

Impact Report



Bras d'Or Lake
Biosphere Region
Association

2023 - 2024



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Message from the Executive Committee

This past year has been very busy for the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Region Association (BLBRA). This work would not be possible without the hard work and commitment of committee members, volunteers, staff and the Board itself.

It is always amazing to see the passion that people have for the Bras d'Or Lake and the Biosphere. The purpose of this impact report is to highlight the accomplishments through the lens of the 2022-2025 BLBRA Strategic plan.

Many of the accomplishments of the year will be highlighted throughout, but three principal areas of achievement in 2023 – 2024 that should be noted here include:

1. The signing of an amendment to the contribution agreement with Environment and Climate Change Canada, (March 2024) as part of the Department's involvement with 19 Biosphere regions across Canada. This provides a two-year extension of the project and an additional \$231,570 in funding for each year to March 2026. A separate summary of this project is available.

2. Inclusion of the Mi'kmaq Language into website and social media products when possible.

3. Participation of Biosphere staff and Board members in the Atlantic Canada Tourism Corridor which hopes to link the Atlantic Biospheres and UNESCO Heritage Sites through a tourism strategy.

Along with these accomplishments, there have been some challenges including the downgrading and rescheduling of the June Annual General Meeting. The Board has taken steps to rectify this and are confident the issue is now addressed.

Workplans for 2024-2025 are being developed with Bras d'Or Watch, Explore the Bras d'Or and the ECCC project being the immediate focus with plans to audit and inspect the BLBRA signage around the Biosphere happening later this summer.

Finally, much appreciation to all the Directors, Committee Chairs and members, volunteers and staff for their amazing work in the Biosphere.

Sincerely, your BLBRA Executive,
Allison McIsaac, Chair
Terri Shobbrook, Vice-Chair
Parker Donham, Treasurer
Megan MacInnis, Secretary

2023 - 2024 Board of Directors

Allison McIsaac [Chair]

Member at Large / EFWC

Rodney Chaisson

Member at Large / Ottawa Brooks

Terri Shobbrook [Vice- Chair]

Member at Large / Kempt head

Wendy McKinnon

Member at Large / Ingonish

Parker Donham [Treasurer]

Member at Large / Kempt Head

Breah Sampson- MacDonald

Member at Large / West Bay

Megan MacInnis [Secretary]

Member at Large / Sydney Mines

Amanda Mombourquette

Ex-officio Member / Richmond County

Bethsheila Kent

Member at Large / Baddeck

Barbara Longva

Ex-officio Member / Victoria County

Kathleen Aikens

Member at Large / Coxheath

Steve Parsons

Ex-officio Member / CBRM

Liz Campbell

Member at Large / St. Peter's

Bonny MacIsaac

Ex-Officio Member / Inverness County

Tony Sylliboy

Member at Large / Eskasoni

Kirsty Lock

Ex-officio Member / NSCC

Veronika Brzeski

Member at Large / Baddeck

Stan Johnson

Ex-officio Member / CEPI

Kirsten Campbell

Member at Large / Stewartdale

Tyler Mattheis

Ex-Officio Member / CB Partnership

The Pitu' pa' q/ Bras d' Or Lake Biosphere

The Bras d' Or Lake Biosphere is located in Mi' kma' ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi' kmaq People. We are privileged to share this special space.



Vision

We envision all things thriving in the special place that is the Bras d' Or Lake Biosphere.

