
- Represent the mission and mandate of INT

IMPORTANCE OF CONSERVATION GUARDIANS

With a small staff and over 10,000 acres of Natural Areas across PEI, it can be challenging for us to monitor all of our properties on a regular basis. After a property has been acquired by INT and protected under NAPA, regular monitoring must be done to ensure that the natural features for which the property was protected remain intact and to mitigate any risks to these features. That's why we rely on local volunteer assistance, to monitor our properties and report their observations. With the information you provide INT is able to make effective management plans and respond to threats more quickly.



STEWARDSHIP OF INT PROPERTIES

We strive to be exemplary stewards of the land we manage. Our stewardship includes restoration of lands impacted by human use and engagement of community members to assist in knowledge sharing of best stewarding practices.

Stewardship of INT properties includes monitoring for human disturbance, surveying the biotic community, erecting informational signage, and management to restore properties most impacted by past natural and human disturbance. Restoration activities that we routinely take part in include planting native species, removal of invasive species, restoration/ecological silviculture, and removing refuse left behind from past human use.



The use and stewardship of our properties is guided by donation requests and the PEI Natural Areas Protection Act (NAPA). For example, the majority of our properties are open to fishing, hunting, trapping and traditional gathering of materials for personal use. In addition, several of our properties have developed trail systems that we use to engage community members and encourage connection with the land.

THE STEWARDSHIP PROCESS



STEP 1 - LAND ACQUISITION

INT works on acquiring land through donation or purchase. INT staff complete a baseline documentation report outlining the lands natural features and any stewardship concerns.



STEP 2 - LEGAL DESIGNATION

Once a property is acquired, it is protected under NAPA. The NAPA designation process involves the development of a initial management plan for the property, which includes general guidelines for management, and a list of prohibited activities.



STEP 3 - MONITORING

Monitoring occurs at least once per year at each natural area to assess changes, conditions, and threats in the Natural Area.



STEP 4 - RESTORATION

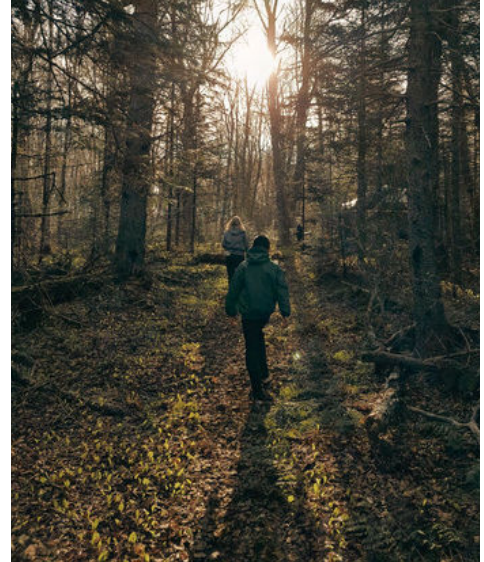
Restoration occurs in Natural Areas where ecological integrity has been compromised and the land requires intervention to return to a more natural state.

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURAL AREAS PROTECTION ACT

What is NAPA?

The PEI Natural Areas Protection Act (NAPA) is a significant legislative tool for safeguarding ecologically important land in PEI. When a parcel of land is designated, it becomes subject to restrictions to avoid degrading the ecological features.

The protection provided by NAPA is permanent and cannot be removed by the landowner. The restrictive covenant remains in effect even if ownership changes, ensuring ongoing preservation. However, the Minister of Environment, Energy, and Climate Action has limited authority to revoke the designation under specific circumstances, although this is infrequent.

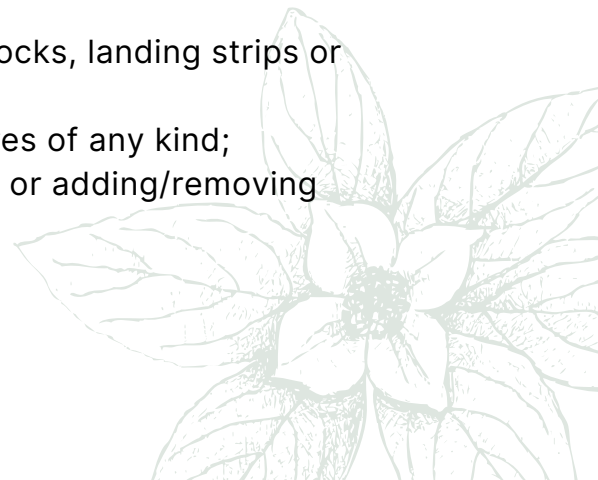


INT employs this act to protect and conserve PEI's diverse and ecologically significant ecosystems for generations to come. INT is not the only organization that can utilize NAPA, other organizations, the Province of PEI, and individuals can also protect natural areas through NAPA. NAPA empowers organizations like Island Nature Trust to protect and manage these areas, preventing their degradation or conversion for other purposes.

