

PECFN NEWSLETTER

January 2026



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Common Goldeneye, female
photo by Ian Barker



**PECFN Outing: 2026 Winter Waterfowl Watch
at Wellington Harbour**
Saturday, January 24, 1 to 2:30 pm
Winter conditions permitting



Trumpeter Swans, Redhead, Long-tailed, and Common Goldeneye Ducks. Photos: Dale Smith

In winter, Wellington Harbour provides refuge for a variety of waterfowl. Recently, Wellington resident and birder Dale Smith has spotted two Trumpeter Swan families and Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Long-tailed, and American Black Ducks, as well as geese, Mallards, and Mute Swans.

Please join us on Saturday, January 24, from 1:00 – 2:30 pm on the dock at the foot of Belleville St (County Rd 2), just south of Wellington Main St (Hwy 33). A number of scopes will be set up, with people to tell us about what we see.

This is a family friendly event. Dress warmly and bring binoculars if you have them.

*Overflow parking is available at the Lehigh Arena,
a block north on Belleville Rd.*

2025 Prince Edward Point Christmas Bird Count

Twenty-five keen citizen scientists braved the early hours of December 20 to take part in the forty-ninth Prince Edward Point Christmas Bird Count. The count circle is centred on Waupoos Island in Prince Edward Bay and stretches along the shoreline from Point Traverse in the Prince Edward National Wildlife Area to the Bay of Quinte near Adolphustown.

The day began cold at -7°C but gradually warmed to -2°C , with light winds throughout. While snow was almost entirely absent, glare ice made conditions tricky on unmaintained roads, escarpment lanes, and across the bays and streams.

Participants recorded 63 bird species on the count day, which is slightly below the long-term average of 68. When count-week sightings were included, the total increased to 67 species. The total number of individual birds observed was 6,547, notably lower than the average of 30,089. This decrease can be attributed to icy waterways and the effects of the previous summer's drought, which reduced natural food sources. Despite these challenges, there were positive highlights: the Bald Eagle count continued its upward trend, with 21 individuals noted.

Noteworthy species observed during the count week included American Goshawk, Pine Siskin, Brown-headed Cowbird and Iceland Gull. For several teams, observing four distinct woodpecker species was a memorable highlight. The tally included 14 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 27 Downy Woodpeckers, 12 Hairy Woodpeckers, 8 Pileated Woodpeckers, and 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers!

Sincere thanks are extended to all the volunteers whose enthusiasm and commitment ensured the success of the count. Special recognition goes to team leaders John Licharson, Barry Pinsky, Amy Bodman, Ketha Gillespie, Greg Forbes, Joanne Dewey, Mikayla Stinson, and feeder watcher Pamela Stagg.

Dale Smith



female Hairy Woodpecker
photo by Dale Smith

ZOOM: PECFN MEMBERS MEETING

7 pm, Tuesday, January 27, 2026

Terry Sprague: A Century of Change - Wildlife on the Move in PEC

Dateline, Big Island, November 13, 1939:

"Beaver have returned to this county," stated long-time Bloomfield resident the late Charles Melton, who found evidence of the first beaver in a long time on a small island in the Big Island Marsh. This is just one example of wildlife changes that have occurred in Prince Edward County in the last 100 years or so. In this presentation, Terry Sprague documents a few of these changes, touching on Opossums, Coyotes, Fishers, and Bears as well as the rise and fall of Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows. Do you know there was a Moose here in 1968, and the first ever confirmed sighting of a Canada Lynx two years ago? Who will arrive, or conversely, disappear, next?



Terry in His Garden: Unknown photographer



Tree Swallow. Photo, Ian Barker

Terry is a well-known naturalist who lives on Big Island. His weekly columns on nature have appeared in local papers for 50 years. He has held positions at Glenora Fisheries Research and as an interpretive naturalist at both Sandbanks PP (8 years) and Quinte Conservation (17 years). He is the recipient of the 2002 Pioneer Conservationist Award from Conservation Ontario, the 2004 Richards Education Award from Ontario Nature, and the 2015 Gold Quill Award from the Canadian Community Newspapers Association.