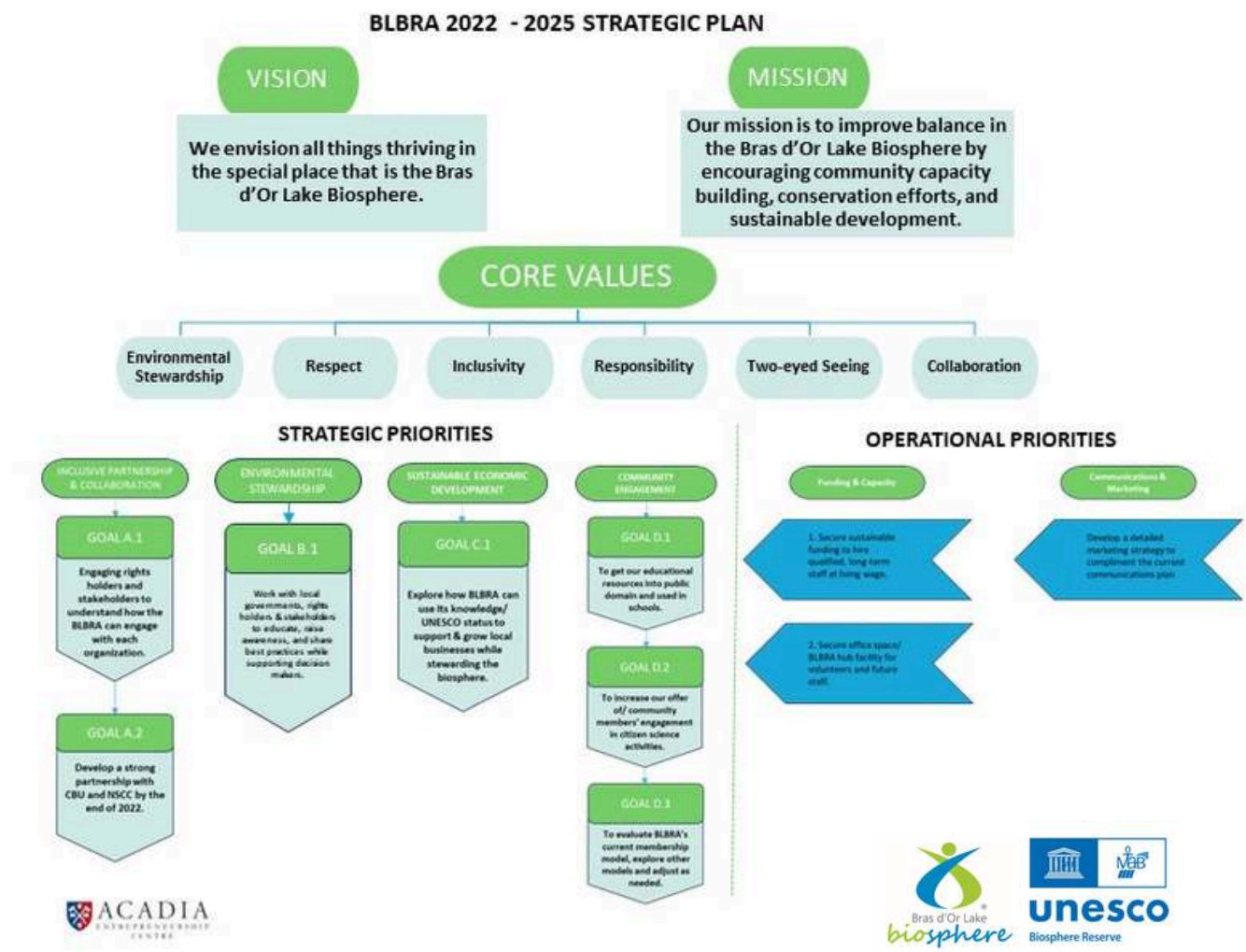
Mission

Our mission is to improve balance in the Bras d' Or Lake Biosphere by encouraging community capacity building, conservation efforts, and sustainable development.

BLBRA Strategic Plan

The 2022-2025 BLBRA Strategic Plan guides the organization as it works to improve balance in the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere by encouraging community capacity building, conservation efforts, and sustainable development. It also serves as an orientation document for current and future board members.

This strategic plan, facilitated by Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre, considered lessons learned from the BLBRA's first 10 years and helps chart a path for the next 10 years so that the Bras d'Or Lake will remain a UNESCO designated Biosphere after the 2031 periodic review.