What Activities Does NAPA Restrict?

NAPA restricts activities that have the potential to degrade a natural area. It also prevents conversion of a natural area to a different use – for example, conversion of a natural area to farmland or subdivision. Some common restrictions include:

- Cutting, destroying or removing trees, shrubs or vegetation (invasive species may be removed);
- Planting or introducing non-native plant or animal species;
- Operating motor vehicles on the property, including snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles;
- Creating, constructing, or paving roads, driveways, docks, landing strips or parking lots;
- Erecting or constructing buildings, fences, or structures of any kind;
- Dumping, filling, excavating, mining, drilling, dredging or adding/removing surface or sub-surface material;
- Severance or subdivision; and
- Camping, campfires, or erection of artificial shelters.



NATURAL AREA MONITORING

Regular monitoring of INT’s Natural Areas is required to comply with the standards and practices set out by the Canadian Land Trust Alliance. INT staff, board members or Conservation Guardians must visit each Natural Area at least once per year to assess changes, conditions of signage and trails (where applicable), and threats in the natural areas.

Monitoring reports are reviewed by the Stewardship team who will take action if required. Reports submitted to INT help to document changes in Natural Areas over time and inform and prioritize future management activities. INT staff and Conservation Guardian volunteers work together to protect INT’s natural areas, and each person’s involvement and commitment is important.

Conservation Guardians will have an initial training session with INT staff to orient the Guardians on the mission and practices of INT, the process of natural area monitoring, and to be comfortable with the Natural Area assigned. Conservation Guardians will also be provided with a variety of resources, including: access to our land management database, laminated maps of the Natural Area, field guide, species-at-risk fact sheets and invasive species fact sheets. Guardians will also be given access to a Guardian specific Google Drive folder once the first one-on-one training is complete.

MONITORING PROCESS



STEP 1

Plan a trip to the Natural Area you have been assigned.



STEP 2

Prepare for your trip by reviewing the maps you have been provided, the monitoring form, and field guide.



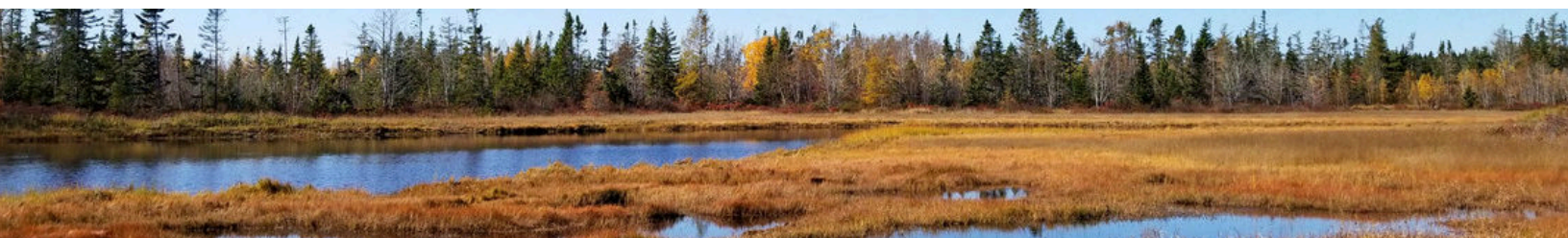
STEP 3

Visit the Natural Area and take notes of human disturbance, changes to the environment, and other biological information you can provide.



STEP 4

Fill out the monitoring form for each visit and submit to INT





SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

To effectively and safety monitor the Natural Area you have been assigned we recommend that you have the following items with you:

- Notepad and pencil
- Monitoring form
- Cell phone
- GPS unit and/or Landscape map loaded on cell phone
- Laminated map of Natural Area
- Compass
- First aid kit and whistle
- Water bottle

SAFETY TIPS

It is always more important that you come back uninjured than take a risk to complete a monitoring survey. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable or unsure, trust your instincts and leave.



Check the weather report before you leave and reschedule your trip if bad weather is expected.



Dress for the weather and comfort. Wearing the right apparel in hot, wet, or cold conditions can help you stay productive and safe.



