



Submitted Photo

Tourism, Culture and Recreation Minister Julie Bettney, second from right, Flower's Cove Mayor Lorne Whalen, Jerry Yetman and Strait's Elementary School principal Geneva Woodward sign

the Limestone Barren's Stewardship Agreement. The agreement secures the protection of the limestone barren habitat and rare plants that grow in the area.

Agreements signed to protect rare plants, unique habitat

By CORY HURLEY
Star Staff Writer

FLOWER'S COVE

The strong efforts of the Limestone Barrens Habitat Stewardship Program (LBHSP) went a long way towards the protection of the limestone barrens habitat and the rare plants located on the Northern Peninsula.

Tourism, Culture and Recreation Minister Julie Bettney announced the signing of three stewardship agreements in the Town of Flower's Cove on the province's Northern Peninsula.

The agreements are a part of the LBHSP, which is funded through the federal government's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk. The agreements create partnerships between the province and the Town of Flower's Cove, Straits Elementary School and individual residents of the Flower's Cove area.

The plant life of the limestone barrens contributes greatly to the biodiversity of the province. The Strait of Belle Isle Eco-region on the Northern Peninsula fosters a significant number of rare or unique species, including Long's Braya (designated endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) and Fernald's Braya (listed as threatened). In 1997, a recovery team was established to develop a plan to protect and conserve these species.

"Newfoundland and Labrador is home to an unusual number and variety of rare or unique plants," Bettney said. "Government is committed to protecting and conserving them."

"We passed the Endangered Species Act to help do just that, and we will continue to work on good environmental stewardship with other government and community partners. The stewardship agreements we are signing today (Wednesday) show our ongoing commitment."

Dulcie House, co-ordinator of the LBHSP, was thrilled at the turn-out during the event and the prospects for the future.

"The attendance at the ceremony, approximately 250 people, was incredible," she said. "I believe it will result in the development of new partnerships, creating a whole network of people who care about the limestone barrens habitat and the rare plants that live there."

"There are plants here on the Northern Peninsula that are not just unique to Newfoundland, but to the whole world. The residents take pride in the fact they have something unique to the world right in their backyards."

Government has participated actively in a very successful Municipal Wetland Stewardship Program through involvement with the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture. The other primary partners in the joint venture are Environment Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

For the past three years, the Town of Flower's Cove has partnered with the Braya Recovery Team in sponsoring a Conservation Corps Green Team that has directed efforts to promote stewardship throughout Flower's Cove and the adjacent communities in order to help protect and conserve their piece of the Strait of Belle Isle Eco-region. The town's agreement identifies a significant limestone barrens habitat within its jurisdiction and commits to participation in and support for conservation efforts.

Straits Elementary School is party to the second agreement, which reinforces their support for good environmental stewardship. The school, located in Flower's Cove, is the centre of education for children from adjacent communities. Straits Elementary staff are taking advantage of this unique opportunity to teach their students about the limestone barrens and species at risk by using examples in their own back yards.

These examples would include Long's Braya and Fernald's Braya, which exist only in a very few locations. In some instances, the endangered Long's Braya is located on or near private property, making support by the landowner essen-

tial to conservation. Two of these landowners, Ren and Madeline White, are signing a stewardship agreement that demonstrates their commitment to actively promote conservation.

"Recovering species now at risk and preventing species from becoming at risk is everyone's responsibility," Bettney said. "These stewardship agreements with the residents, school community and municipal government of Flower's Cove are excellent examples of co-operative stewardship and will help ensure that our wealth of plant life and their habitats are there to be appreciated by future generations."

House said the future is bright with so many people working together with the same goals in mind.

"The government, Straits Elementary School, the Town of Flower's Cove and landowners have all committed to sharing in responsibility of caring for this fragile habitat," House said. "The students of Straits Elementary School have reinforced the awareness message being implemented through the LBHSP."

"The enthusiasm expressed by these students has certainly laid the groundwork for conservation at their school and for other schools and communities."

House said the ceremony revealed how open the door is for future opportunities for the LBHSP.

"With these various groups working together, that's going to enable the program to move forward into other areas of stewardship. The next step for us will include providing opportunities for more people to become involved and to establish new partnerships," House said. "We would like to assist schools in the development of curriculum regarding the limestone barrens habitat. In the next few months, we plan to hold workshops on the peninsula."

"This event created an opportunity for the LBHSP to share information and to provide a greater awareness of this special place. We were able to disseminate this information to people who may not have otherwise been exposed to it."