Nova Scotia Outdoor Network

As part of NS Outdoor Network's work to connect the outdoor sector in Nova Scotia, we are collecting stories and data to both highlight and celebrate the work helping people connect with nature. Our aim with communicating these stories is to share the impact of the outdoor projects and initiatives, to help amplify the good work taking place, and to allow these stories to educate and inform other practitioners. If you have a story to share please contact us.

# South Shore – Art on the Trail

In 2018, Britt Vegsund, the Active Living Coordinator for Municipality of the District of Lunenburg (MoDL) at the time, embarked on a mission to bring exciting art to the trails of Lunenburg County. The goal was to encourage outdoor physical activity and invite more people to connect with nature and their communities via the trails networks.

Three years on, with two pieces established in MoDL on the Bay to Bay and Dynamite Trails as well as a further seven pieces recently launched around the trails in Chester we caught up with Britt along with Jody Conrad to find out more about the Art on the Trail projects.

Images above: L – RISE Art installation on the Adventure Trail (2020), R – Riverbank Habitat on Bay to Bay Trail (2018)

## What was your cue for this project? How did this come about?

For Britt in MoDL, the need came about from citizen surveys where residents stated they wanted to be active by walking more. There were also a lot of trails that people weren't using that was such an untapped resource. So for MoDL, they wanted to create something that would entice people to go find and use the trails.

***"We wanted it [the art] to be just far enough that you couldn't just park your car and see it but not too far that it was detrimental for people to get here." - Britt Vegsund***

*"Also, we wanted it to be as accessible as they can be on these trails for people with physical limitations. You could get here on a motorized wheelchair. Also, for families with little kids from that Trailhead there I think it's half a kilometre so it's like a reasonable distance for a young short-legged human to do. Here we wanted shade and we wanted to work with the natural beauty."*

For Jody Conrad, in the Municipality of the District of Chester, where seven art pieces were launched just in July/August 2021 the inspiration came from the work in MoDL. We spoke to Jody by one particular piece on the Chester Connector Trail by Gold River Reserve:

*"Because theirs was funded by a walkability grant the sighting of the art was a ways away from the community so people had to walk to get to it which is really smart and well done. Because ours is focused on community beautification our art pieces are all located at gateways to our local communities. When you're on the Rum Runner or Chester Connecter trail you don't necessarily have a sense of where you are - you wouldn't even know you're in the back of Gold River here! So our signage will welcome people to those communities."*

In Chester, the art pieces all have a unique way of introducing people to the local community, with one even using comic book stories:

*"For the comic they did they interviewed our Chester Heritage Society – the comic is all all focussed on the history of the Community of Middle River at the gateway to the community itself. That's the angle that we took for the project in general."*

Images above and right: Middle River Funnies in Middle River (2021).

*It's great to engage with Trail users but I also love that we now have seven pieces of community art that anyone can go anyone at all can go and two that you got to walk a bit to get to which is also great because that'll encourage maybe those folks who maybe aren't super active to go and find those other two."*

## What partnerships have been central to the success of this project? Who did you connect with to make this work?

For both MoDL and Chester one key partnership was with the local trails associations where the art would be located – the likes of the Rum Runner Trail Association and the Bay to Bay Trail Association. They formed part of the project committees and were kept apprised of what was going on.

L - Mirroring [In] Between: To See Ourselves [In] Nature -Gold River (2021)

R – Pencil Crayons – Chester Basin (2021)

For MoDL:

*"We partnered with as well as the trails coordinator at the beginning and then we partnered with the Lunenburg School of the Arts. So Douglas Bamford - a man about town in Lunenburg - he was our connection to the art world. Those were our big partnership connections and then of course the funding through what was Heart & Stroke and Walkabout grants for this one (Walkability through RNS provided funding for the 2019-20 piece) and so we created a working committee who came up with the proposed idea after the funding has come through and their job was to come up with a call for proposals."*

They went on to create an adjudication committee with more community members involved. Further to that, a key partner was the landowners of the neighbouring property to the art installations. With all these neighbours, associations and government bodies it took a large number of partnerships to have it all come together.