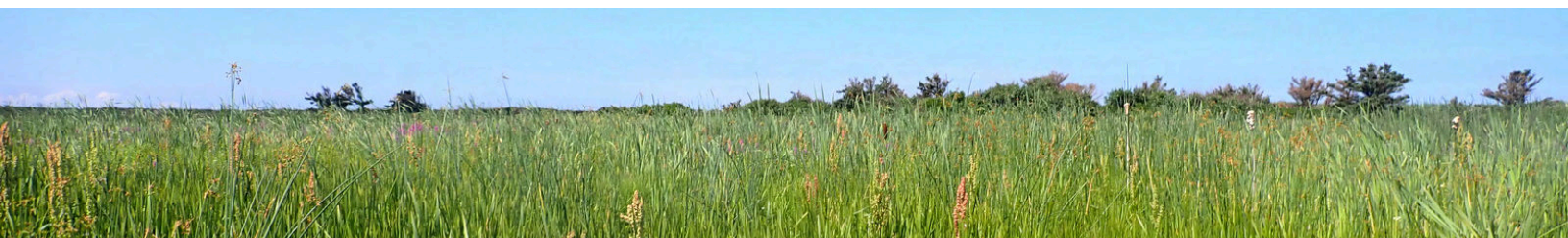
For INTs coastal natural areas, check the tide times and aim to monitor during a falling tide as to not get stuck as the tide rises.



Before embarking, leave detailed instructions with someone letting them know when to expect your return. Make sure to return before nightfall. Hike with a buddy if feel unsafe monitoring alone.



Bring a First Aid Kit with you and make sure that it is replenished as needed. It can be good to have Benadryl in the kit, in case of an allergic reaction. INT has tick removal tools available for Guardians.



STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

Garbage

Garbage and dumpsites are the most common stewardship issues on INT properties. Garbage tends to accumulate on the property boundaries, especially along roads, and can occasionally be found along trails. Additionally, there are old dumpsites often dating back decades scattered throughout the Natural Areas. If you find a dumpsite or larger items (like old vehicles) please document it (note the location and take photos if possible) and notify INT.

If the amount of garbage is minimal and you feel comfortable doing so please remove it from the property and dispose of it properly. Please notify INT so we can record this activity in our files for the property.



Trail Issues

We strive to keep our trails clear and free from issues, however, with over 30 kilometers of trails we rely on reports from volunteers to alert us to any issues that may arise. Please notify INT if there are blockages on the trails. If an area of trail is consistently wet and trail braiding is occurring please alert INT as we may be able to apply for funding to create boardwalks.



STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

Campsites and Firepits

Camping and firepits are not allowed on our properties. If you come across an established campsite or firepit please document it (photos and location) and report it to INT. If you feel comfortable, after documentation, please dismantle the firepit by scattering the charred wood and cover the soot with leaves. Please let INT know if you have dismantled the pit so we can record this activity in our files for the property.



Cutting

Cutting of trees and shrubs is not permitted on our lands with the exception of clearing trails, parking lots, and approved silviculture work. Please note any trees cut or branch damage that you encounter on our properties by noting the location and taking photos when possible.



STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

Motorized Vehicle Use

Motorized vehicles are not permitted to be used on our properties unless they are needed to complete a Stewardship activity (i.e., dumpsite cleanup, transporting plants, removing invasive species).

Motorized vehicle use is destructive to the sensitive habitats that our properties protect. Not only do they disturb the soil but they can also spread invasive species. We ask that Guardians note any evidence of vehicle use on our conservation lands. Areas with consistent vehicle use will be prioritized to install gates or other blockages.



Signage

Island Nature Trust has a variety of signage erected at our properties including: interpretive signs, boundary signs, property name signs, and instructional signage (i.e. no hunting, no motorized vehicles). It is important that the signage is in good condition. If you note signage that is falling out of good condition please document it and let INT know. If you have a property with interpretive signage you can help keep them in good condition by wiping them down with a damp cloth on your visit.



STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

Invasive Species

Invasive species are harmful, non-native species that outcompete or cause damage to native flora and fauna impacting entire ecosystems. There are many invasive species found in PEI - the most common of which are plant species.

If you identify invasive species on our property please documenting the occurrence with a location and photos and report it to INT. Some species are more ubiquitous and others cause more damage. Due to limited resources INT's Stewardship team must carefully decide which species we should manage on our Natural Areas. This process is evolving over time.