For Zoom link, email gerry.jenkison@icloud.com



MYRNA WOOD'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATURE IN THE COUNTY

by Sheila Kuja

We lost a PECFN icon on September 26, 2025! As the longest standing executive director of the PECFN Board – active from 1997 as a founding member, to fall 2024, when she didn't stand for nomination for health reasons – Myrna's 27 years of fighting for nature in the County is a remarkable legacy! There wouldn't be a club without Myrna's foresight and determination. She should be an inspiration to us all.

Born in Iowa on August 16, 1936 and immigrating to Canada in 1959 (moving to Winnipeg with her husband, Robertson Wood), Myrna had an illustrious career as a librarian at a number of public institutions in Montreal and Hamilton, as well as Toronto, where she worked at the U of T Library. She was a second wave feminist and her activities and writings can be documented in Toronto, Montreal, New York and Cuba by doing some research on the web. Her sense of social justice extended from women's issues to combating racism and to labour rights and unionism. Suffice it to

say, Myrna was a force to be reckoned with. Our story of this amazing lady begins when she arrived here in the County in 1994.

Myrna retired to Picton and immediately became enamoured by the beauty, natural habitats and the bird life in the County. As expected, she went directly to the Library to do her research and there discovered Terry Sprague's "Birds of Prince Edward County" (1984). Since she wanted to learn more about birds in her new home, and being a relative newcomer to the ranks of the birding fraternity, who better to learn from than the expert? In no time at all she'd found Terry's number in the phone book and contacted him. Terry was very obliging and soon she and Terry were spending time at Prince Edward Point birding together as she was keen to identify and learn more about the species she saw. That was Myrna's way: no nonsense; right to the point. Action!

Using the remarkable talents that she had acquired fighting for woman's rights and civil rights, and as an excellent librarian, she began making the County a better place by helping people understand, enjoy and protect nature.

Back in 1997 Myrna realized that it was essential to increase the profile of Prince Edward Point if it was to attain status as an Important Bird Area, (designated by Bird Life International), which she and Terry had begun action on by submitting an application for its acceptance. This recognition would best be accomplished by bringing people to the Point to experience how remarkable it was. The first step would be to have the local community onboard. She, Terry, David and Yvette Bree and Joanne Dewey decided that it would be beneficial to initiate a naturalist club that could enjoy nature in the County and advocate for the importance of the area as a migratory hotspot, and thus the PEC Field Naturalist Club came into being. Early meetings were at the Conservation headquarters building at Macaulay Mountain Conservation Area.

At the same time Myrna felt that it would be helpful to bring birders from elsewhere to experience the Point and the County, so, she went about contacting nature clubs in Ontario, Quebec and New York State, sending them pamphlets describing the area and inviting them to come and enjoy the spring birding which was almost comparable to that at Point Pelee – but not as far to travel to, nor as crowded. She made a pitch to the community and drew over 90 attendees to the Picton Town Hall, most of whom were Bed and Breakfast owners who saw this as a chance to draw birders and potential guests into the area during the spring and fall shoulder seasons, and increase revenue. Thus, the Spring Birding Festival was inaugurated by PECFN, partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and the Quinte Conservation Alliance. Walks took place all over the County and were held over two weekends plus the weekdays in between. Myrna was also thinking that this festival could create jobs for local, seasonally employed naturalists, as birding guides, but somehow this never materialized.

The Prince Edward Bird Observatory was formed in 1995 after David Bree invited Brian Joyce and Eric Machell to see what a remarkable place it was. The Kingston Field Naturalists had conducted banding there previously. When a Board of Directors was established in 1998, Myrna and Terry were members. In those early days, according to Terry, they became involved in the Observatory's day to day operations. I'm wondering if Myrna and Terry hadn't played important roles in advocating for a Board to be put in place and if Myrna hadn't been instrumental in establishing their by-laws, just as she did with PECFN.

Largely due to Myrna's efforts, PEPtBO was incorporated in 1999, and received charitable status as a scientific research station. Her foresight was invaluable since this status enabled PEPtBO to receive donations and pursue funding to assist in covering the costs of the banding operations, develop educational and outreach programs, and maintain the facilities. An extremely important step forward

Myrna and Terry played a role in convincing PEPtBO to have banding demonstrations and eventually then take over the Spring Birding Festival because it would promote the Observatory's efforts to the public, dispel any myths about banding and also generate donations for its operation.