BLBRA Strategic Priorities

**YOUR
BRAS
D'OR**
BIOSPHERE REGION

Goal A

Inclusive Partnership and Collaboration

Goal A.1: Engaging rights holders and stakeholders to understand how the BLBRA can be of help to each, where expectations align (or not), and what collaboration opportunities exist.

Goal A.2: Develop a strong partnership with CBU and NSCC by the end of 2022.

Goal C

Sustainable Economic Development

Goal C.1: Explore how BLBRA can use its knowledge and UNESCO status to support local businesses in growing prosperity while stewarding the biosphere.

Goal B

Environmental Stewardship

Goal B.1: To work with local governments, rights holders and stakeholders to educate, raise awareness, and share best practices, in order to support decision-makers in strengthening protective regulations and creating regenerative practices.

Goal D

Community Engagement

Goal D.1: To get our educational resources into the public domain and used in schools by September 2022.

Goal D.2: To increase our offer of and community members' engagement in citizen science activities.

Goal D.3: To evaluate BLBRA's current membership model, explore other models, and adjust as needed.

Inclusive Partnership & Collaboration

GOAL A.1

Engaging rights holders and stakeholders to understand how the BLBRA can engage with each organization.

This is an ongoing process and will continue throughout the years. However, in 2023-2024, the Project Manager has engaged with the Bras d'Or Lakes CEPI, Pitu'pa'q, the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Victoria county, Inverness County, and Richmond County. Additionally, partnerships and collaborations have taken place with Eskasoni Fish & Wildlife Commission, ACAP Cape Breton, Bras d'Or Lakes CEPI and many more local organizations. The Trails, Communication and Community Engagement and Learning Committees play an important role in ensuring that this goal is addressed.



Leat airson Rannsaichadh
Leat airson tlachd thaighinn
Leat airson àrach

Inclusive Partnership & Collaboration

The BLBRA has worked with CBU and NSCC to develop education and learning opportunities. NSCC holds an Ex-officio position on the BLBRA Board of Directors.

GOAL A.2

Develop a strong partnership with CBU and NSCC by the end of 2022.



nscc

**VOTRE
BRAS
D'OR**
BIOSPHERE REGION



Environmental

Stewardship

GOAL B.1

Work with local governments, rights holders & stakeholders to educate, raise awareness, and share best practices while supporting decision makers.

There are many ways that the BLBRA achieves this goal including the Community Engagement and Learning Committee's activities in promoting and expanding on the teaching kits, helping to facilitate Bras d'Or Watch and supporting Explore the Bras d'Or.

The Trails Committee is working to build awareness about the importance of trails within the Biosphere.

The ECCC project provides opportunities to engage locally, regionally and nationally on best practices for the conservation of biodiversity.

Yours to **explore**
Yours to **enjoy**
Yours to **nurture**



Sustainable Economic Development

GOAL C.1

Explore how BLBRA can use its knowledge/ UNESCO status to support & grow local businesses while stewarding the biosphere.



Through events like the BLBRA Bras d'Or Expo in St. Peter's, the BLBRA has supported local artists and vendors in the promotion of their products. The BLBRA also engages with Explore the Bras d'Or to promote other events happening within the Biosphere



Community Engagement

GOAL D.1

To get our educational resources into public domain and used in schools.

The Community Engagement and Learning Committee members have been successful in developing relationships with schools within the Biosphere. The committee has worked with Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) to share kits within the Mi'kmaw schools as well as provide kits to NS Education schools. Funding was secured to provide these kits to a number of schools. BLBRA staff have assisted with building the kits for delivery to the school. Teach the teacher events have taken place.



Community Engagement

GOAL D.2

To increase our offer of/ community members' engagement in citizen science activities.

BLBRA has organized or participated in events that have taken place to engage in citizen science activities. For example, the presentation of teaching kits prior to the June 2023 AGM, the BLBRA Bras d'Or Expo and Bras d'Or Watch activities in promoting and expanding on the teaching kits, helping to facilitate Bras d'Or Watch.

The committee has also worked on signage to increase knowledge of tree species on the Nicholson Trail and will continue this work.