To learn more about invasive species in PEI please consult the field guide and visit: <https://peiinvasives.com/invasive-species/>



Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)



Small-flowered jewelweed (*Impatiens parviflora*)

Boundary Incursions

Owing to the patchwork nature of PEI's landscape our properties are often located adjacent to roads, fields, or residential developments. This increases the risk for boundary incursions and encroachment to happen. Often these incursions are minor and done unknowingly. Incursions can include timber harvesting, road clearing, structure building, and field and residential lawn expansion.

If the property you are assigned is adjacent to one of these disturbed areas we recommend walking the boundaries each time to note any changes. If incursions are noted please take documentation including locations, photos, and a dated written statement and report it to INT as soon as possible.



UNCOMMON STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

Illegal Activity

A rare but possible situation you may encounter is witnessing illegal activities occurring on our properties. Examples may include poaching/off-season hunting, garbage dumping, illegal cutting, and motorized vehicle use in buffer zones. If you happen to come across these activities we ask that you use your judgment – if you feel comfortable please document the encounter with photos. If you feel unsafe at any time, do not engage and return to your vehicle. In situations of poaching and off-season hunting, conservation authorities will need to be contacted.



Open Wells

Due to PEI's history many of our forests have been previously cleared and used as farmland or homesteads. It is possible that you may come across a suspected open well. Please make note of it on your monitoring form and take a location and pictures. Open wells are a safety risk for other people in the forests and are potentially hibernaculum for at-risk bat species. It is very important that we know about them to erect safety features and engage in monitoring.

Archeological Evidence

It is possible that you may come across archeological evidence of past human inhabitation, especially along rivers and shorelines. It is important that you do not disturb the site. Please make note of it on your monitoring form and take a location and pictures. INT will report the site to the Provincial Government for further investigation. A recorded webinar by provincial archeologists is available in the Guardian Google Drive folder.

Injured Wildlife

If you encounter injured wildlife while on a monitoring visit, during regular working hours you can call the Province at 902-368-4683 or 1-866-368-4683. Outside of regular hours Candy at PEI Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Inc can be contacted at 902-439-3311.

TRAINING AND MATERIALS

Stewardship Training

All Conservation Guardians must have a one-on-one training session prior to monitoring their assigned Natural Area. Additionally, INT staff will provide additional value-added events that provide skills training or education to the Coastal and Conservation Guardians. Previous trainings included scat and track identification, Krumholtz interpretive walks, invasive species identification, and boundary identification. Information on these events will be distributed by the Outreach and Engagement Coordinator via email. If you have an idea for a value-added event or if you have any skills you would like to share please reach out to us.



Available Materials

Conservation Guardians are provided with a welcome package that contains reference materials and other items. These packages vary depending on funding but will always include a laminated property map, INT car sign to put in the window while monitoring, and a Conservation Guardian Field Guide. Other items may include waterproof notebooks, t-shirts, baseball hat, tick removal devices, personal first-aid kits, and reference guides (i.e. winter bud ID, invasive species keychains, tracks, amphibian and reptile ID). In addition to physical materials the digital version of reference documents will also be available through the Guardian Google Drive folder.

Citizen Science Websites

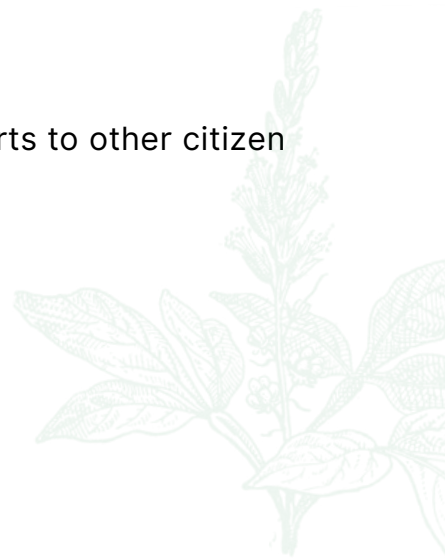
While you monitor our properties you may also wish to submit reports to other citizen science initiatives by using websites such as:

UPEI Climate Diary: <https://diary.peiclimat.ca/>

iNaturalist (Phone App or Website): <https://www.inaturalist.org/>

Journey North: <https://journeynorth.org/>

Nature Watch: <https://www.naturewatch.ca/>



USEFUL APPS

The following applications are free can be downloaded to smart phones and tablets.



Merlin provides multiple options to help you identify birds from photo ID, sound ID and by answering 5 questions about a bird. Merlin will come up with a list of possible matches that you can use to inform your ID. There is also the Explore Birds option which allows users to explore various species and includes ID information as well as sounds and range maps.



