

Annual Report – Commencing September 25, 2020 to September 7, 2021

Note - As with the previous year, COVID-19 severely curtailed the ability of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association to carry out most public events; however, online meetings enabled some projects to continue on a limited basis following federal and provincial guidelines. Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, the BLBRA AGMs were held in mid-June, or within 90 days of the end of the fiscal year. Since my election as Chairperson, I can only comment on that activity of the BLBRA that has occurred during my term.

Below are some highlights of the work accomplished by the various committees of the BLBRA since the last AGM, held in St Peter's on September 25, 2020.

- **The Periodic Review Committee** which was struck back in January of 2020 successfully completed their assignment. The draft submission was made to CCUNESCO in Ottawa on February 5, 2021. Subsequently,
 - CCUNESCO appointed two reviewers who conducted online interviews with a variety of individuals who could clarify and confirm the content of the Periodic Review.
 - In early July, the PR Committee received word that the Periodic Review was accepted by the appointed reviewers along with their recommendations for the BLBRA to focus on over the next few years.
 - The final draft of the Periodic Review with reviewers comments and recommendations was resubmitted to CCUNESCO who will submit the final draft to MaB UNESCO Headquarters' on September 30, 2021 for approval of the Biosphere's recertification.
 - Final approval should be given in August of 2022.

- The 7th **Bras d'Or Watch** annual citizen science events were held again this year over a two week period that coincided with Explore the Bras d'Or/*Wjinene'n Pitu'poq*. The usual water samplings were carried out by ACAP at four sites: St. Peter's, Iona, Ben Eoin and Whycomagh. Once again, due to public health restrictions, we hired ACAP to organize and deliver two events to substitute for public gathering events.
 - The first was a Bio Blitz using the iNaturalist App. where photos of different categories were submitted from the shoreline and watershed for prizes.
 - The second was a family oriented shoreline Scavenger Hunt . Bras d'Or Watch kits and Field Guides designed, created and distributed to public outlets for the Scavenger Hunt.
 - A limited edition of the *Common Birds of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere* was printed. A reprint is scheduled for later in the year.
 - Ten bird kits are ready for distribution to elementary schools in the biosphere. They include a copy of the bird book.
 - Eighteen Oyster kits are now available for distribution to schools.

- The **Forest Watch Committee** was re-established in January of 2021, and held numerous committee and task group meetings. The Committee reflected on ideas generated through

brainstorming, reviewing previous committee priorities, and exploring the collective network of resources. They narrowed these considerations down to four main priorities that will offer individuals a better understanding and appreciation of all forest values, including ecological, recreational and economical. The four priority areas are the Plantation Project, Explore the Bras D'Or Events, Citizen Science Pilot Initiative, and Signage for Biosphere Trails. Aspects of these projects are underway and will continue into the upcoming year. The work that has been completed to date includes:

- Surveyed soils of the Irish Cove Plantation in conjunction with Department of Lands and Forestry, Nova Scotia Community College and Port Hawkesbury Paper, and development of an action plan for going forward
 - Planted 200 hardwood and 450 softwood trees at the Irish Cove Plantation
 - Offered semi-guided hikes in conjunction with the Trails Committee at Salt Mountain and MacCormack Beach Provincial Park as a part of “Explore the Bras D’Or” activities
 - Developed pilot program for citizen science projects and presented to the Board for input and budget approval
 - Visited existing trails within the Biosphere to start the process of identifying most suitable trail(s) for signage projects
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- The **Trail Committee** has -
 - Published its Trail Toolkit for use by communities throughout the watershed to assist in building and improving local trails.
 - A very successful interpretive trail walk was held on August 2 on Iona Beach.
 - BLBRA joined Hike Nova Scotia.
 - A colourful, detailed laminated map of the biosphere (24”x30”) was designed, printed and is now for sale on the website blbra.ca
 - Met with 5 interested community groups to promote and encourage community trail development. With resources provided by CBRM, these communities now have detailed topographic maps to work with as they plan.
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- The **Museum Committee** has now completed BLB display design at the Bell Museum with the installation and display of a new large wall map of the Biosphere. This replaces the light table map which was outdated.
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- The **Executive Committee** met 10 days prior to every BoD meeting to set the agenda and discuss issues of concern.
 - The Chair submitted a funding proposal to ACOA through the Community Capacity Funding Program and was successful in obtaining approximately \$10,000 for a much needed Strategic Plan Facilitation.

- The Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre will conduct our strategic planning session on October 5 at the Waymatcook Cultural and Heritage Centre followed by two online sessions in the following two weeks.
 - The outcome of this facilitation will determine the direction of the BLBRA for the next five years.
- The **Communication Committee**, in an attempt to encourage tourism and share knowledge about the Biosphere, has-
 - encouraged Destination Cape Breton to give the Biosphere a special feature box status on their website.
 - BLB rack cards designed, printed and distributed to key tourist outlets within the province and throughout the Island.
 - Assisted in promoting *Explore the Bras d'Or/Wjinene'n Pitu'poq*, inaugurated this year, a two week series of summertime events in, on or near the Lake during the last week of July and the first week of August. The BLBRA, in partnership with the CEPI and Oceans North, put together this staycation celebration of the Bras d'Or.
 - Arranged training for our in house web master to make ongoing changes to the BLBRA website
 - Provided constant updates to our Bras d'Or Watch and BLBRA Facebook pages.
 - Continued to produce a very informative newsletter four times/yr. Circulation is 800 plus subscribers.
 - Created Biosphere Bulletins to share significant issues with the same Newsletter subscribers.
 - Redirected some of the Home page graphics to a new 'Things ToDo' page and a direct link to the Cape Breton Mesonet.
 - Expanded and formatted the website Resources page to include important links.
 - Added key partnership links to the webpage.
 - Added a new Map Gallery page accessed from the Our Biosphere page.

The Nomination Committee, after a good deal of searching, approved the following slate of nominees at the BoD meeting, Jun 17th, 2021 as Directors of the BLBRA.

- Rosella Born 2021-2024
- Elizabeth Campbell 2021-2024
- Christopher King 2021-2024
- All are new members.
- A new ex officio director from Cape Breton partnership joined the Board in March
- The BOD is to be composed of up to 14 members at large with the remainder appointees (ex. officio) to a maximum of 20 in total.

Registration (paid members) in the BLBRA is currently at –

- Lifetime members - 104
- Annual Family members - 18
- Annual Business members - 4
- Annual individual members – 22
- Annual NFP organizations - 1

For the next five years, the priorities of the BLBRA will be determined by the outcomes of our strategic planning facilitation and the conclusions reached through the Periodic Review process. These two elements will determine the path we take as an organization to best fulfill the three goals of a UNESCO Biosphere – conservation of biodiversity, sustainable economic development, and community capacity building (logistic support).