Throughout the years Myrna continued to advocate for nature and for the environment. She lobbied Council to discontinue the use of Dombind as a dust suppressant on gravel roads in the County due to the adverse health effects caused by the dioxins and furans present. Eventually, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld an MOE order to stop its use by October 2002, thus supporting her case to Council.

The Important Bird Area (IBA), with pressure from Myrna and others, was expanded from Prince Edward Point to include the entire South Shore. Myrna was instrumental in working with Dick Bird and others at the Hastings Prince Edward Land Trust and NCC to raise money to acquire the Miller Family Nature Reserve, south of Hilltop Rd. along the South Shore. Waring's Creek was another major issue for Myrna as PECFN joined with the Waring's Creek Improvement Association (WCIA) in 2007, to stop an open well sewer line from dumping sewage when it overflowed, into the County's only cold water creek. Later WCIA worked towards the acceptance of a signed legal agreement guaranteeing that the county would protect Waring's Creek and fulfill a number of outstanding needs before embarking on any additional actions in the watershed. This agreement has since been referred to as the Minutes of Settlement. But this was somehow overlooked recently by Shire Hall. Myrna was also instrumental in initiating The Friends of Sandbanks as a group to benefit the provincial park.

As Ted Cheskey so aptly pointed out in a recent tribute to her in Nature Canada, "Myrna was not risk averse. If she was, Ostrander Point, an ecological gem along the south shore of Prince Edward County, on Lake Ontario, would likely be an industrial wind energy project by now." And this is probably what we associate most with Myrna's dedication, fearlessness and determination. It was her quiet work, mostly behind the scenes, but nevertheless gathering most of the information necessary, to spearhead the protection of the South Shore from Industrial Wind Turbines. She had accumulated an incredible number of articles pertinent to the issue, all catalogued in folders and sub-folders, as any excellent, organized librarian would do, documenting the various reasons why industrial wind turbines should not be located on the site.

But it wasn't a straightforward path. When the threat arose in 2008, Myrna was at the forefront of opposition with Cheryl Anderson at her side. When attempts to stop the IWTs (Industrial Wind Turbines) through writing campaigns and townhall meetings did not change the view of the government, it became clear that the only way to protect the IBA was to mount legal action and request an Environmental Review Tribunal hearing to decide the fate of the area. A concerted effort was made, especially in 2010 and 2011 to educate all levels of government and the community that IWTs did not belong along a shoreline and particularly in an IBA. However, the government moved forward and the only way to oppose the IWT's was through legal action which was a daunting and risky undertaking: after all it wasn't one lawyer that would be attacking but two: one from Gilead, the company wanting to erect the Turbines and the other from Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change since the government had mandated the project go forward. But Myrna remained committed. She felt that it was just the beginning: if one company was allowed to build turbines in the heart of an IBA, they couldn't be stopped anywhere. This was a precedent that needed to be stopped. Migrating birds and the South Shore were in jeopardy and she wanted to make sure they were protected., as well as other IBAs in the future.

Although Myrna's first choice for legal counsel, a lawyer from the Guelph area, didn't agree to represent PECFN, it was a severe blow but only a setback to the determined lady. Eric Gillespie agreed to be our legal counsel and Myrna was responsible with input from others, for choosing each of the expert witnesses to testify for PECFN at the Environmental Review Tribunal (ERT).

Working closely with Natalie Yuko-Smith, a young lawyer in Eric Gillespie's office, Myrna provided all the background information which she had organized on each aspect of the case and all the precedents to substantiate why wind turbines should not be located along shorelines and in IBAs.

Expert witnesses came from Ontario mainly, and were present at the hearings but some, from as far away as Scotland and locations in the U.S., gave their testimony and were questioned via teleconference calls at the ERT. Many of the expert

witnesses: Paul Catling, Kari Gunson, Ted Cheskey, Don Davis and also Natalie and Eric, became life-long friends with Myrna: all part of a mutual admiration society. They respected and admired her as she did them – and they maintained contact over the years.

