For Immediate Release

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TOPIC: **Gulf of Maine Council Partner Spotlight – Ecology Action Center Salt Marsh Restoration Project at Cheverie Creek**
LOCATION: Cheverie Creek, Nova Scotia

In December 1989, the governors and premiers of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia signed an agreement creating the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment (GOMC). The Council's efforts are focused on promoting sustainable development of marine and coastal resources, raising public awareness about the Gulf of Maine, and cultivating support for stewardship at the local level.

In preparation for the upcoming Gulf of Maine Summit, October 26-29, 2004 in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, the Gulf of Maine Council has launched a visibility campaign to share news related to the Summit and to highlight the efforts of partner organizations throughout the region working as stewards of the marine environment. The following information on Nova Scotia's Ecology Action Center is the fifth release in the series which will run through September 2004. This project was funded in part by a grant from the Habitat Restoration Partnership, a project of the Gulf of Maine Council and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Ecology Action Center, Salt Marsh Restoration at Cheverie Creek

The Ecology Action Centre (EAC) of Halifax, Nova Scotia is a non-government environmental group interested in the protection and restoration of salt marshes and tidal rivers. Salt marshes, also known as tidal marshes, are amongst the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world. Found in protected bays and estuaries and along tidal rivers, salt marshes form a transition zone between land and sea. Salt marshes are a natural component of the coastal ecosystem and in the Maritimes they represent the climax, or mature community for coastal flood plains.

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Functional salt marshes resemble grassy meadows complete with tidal creeks and salty ponds (salt pannes). They have often been referred to as the grasslands of the Atlantic Provinces. The low marsh, the area below mean high water, is flooded more regularly than the high marsh and at high tide much of its vegetation is actually underwater. The daily ebb and flood of the tide has a significant influence on the form and function of the salt marsh and is crucial to its well-being.

Salt marshes play a vital role in coastal ecosystem health. They help control coastal flooding and shoreline erosion, improve water quality, contribute significantly to coastal and marine food webs, and provide valuable habitat for fish, birds and other wildlife. They also reduce mosquitoes and the risk of flooding and provide neighboring communities with educational and recreational opportunities. Yet salt marshes around the Bay of Fundy are constantly threatened by activities such as dyking, ditching, and road construction. Salt marshes and tidal rivers with natural, unobstructed tidal flow have become a rarity around the Bay of Fundy.

In cooperation with local community groups and government agencies, the EAC has conducted field work in Hants County to assess the status of salt marshes and tidal rivers in the area. The Cheverie Creek salt marsh tidal river system was identified as one of a number of small to medium sized rivers in the county that is substantially restricted by inadequately sized and placed road crossings (causeways, culverts and bridges). We have contacted landowners who own property along the lower portion of Cheverie Creek in Hants County, and have been in consultation with them over the past three years of our project. It is believed that the Cheverie Creek and its associated salt marshes have a high potential to be restored to a healthy salt marsh and tidal river system through the replacement of the current culvert with a larger crossing.

Following two years of on-site ecological study, public consultation and government lobbying, we have secured the interest and commitment of the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Public Works (DOTPW) to replace the existing tidally restrictive culvert with a larger crossing. This will restore a more natural tidal flow to the system; improve fish passage, habitat, productivity and overall ecological integrity of the system. If completed this year, as we are hoping, the restoration of Cheverie Creek will have the distinction of being the first intentional salt marsh restoration project to be completed in the Bay of Fundy.

A community meeting was on June 15 at Dr. Arthur Hines Elementary School, as a follow up to the community events we conducted last summer and fall. At the meeting we provided updated information on the field work we doing, announced DOTPW's commitment to examining replacing options and discussed a number of aspects of the project with the members of the community who attended.

