

McGowan Natural Area

The *McGowan Natural Area* is 14 acres of riparian regenerating woodland located in Brudenell, Kings County, Prince Edward Island. The land is a mixture of riparian zone and regenerating old field, with approximately 500m of frontage on the Brudenell River just above the head-of-tide. The Mi'kmaq name for Cardigan Bay, which the Brudenell River feeds into, is Samkuk, which means “It is the place where you touch or touch down or land” (Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI, Traditional Use Map).

Acquisition and Legal Status

The property was bequeathed to Island Nature Trust by the late Elizabeth McGowan, and was certified in 1999 through the Government of Canada's Ecological Gifts Program. Land designated as an Ecogift is considered important to the preservation of Canada's environmental heritage. The *McGowan Natural Area* was protected under the *PEI Natural Areas Protection Act* on December 22nd, 1999.

Landscape Context

The *McGowan Natural Area* is bordered by farmland along the western boundary, by Dewar's Road along the eastern boundary, and a regenerating field to the south. The northern boundary borders the Brudenell River where an old mill pond once lay. The river acts as a natural connector to other nearby natural areas, including the provincially-owned Brudenell Provincial Park with its stand of mature white pine, on the opposite river bank and a few hundred meters downstream.

Plant Community

The regenerating field is composed primarily of dense white spruce growing on rocky, sandy soil rich with groundwater seeps. There are mixed woods with a varied shrub layer near the river. The western edge of the McGowan Natural Area features an old hedgerow that is composed of a greater variety of mature tree species than the rest of the young forest. These species include trembling aspen, white birch, pin cherry, and sugar maple. The sugar maple appears to be a variant that some call black maple. The bequeathment of land by Elizabeth McGowan stipulated that Island Nature Trust must plant 200 maple (*Acer* sp.) trees on the upland portion of the property. A mix of sugar maple and red maple were planted in the spring of 1999. Due to the healthy population of snowshoe hare, most of these did not survive. More plantings were done throughout the years with continued failure due to browsing from voracious hares.

In 2018, INT staff planted white pine, eastern hemlock, Canada fly honeysuckle, and purple chokeberry inside metal exclosures to prevent snowshoe hare damage. Exclosures occur in patch cuts designed to mimic natural gaps in mature forest stands created when a mature legacy tree falls. These plants will be monitored regularly to determine the effectiveness of the exclosures. There are areas of moss, lichen and grasses on the property which help to create natural corridors through the dense white spruce thickets. In some of these natural openings, additional wire-wrapped eastern hemlock and white pine were planted in 2018.



McGowan Natural Area

Riparian Zone

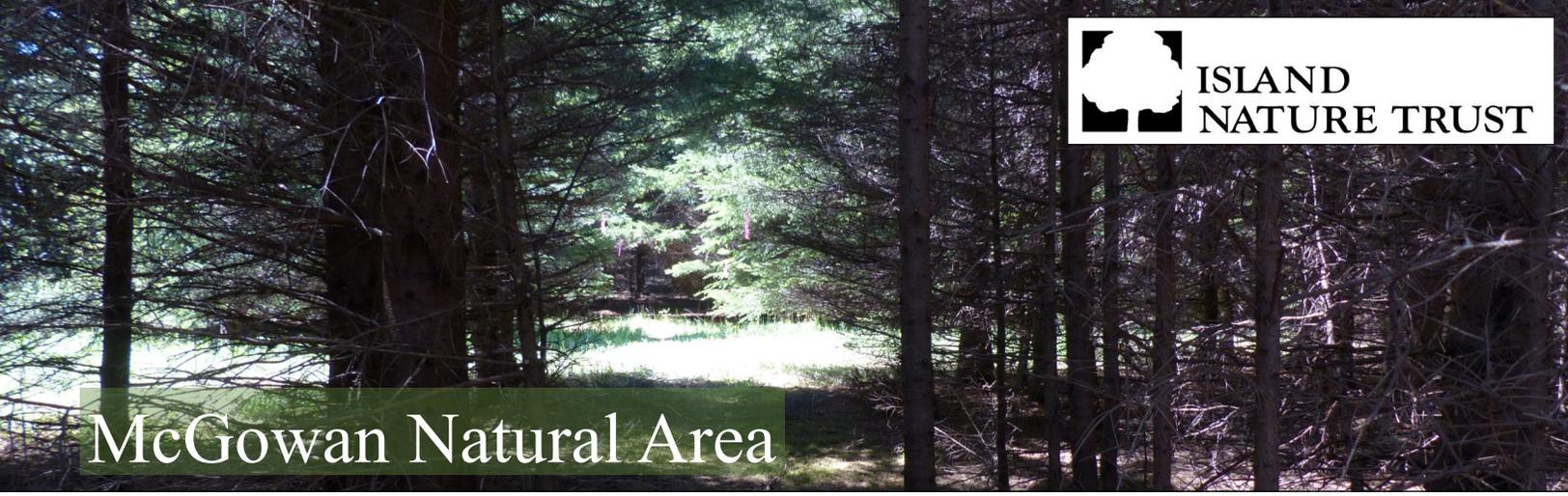
The riparian zone along the north boundary of the property forms the core of the property and has notable patches of green alder, speckled alder, willow, stinging nettle, cattails, and reed canary grass. Reed canary grass is an aggressive invasive species that prevents other grasses, shrubs, or trees from growing; it invaded the old mill pond basin. Attempts have been made to colonize the riparian zone with native Acadian tree and shrub species to diversify the area and provide bank stabilization, but these efforts have proved unsuccessful. In the future, INT staff will undertake further efforts to gradually shade out this invasive population through progressive forest edge plantings.

Wildlife Community

Snowshoe hare are very prevalent in the *McGowan Natural Area* and control the community makeup of regenerating forest, without intervention. Red squirrel is also very common in the natural area. A number of migratory bird species have been observed during the summer nesting season, including northern parula, blackburnian warbler, red-eyed vireo, white-throated sparrow, golden-crowned kinglet, blue-headed vireo, rose-breasted grosbeak and chestnut-sided warbler.

Access

A rough trail was made in 2018 for ease of access to the 11 exclosed and unexclosed patch cuts (forest gaps) on the property. Small meadow patches also allow for some access through the property, but in areas of dense white spruce walking is challenging. To access the property from Poole's Corner, follow Route 4 towards Montague, taking a left onto Brudenell Point Road, and a second left down Dewar's Road. The natural area is approximately 0.5 km down Dewar's Road. Parking is along the seasonal clay Dewar's Rd only, which dead-ends at the river (a bridge used to exist but was removed many years ago).



McGowan Natural Area



200m

DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, CNES/Airbus DS

The *McGowan Natural Area* is represented in green in the map above