In July 2013 the Tribunal revoked the approval of the project, agreeing with PECFN that it would result in serious and irreversible harm to Blanding's Turtle. PECFN had won. But that wasn't the end of the story. An appeal was made in August and over several more years PECFN was in and out of Divisional Court and the Court of Appeal, until in June 2016, it was decided that there would be no wind turbines at Ostrander Point. The decision was final. This was the first time there had ever been a success, on environmental grounds, to stop an industrial wind turbine project at an Environmental Review Tribunal (ERT) by any opponent, in this case, PECFN.

As a result of her work for Ostrander Point, and her many other projects working for nature, Myrna was recognized by being nominated for and receiving awards from various sources. She was given Nature Canada's Volunteer of the Year award in 2011; the Governor General's Diamond Jubilee medal in 2012 and Ontario Nature's W.E. Saunders Award in June 2013 (although this was for the club, we all knew that it had been Myrna guiding us fearlessly to the Ostrander success). KFN had nominated the club for this prestigious honour.



Myrna was up for the challenge of fundraising, reaching out across the County, the province and the country for donations. Naturalists saw the importance of this. Club members, including Myrna, participated in fundraising activities like auctions, dinners and providing materials to be sold at the annual Women's Institute sale in August and Picton Fair in September where PECFN had a booth to raise money and awareness. As an expert seamstress, Myrna's beautiful tote bags, usually with cheerful flower and bird motifs, became a favourite choice that was vied for, especially when it was realized that Myrna had made them. She knitted mittens and hats and baked banana cakes as well.

In addition, Myrna orchestrated the lunches that were provided for the PECFN lawyers and witnesses, each and every day of the Tribunal hearings held at Demorestville in 2013. I can't remember a day when I didn't see Myrna behind Eric and Natalie, or conferring with them at the meetings or making Lemon Thriller tea for Eric. She was a there through the entire ordeal when the ERT met in the County.

Then there was the idea of bioblitzes. It had become obvious during the hearings that we didn't know enough about the natural history: the flora and fauna, of the South Shore. If KFN could hold them she insisted, why couldn't PECFN? And thus began the annual PECFN bioblitzes of the South Shore, beginning at Ostrander Point in 2014, Point Petre in 2015, Little Bluff in 2016, Miller Family Nature Reserve in 2017, Charwell Point in 2018, NCC Hudgin-Rose property in 2019. At each and every event Myrna was our Chili chef, providing vegetarian and meat choices for the Saturday night "dinner". That had become her "job" and as with anything she decided to do, she excelled and we all looked forward to one or more bowls of her chili at the bioblitz.

After securing the future of Ostrander Point, Myrna worked with others to form an organization whose aim was to protect the whole south shore from development and thus the South Shore Joint Initiative (SSJI) was established, with Myrna as a founding member and Director of SSJI, and PECFN as one of the groups associated with it. A few years ago, she and Paula, another seamstress of renown, worked together to produce an amazing quilt that was then auctioned off to fund SSJI and its projects. As you can imagine, Myrna, in her quiet, methodic way, worked toward ensuring that the Monarch Point Conservation Reserve eventually became a reality.

Myrna always was able to surround herself with exceptional people to aid her with her many causes: Terry Sprague, Yvette and David Bree, Cheryl Anderson, Ted Cheskey, Paula Peel, Amy Bodman to name a few – but she was always the quiet driving force in the background. She acted as a behind the scenes adviser to Paula Peel to help organize an environmental

case against White Pines Industrial Wind Turbines at that ERT hearing, not that Paula would need help but it was always reassuring to have Myrna to confer with.

With Paula and Amy, she met with consultants to work on the environmental component of the new PEC Official Plan review. They all continued to send comments at every stage until the Official Plan was adopted, making important improvements to help protect the environment. Myrna was never one to shy away from complex issues such as writing the by-laws for PECFN, or modifying them, or working on our tax returns for the years after they became more complicated with the legal fee donations. She and Sheena made their way through a maze of government forms but they persevered.

