

Fundy biosphere project moves forward

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New Brunswick students, environmental groups and tourism operators will be invited to join in the process of restoring the Bay of Fundy coastline into an environmental jewel through the ongoing UNESCO Fundy Biosphere Reserve project, the project's executive-director said yesterday.

Late last year, the New Brunswick side of the upper Bay of Fundy received its official designation as a biosphere reserve under the UNESCO program Man and the Biosphere.

Since then the project's executive-director, Peter Etheridge, has been busy planning the next moves and writing proposals for various studies and the requests for funding that will allow them to proceed. Etheridge says the first steps will be various studies to determine the environmental status of the area and how best to proceed in restoring the environment and then protecting it for the future. Since funding will likely be limited, the group will be calling on schools, students and various organizations to help push the project along.

The area covered under the United Nations biosphere designation stretches along the coastline from the Tantramar marshes in the east to St. Martins in the west and as far inland as the northern borders of Moncton. The area includes Fundy National Park and such tourism hotspots as Cape Enrage.

Etheridge describes it as one of the least-developed areas of the Atlantic coastline between Nova Scotia and the United States and worthy of protecting for nature-based tourism.

When the designation was announced last fall, the provincial government put up \$30,000 to support educational and scientific programs.

While the Fundy coastline is considered an environmental jewel, it is not without its nicks and scratches. Much of it has been cut up by roads, forestry operations, farming, mining and oil and gas exploration. At one time, there were so many lumber mills operating that streams were clogged with sawdust.

Etheridge said the first order of business will be the development of a baseline database of the forest and the species of plants, fish and animals that call it home. From there, it will be a monitoring project to see how it changes if and when environmental protection policies are brought into play. The next focus will be on the social and economic impacts of the forest and the idea of sustainable tourism.

Etheridge hopes to get students involved in the initial baseline database as class projects where they could have field trips to identify and study various types of plants and animals, then mark off a spot for continued study over time. Community and special interest groups could also get involved in the monitoring process.