The Trails Committee has organized citizen science activities on trails during Explore the Bras d'Or as well as other opportunities throughout the year.



Community Engagement

A membership committee has been established. Priorities and accomplishments for 2023-2024 included a well-defined membership list, review and adjustments to the membership by-laws and reminders for membership renewal.

GOAL D.3

To evaluate BLBRA's current membership model, explore other models and adjust as needed.



BLBRA Operational

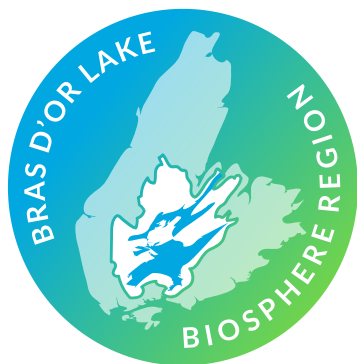
Funding & Capacity Priorities

1. Secure sustainable funding to hire qualified, long-term staff at living wage.

Funding for staff has been extended for 2 years until March 2026. Other opportunities have been investigated and this will continue into next year.

2. Secure office space/ BLBRA hub facility for volunteers and future staff.

Office and equipment space continues to be provided in-kind by Eskasoni Fish & Wildlife Commission



Communications & Marketing

A communication and marketing plan was completed in 2022 and is being incorporated into BLBRA activities as much as possible and will continue to do so.

Develop a detailed marketing strategy to compliment the current communications plan

Yours to **explore**
Yours to **enjoy**
Yours to **nurture**

www.blbra.ca



Muiwاتمnej

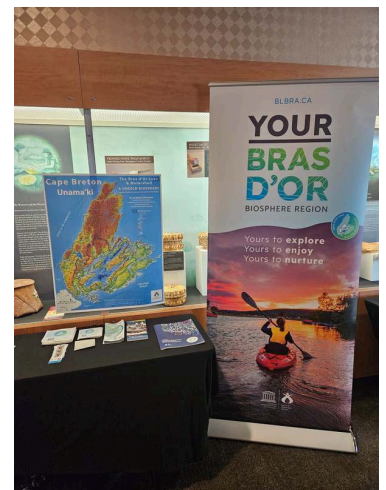


Etuaptmumk Two- Eyed Seeing Conference

The “Muiwاتمnej Etuaptmumk/Honouring Two-Eyed Seeing” conference in Membertou, NS, was a resounding success. Fostering a deepened understanding and appreciation of the Two-Eyed Seeing approach, the conference celebrated the application of this unique worldview across diverse disciplines and organizational relationships, helping attendees see how they can embrace Two-Eyed Seeing in their work. More than half the BLBRA Board attended the conference and the BLBRA sponsored two tickets for students. There was a table set up at the conference to provide information on the Biosphere where we sold 50 maps.



The BLBRA received the 2023 Golden Award for **Business & Industry** recognition of the BLBRA's collaborative work within the Biosphere and in celebration of our redesignation/ recertification after the periodic review.



KI'LEWEY
PITU'PA'Q
BIOSPHERE REGION

Ki'lewey **mili-ala'sin**
Ki'lewey **wlapesin**
Ki'lewey **wli-anko'tmn**

Atlantic Regional Biosphere Gathering

The 2023 Fall Atlantic Regional Biosphere meeting took place in November during CEPI's Two-Eyed Seeing conference. On November 13, 2023, the BLBRA hosted a meeting in ACAP's boardroom where discussions took place of sharing, planning & collaboration. In attendance there were 5 members from the BLBRA and 5 members from Southwest Nova and Funday combined. From November 14 - 15 the group enjoyed the Two-Eyed Seeing conference events held in Membertou First Nation and around Sydney. We got to hear from leaders such as Dr. Albert Marshall, Dr. Shelley Denny, David Suzuki and more on their Two-Eyed Seeing perspectives and how to incorporate it into our daily lives. In the evening the group enjoyed a dinner together at the Freight Shed in Baddeck. November 16 was the last day of the Atlantic Regional Biosphere gathering where Biosphere members enjoyed a hike on the Sky River Trail in We'ko'maq First Nation. The regional gathering ended with conference debriefing and discussions and the Funday Biosphere will be hosting the 2024 Atlantic Regional Biosphere gathering.