As well as her advocacy role, Myrna wanted to do everything she could to support the Chimney Swift, a threatened species in Ontario.. She was an original member of the Chimney Swift group formed to survey for nesting and roosting chimneys in Picton, sending our data to Birds Canada. Every week throughout the summer, at least from 2012 – 2016, then less frequently until 2020 when the pandemic hit and then mainly just for the May-June annual survey nights, Myrna was an active participant either walking the streets or stationed in the parking lot behind Books and Company, observing that chimney and the yellow chimney beside it for swift activity.

In recent years, Myrna continued to sew and contribute her tote bags to be given as gifts to the PECFN presenters at monthly meetings. They received their gifts of wine and cheese in a lovely, environmentally friendly, reusable bag that would be a reminder of how much PECFN, particularly Myrna, appreciated their presentation.

In 2017, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of PECFN, a series of Awards honouring the club's founding members was established. The Myrna Wood Conservation Award, was aptly instituted to honour Myrna's many contributions to protecting nature in the County.

I can only imagine the number of submissions Myrna made to the Ontario Environmental Registry and to the Federal government, probably in the hundreds over the years, on a wide range of topics from Endangered Species, to actions for climate change and protection of habitats, always urging the government to do the right thing – generally the opposite of what they were proposing.

Myrna provided us with an example of what we can do. She gave us a history to be proud of. What she worked for and accomplished has moved conservation forward in the County. In this way she is still with us. She has been and will continue to be an inspiration to us all. It was an honour to know and work with Myrna over the years. She has left us a lasting legacy that we should continue to improve on – in her memory. She loved nature and she was determined to help nature, as should we.

Photos:

- Myrna was an avid gardener: here she is with her prized Peonies and some of her beloved Roses grown around her home on Queen St. (photos by Sandra Dowds) .
- Myrna was always enthusiastic about participating in the Millford Fair each September,
- Enjoying a good beer was one of Myrna's "guilty pleasures" (photo Amy Bodman)
- Terry and Myrna at Canada Trust holding the new PEPTBO pamphlet (Cheryl Anderson)
- Myrna and the PECFN Executive at Demorestville after the Ostrander Point ERT success.
- Eric Gillespie admiring a determined Myrna during the Ostrander Point ERT
- Myrna and Paula from PECFN 2018 Awards dinner taken by Allen Kuja. Paula was one of the recipients of the Myrna Wood Conservation Award in 2018.



World Wetlands Day Feb. 2, 2026: Lori Erwin



Beaver Meadow Conservation Area photo by Ron Erwin

Wetlands (marshes, swamps, bogs, and fens) around the world are disappearing at a rapid rate. These important ecosystems don't just provide habitat for wildlife and plants, but they help to control flooding and erosion, filter water pollutants, provide tourism and recreation opportunities, and even store carbon which helps to mitigate climate change. Their loss or disturbance can have serious consequences on our environment.

The only type of wetlands found in Prince Edward County are swamps and marshes. Fens and bogs are found in more northern regions of Ontario. But PEC wetlands are also under pressure from development and invasive species.

Ontario Nature's "Wetland Advocacy Guide" provides more information on the benefits of wetlands and what is putting these critical areas at risk in our region:

<https://catalog.ontarionature.org/wetland-advocacy-guide/page/1>

February 2, 2026 is World Wetlands Day (a United Nations designation). Its purpose is to raise awareness to help protect these critically important yet sensitive areas. See <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/en/about> for more information.