In the Municipality of the District of Chester, Jody highlighted some key partners engaged before and after the funding for the project was confirmed:

***"Acadia First Nation, Rum Runner Trail Association, Chester Art Centre, Friends of Nature Conservation Society. We had membership from all those groups in on choosing the artists and deciding which pieces were chosen." - Jody Conrad***

*"Chester Arts Centre definitely helped with those networks. One of the biggest eye-openers for me was how many artists there are in Nova Scotia and how many local artists in Lunenburg County we have and really good quality – so it wasn't an easy decision!"*

Jody went on to highlight more of the partnership they formed with Acadia First Nation,

*"It's been great to connect with Acadia First Nation…we connected through an entrepreneur here - Shannon who manages the gas station and restaurant facility here. She's been our champion here so finding the right person as we hear all the time but it's true if you find the right person who's gung-ho and she's been that for us. Connecting with her has allowed us to connect to some other First nation representatives that have been key".*

Jody and colleague Nadine Hankney from Chester Municipality are working on building the relationship with AFN and working on a ceremony specific to the art piece by the Gold River Community to welcome the art into the space.

## Why do you think this project has been successful? And how did you define success?

For Jody and Chester, who are at an earlier stage of the project having just launched the art pieces, the immediate focus is to create and measure the buzz created by the new art pieces.

*"We've asked people to check out the art pieces, take your selfies and send in the first three words that come to your mind when you look at the art piece. We'll measure how many submissions we're getting and what people are saying on social media. So far it's really good".*

Tree - Chester (2021)

Another way of encouraging people to get out to see all the art pieces is a partnership with Hike Nova Scotia creating a new Hiker Challenge badge – the Chester Art Adventures badge!

In MoDL, Britt identified some changes she would make were she to repeat the project:

*"I'd get a trail counter and I would do a month of counting on the trail for baseline data then I would build the thing and promote the thing and repeat, maybe three months post and six months post."*

*"Informally here in the aftermath of this whole thing being launched it was the winter and there were more people using the trail". At the launch of the first art piece on the Bay-to-Bay Trail a show of hands at the event showed over half the people were there on the trail for the first time. "So I think it works, I think it totally works to get people out and about".*

## What challenges did you come, or what barriers did you face in getting this project to where it is now?

*"I think doing seven at once was hard! I am super happy and impressed even though we were a little bit late with some of them. We had seven artists so that's pretty fantastic but it was a challenge like some of them especially during COVID-19 getting some of the supplies which is really limiting, personal things come up! Some also wanted to go bigger but we only have so much space to work with"*

Jody also mentioned a couple of instances where a risk-management perspective was needed to help alter materials used.

For Britt at MoDL, the main challenge was simply keeping everything on time but nothing surprising:

*"It wasn't a very contentious process and wasn't all that cumbersome. There were steps that we needed to take. Getting the committee together, finalising the RFP and making sure it was well promoted. I think we were behind are targeted dates if I remember correctly it was slower to build then we had anticipated. All kind of expected things to come up with these collaborative projects. We had a gracious landowners next door. Nothing was insurmountable that's for sure. Could maybe be trickier closer to an urban centre".*

## Sustainability of the project: how does the success of this inform or inspire other work?

Not only did the idea spread across the county leading to a total of nine Art Installations on the South Shore, but there have also been ideas to develop this work within both MoDL and Chester.

Jody:

***"I think too what's great about this project is the value-add that it brings and attracts a different group of people that wouldn't normally be on our trails." - Jody Conrad***

*"It connects trail users to our communities which is something that I think provincially there's a lot of work to do there. Going forward we'll measure how this goes whether it's formal or informal but maybe there is other value adds that we can bring to some of our green spaces other than trail work in our parks and even our community schools"*

For Britt and MoDL, the Art on the Trail project has inspired the municipality to keep going with continued funding in the budget so these installations will continue and Britt sees more opportunities related in this work:

*"South Shore has a strong artistic community and then linking it with nature and the need to move and get out and do stuff is I think is a good combo. When you do this kind of project it doesn't have to be like ours which is quite adults centric, just who we were working with. There's a world where these kinds of project could become programs for amazing opportunities, maybe for marginalized youth and programs that already exist that involve young people. There's a lot of leadership opportunities which would make an even cooler."*

Riverbank Habitat on Bay to Bay Trail (2018)

'Leave Only Footprints' in East River (2021)

Middle River Funnies in Middle River (2021)

## FURTHER LINKS:

The Municipality of Chester Trail Art

Municipality of the District of Lunenburg Art on the Trail

### PRESS COVERAGE:

CBC Article - If you go into the Woods (in Lunenburg) you'll find a big suprise
CKBW Article - Chester Receives Funding for Trail Art Project
Hike Nova Scotia - New Chester Art Adventures Hiking Challenge

Thank you for reading! If you have a story about great work happening in the outdoor sector please reach out! Contact Graham Mounsey at gmounsey@recreationns.ns.ca.

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