BLBRA Committee

Highlights



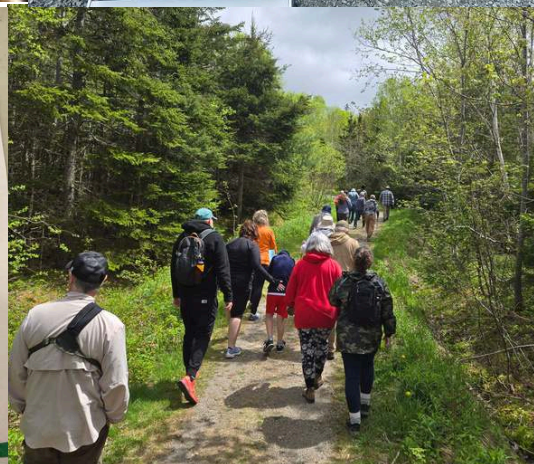
Biosphere Expo & Artisan Market
St. Peter's Lion Hall
Saturday May 27
11:30am-2:30pm



YOUR BRAS D'OR Biosphere Region
 Yours to explore
 Yours to enjoy
 Yours to nurture

KI'LEWEY PITU'PA'Q BIOSPHERE REGION
 Ki'lewey miili-ala'sin
 Ki'lewey wiapesin
 Ki'lewey wi-anko'tmnn

Please join the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Region Association at the first Biosphere Expo & Artisan Market. Together with some local artisans, music and refreshments, there is sure to be something of interest for everyone, whether a resident, non-profit or a business. Learn about the Biosphere - the association's projects and initiatives, various partners and annual events. You will discover that the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Region is always within reach to explore, enjoy and nurture.



Community Engagement & Learning Committee

2023 - 2024 Highlights



**Kirsty Lock,
Committee Chair**



Committee Members:

Liz Campbell
Kathleen Aikens
Veronika Brzeski
Megan MacInnis
Chris King
Maureen Cameron MacMillan
Foncie Ferrall
Breah Sampson-MacDonald
Sarah Dooley

Adventure Lab App - Visited and assessed 4 sites for suitability to create Geocaching Adventure lab

Biosphere Launch - Participated at the Biosphere Launch in St Peter's to promote awareness and participation in the various activities.

Teaching Kits - A grant from TD Friends of the Environment Fund received in October allowed for the creation of 5 sets of kits that were distributed to Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools.

Workshops - A workshop was held at the Bell Historic Site ahead of the AGM in June 2023. Fifteen participants were able to learn about the contents of the teaching kits and how to use them.



Bras d' Or Watch 2 Bras d'Or Watch events were held; Eskasoni (July 26) and St Peter's (August 5) providing excellent opportunities for participants to engage in activities that use scientific equipment to measure and explore various aspects of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere.

Species of the BLBR - Information pages created by ACAP Cape Breton to be released on a weekly basis on the BLBRA website and Facebook (May until November 2024).

Communications

Committee



**Pierre LaRochelle,
Committee Chair**

Committee Members:

Bethsheila Kent
Zoe Nicholas
Parker Donham
Tyler Matheis

2023 - 2024 Highlights

- Sourced, edited and issued 14 newsletters and bulletins enjoying > 50% opens (> 350/700 subscribers).
- Identified, sourced and/or created numerous posts for Facebook pages and the Instagram site.
- Tweaked, added Trails, Species of the Bras d'Or pages; News & Event articles, to the website.
- Worked with Biosphere Expo and Artisan Market 2023 committee.
- Liaised with CBRA Communications to implement national and local initiatives.
- Consulted with committees, staff and Executive regarding integration of the new branding.
- Utilized Google Workspace and Canva as collaboration tools as much as possible.