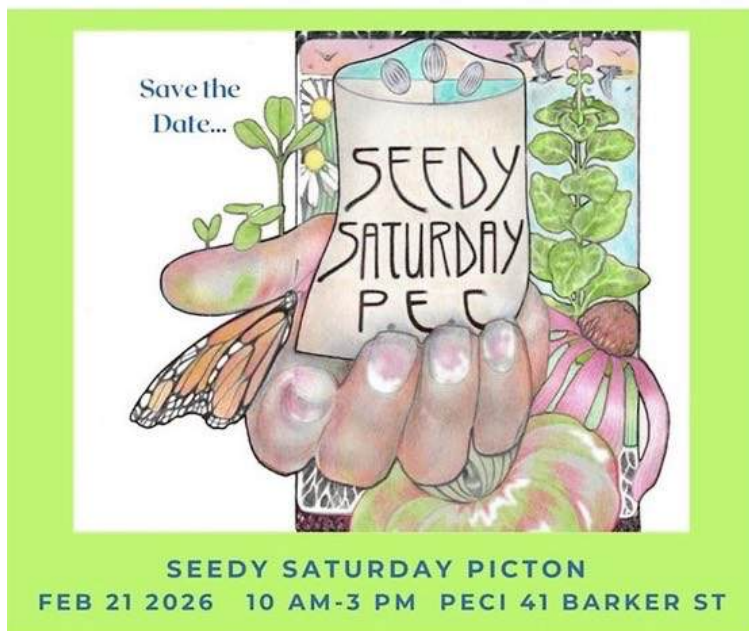


Slab Creek Swamp (Provincially Significant Wetlands) photo by Lori Erwin

PECFN member, Helen Fearman protests on Hwy 62



Join us at Seedy Saturday Sat 21 at the highschool in Picton



ZOOM: PECFN MEMBERS MEETING
7 pm, Tuesday, February 24, 2026
Jennifer Peaslee: Weird and Wonderful Wildlife
The Virginia Opossum

The Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) is North America's sole marsupial. Often viewed as nuisance animals, they possess remarkable traits that make them fascinating! They've been around since the age of dinosaurs, proving their ability to adapt. My goal is to provide some insight into their uniqueness and value, hopefully fostering some appreciation for this easygoing animal.

Due to climate change, opossums are expanding northward, even inhabiting Canada. Originally woodland dwellers, they've adapted to urban environments, thriving in cities with easy access to food and shelter. With a brief lifespan, opossums embrace life as nomadic omnivores, thriving at night, moving leisurely and using their keen sense of smell and sharp memory to find food.

Known as "Nature's Little Sanitation Engineers," they actually help manage pests and clean up rotting fruit and dead animals, making living with opossums nearly problem-free.



Jennifer Peaslee has been with the Cornell Wildlife Health Lab (CWHL) for nearly nine years and at Cornell University for over 14 years. She is the program's web content manager, communication/media contact, social media administrator, and an expert 'cat herder.'

Jennifer received her BSc in Entomology and a minor in Infectious Disease Biology from Cornell University. She received a graduate certificate in Creative Strategy from West Virginia University's College of Marketing Communications.

For Zoom link, email
gerry.jenkison@icloud.com

IN PERSON: PECFN MEMBERS MEETING

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Amy Bodman and Sheila Kuja: Protecting PEC's Natural Heritage: Natural Core Areas in Our Official Plan

We don't often recognize just how impressive PEC's natural heritage is, as the last stronghold for many rare habitats and species in Ontario. Much of this natural heritage is identified in 11 Natural Core Areas (NCAs) in the County's Official Plan, Schedule B. They include provincially