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The projected benefits from restoration will be:

Improved fish passage
Reduced mosquito populations
Habitat improvement for wetland vegetation, fish, birds and other wildlife
Reduced risk of flooding, and improved safety (reduce/eliminate dangerous whirlpools at the crossing)
Tourism, outdoor education and recreational opportunities

While we are awaiting new information from DOPTW, the Salt Marsh Restoration team is once again conducting its summer fieldwork at the Bass and Cheverie Creek marsh systems. This summer we will be continuing our ecological monitoring activities at the sites including collecting information on bird, mosquito, fish and vegetation populations, and testing salinity, sedimentation and groundwater levels. The data we are collecting at Cheverie Creek has helped us determine the right size of opening to improve the habitat quality and fish passage at the site. This baseline or pre-restoration data will help us track the changes that occur in the system once the crossing is replaced.

Bass Creek is our reference site and the data we collect allows us to compare mosquito, bird, fish populations and vegetation at an unrestricted site (Bass Creek) and in a tidally restricted system (Cheverie Creek). If you are interested in joining us on the marsh, please contact us to find out when we will be in the field next.

The EAC is actively building support for salt marsh restoration at Cheverie Creek through community outreach activities. A community can contribute significantly to a restoration project by sharing their knowledge of local tidal and land use history, and through future monitoring and care of the salt marsh. Before beginning any field data collection, the project team first contacts local landowners to explain the project and obtain their permission for data collection and eventual restoration.

Gradually, the wider community, including schools and local government, become involved in salt marsh restoration through education and outreach activities. Community meetings are a venue for the wider community to meet project staff, learn about the project, and exchange information about the marsh systems. Community meetings are also the forum to connect local residents with potential external supporters such as government agencies and to discuss restoration options for the site.

Ultimately, actual restoration work is the best outreach and education tool for promoting salt marsh restoration. The pilot restoration work at Cheverie Creek, West Hants, will be a venue for learning about and teaching about salt marsh restoration. Scientists and academics will study the re-establishment of salt marsh vegetation; children and teachers will learn more about salt marshes. And most importantly, the Cheverie site will be a catalyst showing other community groups and government agencies that restoration is possible.

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For more information, try the following or go to our website at ***www.ecologyaction.ca*** and see the ***links*** page for more resources:

School age kids (or those young at heart) will enjoy University of Rhode Islands virtual ***salt marsh field trip***
The Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management's downloadable handbook, ***A Volunteer's Handbook for Monitoring New England Salt Marshes***

Please feel free to contact us if you are interested in any additional information.

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Gulf of Maine Summit: Committing to Change

The Gulf of Maine Council and Global Programme of Action Coalition for the Gulf of Maine will host the **Gulf of Maine Summit: Committing to Change, October 26-29, 2004** in St. Andrews, New Brunswick. The Summit will bring together coastal experts, concerned citizens, fisheries and aquaculture representatives, businesses and leaders from around the Gulf of Maine to celebrate 15 years of partnerships, assess current environmental conditions, share knowledge and together develop plans for future actions needed to continue improving the environmental quality of the Gulf.

Prior to the Summit a State of the Gulf report will be produced based on a blend of information from both local watershed forums and scientific literature. The report will document environmental, economic, and social trends and conditions for three primary areas – contaminants, fisheries, and patterns of development. Using this report as a basis for discussion, Summit participants will work together to develop a clear vision of the future of the Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy region and design specific actions and strategies to get there. By developing a series of indicators we will be able to track our progress for years to come. Issues on the agenda include:

- Mechanisms/tools to enable and assist communities to move forward on local-level recommendations to protect and enhance the Gulf and its watershed.

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- Improvements to reporting mechanisms and indicators to be used for future reports.
- Priorities for research in the Gulf of Maine
- Priorities to integrate environmental monitoring and ocean observing via the Gulf of Maine Ocean Observing System.
- Improvements to state, provincial, and federal coastal & marine regulatory and planning programs.

The Summit promises an action packed agenda that seeks full participation from individuals working at all levels as stewards of the environmental health of the Gulf region. One way that the plans crafted at this meeting will be used is for consideration for the Councils next five year action plan. If you are committed to the on-going health of the Gulf of Maine's resources, attend the Summit and be a part of the plans for the future.

Time and Location:
The Summit will be held October 26-29, 2004 at the Fairmont Algonquin Hotel in St. Andrews, New Brunswick.

For additional Summit information: Visit the Summit website at- www.gulfofmainesummit.org.

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