Trails

Committee



Ron Newcombe,
Committee Chair

Committee Members:

Maureen Cameron-MacMillan

Candace Christiano

Teresa MacNeil

Bethsheila Kent

Doug Foster

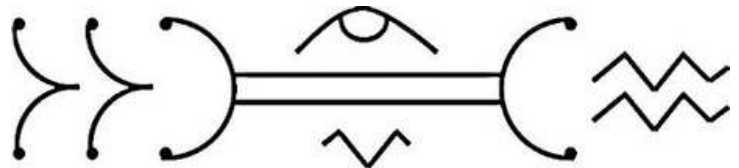
Don Crosby

Committee Goals:

- Promote the development and use of walking, hiking and multiuse trails within the Biosphere.
- Support community groups developing trails within the Biosphere.

2023 - 2024 Highlights

- Continued development of The Trail Developers Toolkit
- Developed the "Walk the Watershed" hiking series for 2024. (Led by Bethsheila Kent)
- Attended the 2024 Hike Nova Scotia Summit in Antigonish.
- Developed relationships with Hike Nova Scotia and The Great Trail.
- Worked with BLBRA communications on website content and other marketing.
- Continued support of local community trail building groups.



Membership

Committee



**Kathleen Aikens,
Committee Chair**

Committee Members:

Amanada Mombourquette

Pierre LaRochelle

Kirsty Lock

Veronica Brzeski



2023 - 2024 Highlights

- Membership (at March 2024): 150 members; 46 annual, 104 Lifetime
- Membership administration remains a priority
- Member recruitment through Biosphere events, peer-to-peer, and (future) social media.



Committee Goals:

Priorities in 2024-25: Strengthening communication with members, maintaining administration, and succession planning.

Special Thanks

to our **Funders**



Environment and
Climate Change Canada



Destination Cape Breton Association



**TD Friends of the
Environment Foundation**



Environment & Climate Change Canada ECCC

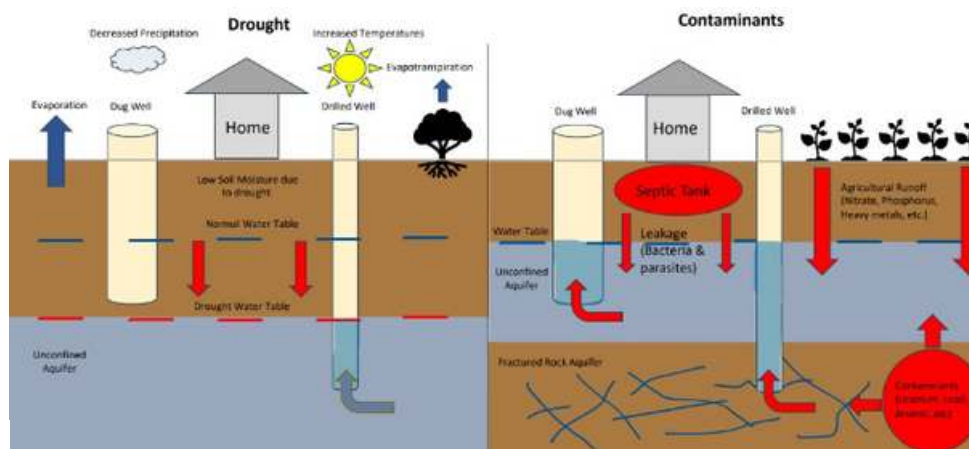


Environment and
Climate Change Canada

BLBRA is working with Dalhousie University and Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission (EFWC) and Fred Baechler to study groundwater and surface water systems and climate change impacts in the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Region with funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Our Dalhousie team is led by Dr. Lauren Somers and graduate students Reid Dauphinee and Julia Gillette.



We are focusing on the Christmas Brook Watershed in Eskasoni First Nation where a fault aquifer provides municipal water supply. The goal of our research is to develop a hydrological understanding of the local groundwater system and figure out where the water in the aquifer, and in Christmas Brook, comes from and how it may be impacted by climate change.