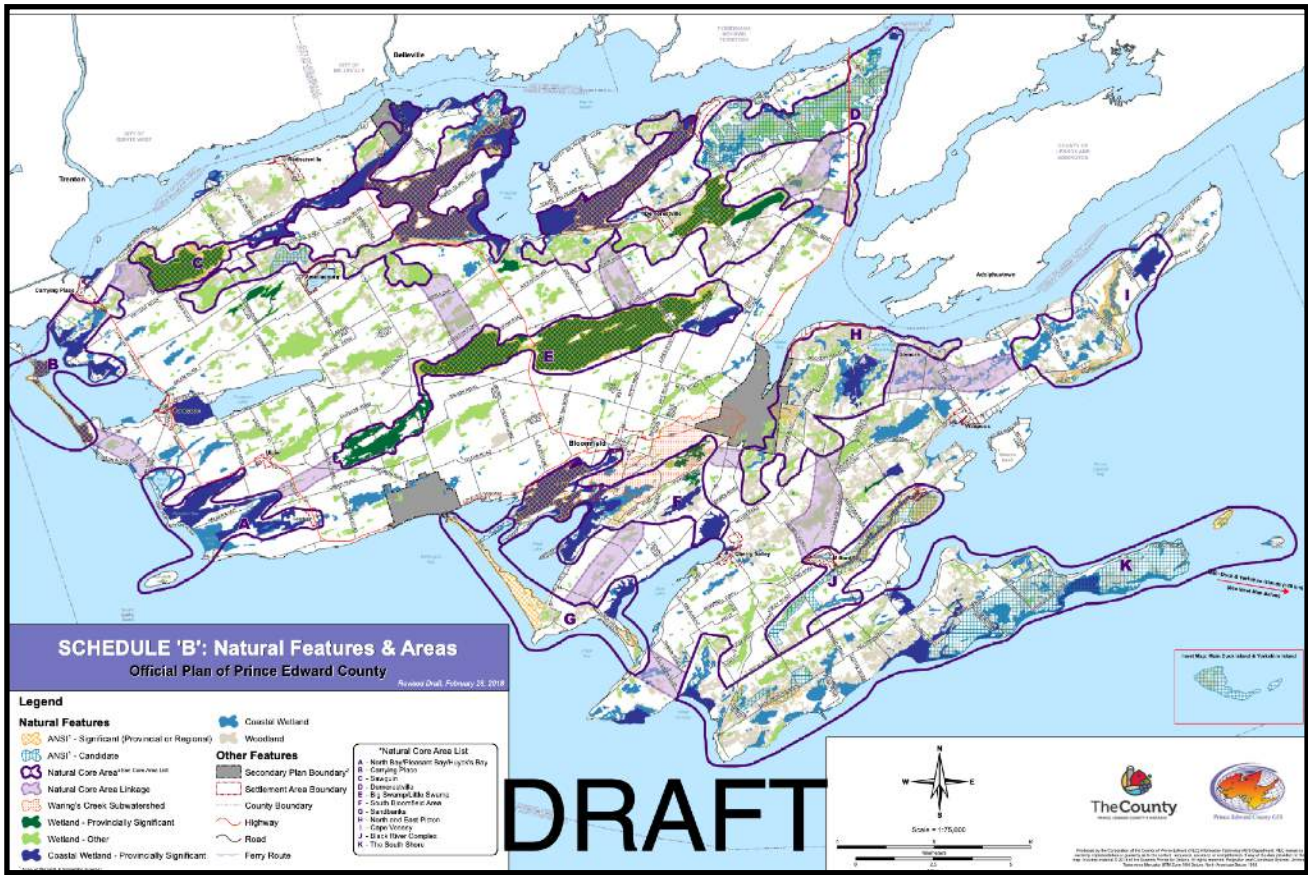
and regionally significant Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest and Provincially Significant Wetlands, including inland and coastal wetlands and the shorelines they encompass. Together with the spaces that link them, NCAs capture the County's most important natural heritage components. Preventing major development within them is essential for preserving our natural heritage. Amy Bodman has been a member of the PECFN Board since 2013 and is a past president. She has worked on many advocacy files, including making submissions and recommendations to the County and its consultants on Schedule B, the Natural Heritage section of PEC's Official Plan. Together with Sheila Kuja, Amy has worked on many projects to increase public awareness of the County's precious biodiversity and the diverse habitats that support it. Sheila Kuja has served on the PECFN Board since 2012. She volunteered at the PEPtBO banding station during spring and fall migration for a number of years. She has led botanical walks for PECFN on the South Shore and at



Habitat of Endangered Four-leaved Milkweed in Open Shagbark Hickory Forest. Photo: S Kuja, June 2025.

Massassauga Point C.A., and has co-led bird outings with Amy. Sheila has a Master's in Plant Taxonomy from U of T and has served as committee chair for PECFN bioblitzes from 2014 to 2023. She hopes to organize one at Green Point in 2026. PEC's biodiversity is a key area of interest for her.

THIS EVENT IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC – EVERYONE IS WELCOME!



County Natural Features & Areas

SAVE THE DATE!

PECFN MEMBERS MEETING
7 pm, Tuesday, April 28, 2026
Gavin Christie: The Importance, Protection, and Preservation of the Great Lakes

Members' Sightings: Ian Barker



Pair of overwintering American Herring Gulls on ice edge



Tundra Swan in late afternoon light, between feeds, water dripping from head dirty from foraging on the harbour bottom



Trumpeter Swan landing in the harbour

Immature Bald Eagle flying off over frozen West Lake with the remnants of the carcass of a Canada Goose

