

The Gaspé Spec

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Nature Conservancy of Canada purchases 2 km of Malbay salt marsh



Photo: Nature Conservancy of Canada

The Malbay salt marsh is an important area for 200 bird species, but also for Atlantic salmon, striped bass and the American eel.

Geneviève Gélinas

BARACHOIS: – The Nature Conservancy of Canada has purchased part of the Malbay salt marsh sandbar in order to protect it. The 37 hectares of dunes and beaches add to the 164 hectares already protected in the marsh.

The newly acquired part extends from the Barachois railway bridge on for two kilometres westward, towards Percé, that is to say one third of the sandbar that separates the marsh from the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The tracks and its right-of-way remains the property of Transport Quebec, but the remainder now belongs to Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC).

“The sandbar is made

up of beaches and dunes, with special vegetation that stabilizes the dunes, and species associated with this special vegetation, like the red knot or the Nelson sharp-tailed sparrow. The sandbar also protects surrounding wetlands from big storms,” explains Camille Bolduc, who is responsible for NCC projects in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands.

“The property will remain accessible, like all others (of NCC in Barachois). The population can go on hiking, fishing and watching birds on the site. But we’ll want to better manage the activities and we’ll discuss that with the community,” adds Ms. Bolduc.

All-terrain vehicles and other vehicles pass over the sandbar. NCC won’t block the access, but could concentrate

it. “Will we allow access to one trail and close another one?” evokes Ms. Bolduc.

“Vehicle traffic on the vegetation of a sandbar has a negative impact because this vegetation holds and structures the sandbar. If it’s damaged, it leaves the door open to erosion and the species won’t find their natural habitat anymore,” Ms. Bolduc explains.

The piece of land purchased by NCC on the sandbar did belong to Clifton Thibeault, a Bridgeville resident known as the owner of its village’s hunting and fishing store. Mr. Thibeault contacted NCC before his death in November 2016, to offer his property in order to protect it. The transfer was completed by his family after his passing.

A total of 201 hectares of the salt marsh now belongs to

NCC, that is to say about 20% of the ten-square-kilometre territory. “We don’t want to protect it all, because there are houses and people living there. But we’re interested in natural habitats and we’d like to protect 200 more hectares,” says Camille Bolduc.

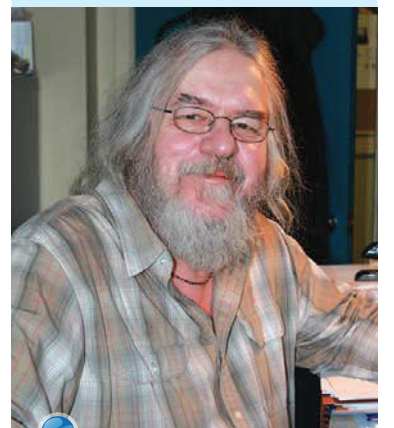
The Malbay salt marsh is a feeding habitat for Atlantic salmon. The endangered American eel and the striped bass, appreciated by fishermen, also feed on the rich lagoon.

More than 200 species of birds have been observed in the marsh and on its sandbar. It is recognized as an important bird area and is feeding and habitat ground for the yellow rail, designated as being of special concern under the Canada Species at Risk Act.

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