

RNS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

2026

**GET INSPIRED.
LEARN. CONNECT.**



CONFERENCE PROGRAM

OCTOBER 14-15, 2026

THE BEST WESTERN TRURO - GLENGARRY

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P'JILASI, BIENVENUE, WELCOME!

Welcome to the 2026 Recreation Nova Scotia Annual Conference!

This year, we are proud to gather in Nova Scotia's beautiful Fundy Region under the theme *Waves of Impact: Elevating the Power of Recreation in Nova Scotia*.

Like the powerful tides that define the Bay of Fundy, recreation has the ability to create lasting change. Every program, partnership, volunteer, and leader contributes to a ripple effect that strengthens communities, supports health and well-being, and creates opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to thrive.

We invite you to learn, connect, and be inspired alongside recreation professionals, volunteers, students, municipal leaders, and community partners from across the province.

Together, we'll explore new ideas, celebrate achievements, and discover innovative ways to elevate the impact of recreation in our communities.

Thank you for being part of this year's conference. We hope you leave with new knowledge, meaningful connections, and renewed energy to continue creating waves of impact across Nova Scotia.

As the conference will take place at the Glengarry in Truro, we acknowledge that the Town of Truro is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaw People, and is subject to the Treaties of Peace and Friendship. The Town of Truro is situated in a region long inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, with neighboring communities like Wékopekwithk, Millbrook First Nation.



Did You Know...

We'kwampekik
(Truro Area, Colchester County)
translates to
"the bay runs far up"

Wékopekwithk
(Millbrook)
translates to
"as far as the water will flow" or
"the end of the water's flow"

Conference Sponsors

Thank you to our generous sponsors for making this conference possible.

Award Banquet



LIFESAVING SOCIETY
The Lifeguarding Experts

Gold



Bronze



Special Thanks to Our Funding Partner



Colchester
be centred here.

Schedule at a Glance

October 13 - Pre-Conference

2:00 - 7:00	Truro Golf & Country Club	See session description on page 6
4:00 - 6:00	Victoria Park Walk & Talk	See session description on page 6
7:00	Social Gathering	See session description on page 6

October 14 - Day 1

9:30 - 10:00	Registration	Conference Area Lobby
10:00 - 10:30	Welcome Ceremony	Ballroom D/G/E
10:30 - 11:15	Opening Keynote	See session description on page 7
11:20 - 12:20	Breakout Session #1	See session description page 7-8
12:20 - 1:25	Lunch & Exhibitor Showcase	Ballroom D/G/E & MacDonald Room A/B
1:30 - 3:00	RNS AGM	Ballroom D/G/E
3:00 - 3:30	Break/Travel to off site venue	-
3:30 - 5:00	Off-Site Venue Walk and Talks or Additional In-Hotel Sessions	See session description page 9
5:30 - 6:00	Award Winner's Reception	Ballroom A
6:00 - 8:00	Award Dinner and Banquet	Ballroom D/G/E
8:30 - 10:00	Regional Games	Ballroom D/G/E

October 15 - Day 2

8:00 - 9:00	Breakfast	Dining Room
9:00 - 10:00	Demonstrating the Impact of Rec	See session description pages 10
10:00 - 11:00	Breakout Session #2	See session description page 10-11
11:00 - 12:00	CPRA Framework Review	See session description page 11
12:00 - 12:15	Closing Ceremonies	Ballroom D/G/E

Session Description

Pre-Conference

October 13

Optional

Truro Golf & Country Club

Date: Oct 13 | Time: 2:00-7:00 | Location: 86 Golf St, Truro, NS

Overview: Start your conference experience with a relaxing round of golf at the beautiful Truro Golf & Country Club. As a special pre-conference offering, attendees can enjoy discounted green fees while connecting with fellow recreation professionals in a casual setting before the conference begins.

24 Tee times available at an RNS Conference Special Rate between 2:06pm - 2:51pm.

Preferred tee times are not guaranteed.

Cost: \$40 Tax included for 18 holes, \$25 Tax included for 9 Holes, Power Cart Rates are \$36 tax included for 18 holes and \$18 tax included for 9 holes.

To be paid on site.