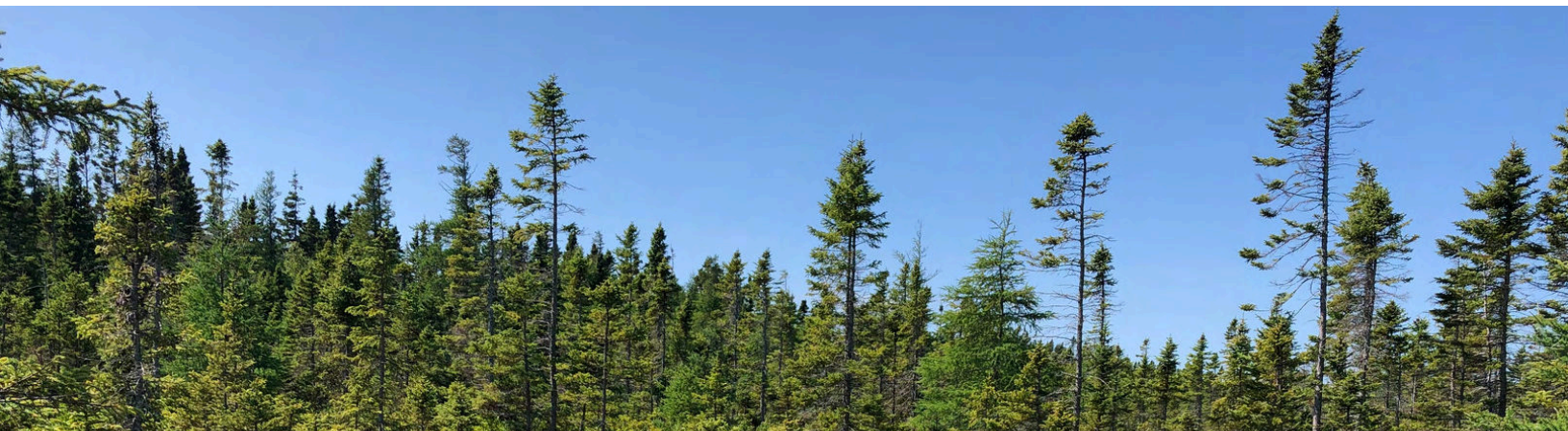
BirdNET is another app from The Cornell Lab that is a research project and allows you to ID birds from sound. The app using artificial intelligence to train computers to identify more than 3,000 of the most common species worldwide.



Seek by iNaturalist uses your phones camera to help identify all living things including plants, insects, fungi and wildlife! Seek is also able to draw on observations from iNaturalist to let you know if the species has been observed nearby. This app can be used to assist you with your identification. As with any resource please confirm your ID with more than one source before foraging or consuming anything.



Landscape enables users to navigate the Natural Area using their device's built-in GPS without an internet or network connection. It allows location tracking, marking points on the map, and viewing recent site visits or work completed by INT. Applicable details like acreage, nearest civic address, and emergency services are also available. INT creates individual accounts, and login details will be provided. A Landscape How-To Guide is available on the Guardian Google Drive for more information and instruction. We recommend always carrying a backup compass and map.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Understanding the Natural Area Protection Act

www.islandnaturetrust.ca/natural-areas-protection-act-on-prince-edward-island/

Learn more about native plant species:

www.macphailwoods.org/resources/native-plant-species

Learn more more about invasive species in PEI:

www.peiinvasives.com/

Illustrated Flora of Prince Edward Island:

<http://www.accdc.com/peiflora/s1.htm>

Field checklist of birds:

www.islandnaturetrust.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014_pei_birdchecklist-english.pdf

List of amphibians, reptiles and mammals:

https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2014_pei_vertibrates_list.pdf

Learn about PEI Watershed Groups:

www.peiwatershedalliance.org/

Learn about the Ecological Gifts Program:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/ecological-gifts-program/overview.html>

Learn about options to protect your land in PEI:

<https://secure.islandnaturetrust.ca/form/download-protecting-peii-guide->

Contact Information

EMERGENCY: 911 FOR POLICE, FIRE AND AMBULANCE

RCMP Non-Emergency: (902) 566-7112

To report a marine pollution incident to the Coast Guard call 1-800-565-1633

To report a wildlife related enforcement matter during normal office hours:

- Charlottetown (902) 368-4884
- Montague (902) 838-0600
- Queens County (902) 368-4884
- Souris (902) 687-7000
- Summerside (902) 888-8000
- Wellington (902) 854-7250

To report a wildlife related enforcement matter after normal office hours call (902) 368-4884 or visit www.princeedwardisland.ca/reportpoaching.