Bras d'Or Preservation Nature Trust

In Recognition of the Bras d' Or Preservation Nature Trust and their \$ 8, 000 Donation

The BLBRA would like to express our appreciation and respect for Bras d'Or Preservation Nature Trust for their dedication and substantial accomplishments throughout the years. Behind every amazing not for profit organization is a group of incredible people who work together to fulfill the mission. There are 3 specific founding members of the BPNT who we would like to thank, and they are:

- **Dr. Grovesnor Blair** - the founder and first Chair of the Board
- **Roland Thornhill** of Baddeck
- **Clair Rankin** of St. Peter's.

We would also like to thank the current Chair, Dr. Henry Muggah, also a past BLBRA Board member, and his colleagues, for choosing to donate to the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Region Association.



TD Friends of the Environment

Thanks to the grant from TD Bank - Friends of the Environment Fund, the Biosphere's Community Engagement and Learning Committee with support from other members and employees have been able to create and distribute the kits to each of 7 local schools. Workshops were organized at several schools within the Biosphere including all 5 of the Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey community schools where they got to keep a set of kits.



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

Education kits have now been created for three different topics including **Adapting to Watery Habitats**, **Introduction to the Acadian Forest** and **Animals and their Habitats: A Question of Balance**, and contain all the materials needed to deliver the curriculum.

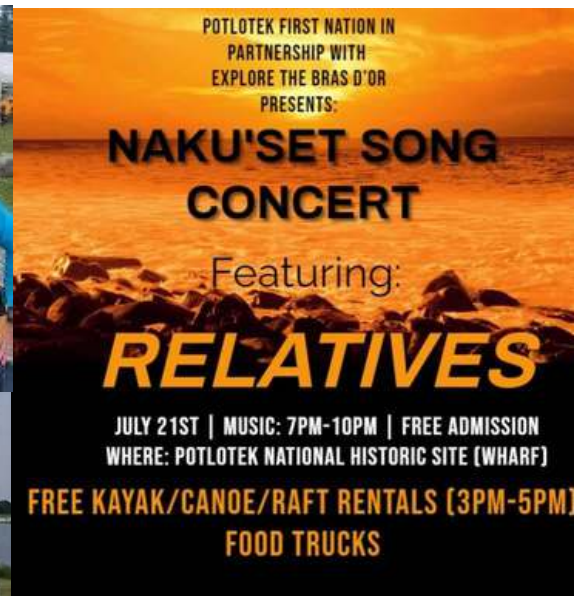


Cape Breton

Explore the Bras d'Or is a 2 week schedule of events highlighting Mi'kmaw and non-Indigenous communities and events, while promoting stewardship, sustainable economic development and ecotourism within the Biosphere.

Events and Communities:

- Aros na Mara - Iona
- Bras d'Or Watch
- Swim the Canal
- Washabuck Summer Festival
- Naku'set Concert
- All Five Mi'kmaw Communities
- Baddeck
- St. Peters
- Washabuck - Iona
- Whycomomagh



We thank you
for your
ongoing support
and
commitment to
your Bras d'Or
Lake Biosphere

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the committees and
volunteers as well as community partners.
We also want to take this opportunity to
thank various funders including:

-  Environment and
Climate Change Canada Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada
- Destination Cape Breton
- TD Friends of the Environment Fund
- Bras d'Or Lake Nature Preservation
Trust
- BLBRA Membership

**YOUR
BRAS
D'OR**
BIOSPHERE REGION

Yours to **explore**
Yours to **enjoy**
Yours to **nurture**



**KI'LEWEY
PITU'PA'Q**
BIOSPHERE REGION

Ki'lewey **mili-ala'sin**
Ki'lewey **wlapesin**
Ki'lewey **wli-anko'tmn**

**VOTRE
BRAS
D'OR**
BIOSPHERE REGION

À vous **d'explorer**
À vous de **profiter**
À vous de **nourrir**

**DO
BHRAS
D'OR**
BIOSPHERE REGION

Leat airson **Rannsachadh**
Leat airson **tlachd fhaighinn**
Leat airson **àrach**