Optional

Victoria Park Walk & Talk

Scott Holman | Urban Forest and Victoria Park Supervisor

Date: Oct 13 | Time: 4:00-6:00 | Location: 29 Park Road, Truro, NS

Overview: The hike will highlight the ongoing impacts and recovery efforts following Hurricane Fiona, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) prevention initiatives, healthy forest research, including an internal salamander study, and some of the unique traditions and "folklore" that have shaped Victoria Park over the years.

This will be a great opportunity to learn more about the park's natural environment, history, and ongoing stewardship efforts.

Optional

Pre-Conference Dinner & Social

Date: Oct 13 | Time: 7:00 | Location: TBD

Overview: Join us for a relaxed pre-conference dinner featuring good food and great company. Enjoy a meal, catch up with colleagues, and ease into the conference before things get underway.

Costs are the responsibility of the conference delegate and are payable on site.

Day 1 October 14

Opening Keynote

The Power of Connection: How Recreation Supports Mental Wellness

Starr Cunningham | Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia

Date: Oct 14 | Time: 10:30-11:15 | Location: Ballroom D/G/E

Overview: Connection is one of the strongest contributors to mental wellness and recreation professionals foster connection every day. Drawing on community initiatives across Nova Scotia, including the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia's Body Movin' campaign, this session will explore how recreation strengthens belonging, reduces isolation, and supports mental wellness through connection, movement, purpose, and engagement. Attendees will gain practical strategies to communicate and elevate the impact of their work in getting people moving while helping build healthier, more connected communities.

Breakout Session #1 Options

Date: Oct 14 | Time: 11:20-12:20

Inclusion is a Team Sport: Collaborative Approaches to Municipal Recreation

Bekah Craik, Hannah Terasco, and Corrie Melanson | Active Abilities Canada and Sea Change Collab

Overview: Creating inclusive recreation opportunities requires more than accessible programs—it requires the leadership, relationships, collaboration, and organizational culture that make inclusion part of everyday practice. In this interactive session, participants will explore how collaboration, co-design, and organizational change can help municipalities move from good intentions to meaningful action. Through real-world recreation scenarios, guided discussion, and practical activities, participants will reflect on their own organizations, identify opportunities for change, and learn approaches they can adapt within their communities. Participants will leave with practical tools, fresh ideas, and one meaningful action they can begin putting into practice right away.

Elevate your Impact on Nova Scotians Affected by Dementia

Beth House | Alzheimer Society Nova Scotia

Overview: Join Beth House from the Alzheimer Society NS to learn how Recreation professionals can elevate their impact for the 18,800 Nova Scotians living with dementia in your communities. Discover simple ways to be more inclusive and accessible, options for further free education and how ASNS can support you. A dementia friendly community supports, respects and includes people living with dementia and their partners in care in the places they live, work and PLAY.

Shared Digital Infrastructure for Connected Communities

Laura Duggan | PlayFinder

Overview: Communities recognize the value of recreation, investing significant time and resources into programs, facilities, natural spaces, equipment, and events, yet opportunities often remain underutilized as access is fragmented across organizations, municipalities, and platforms - creating barriers to participation and limiting their collective impact.

This session explores how shared digital community recreation infrastructure is strengthening collaboration, supporting recreation professionals and community volunteers, improving access, and generating meaningful data to inform planning and investment.

Through real-world Community Access case studies from Nova Scotia, participants will discover how connected communities are creating network effects that make recreation easier to discover and access within and across county boundaries while laying the foundation for provincial and national collaboration.

Beyond Participation: Creating the Conditions for Impact

Jessica Spooner | Founder of Blue Bark & Co.

Overview: Recreation organizations invest significant effort in attracting participants, but what if lasting impact depends on investing just as intentionally in the people who create opportunities for others?

Drawing on graduate research and the transformation of Cycling Nova Scotia's Women on Wheels program from 25 to 115 members in 18 months, this session explores how training, practical resources, peer connection, and ongoing support can unlock capacity and expand recreation opportunities. Participants will examine what happens when organizations move beyond simply delivering programs and instead create the conditions for people to contribute, connect, and sustain opportunities in their communities. Attendees will leave with a practical framework for identifying untapped capacity and strengthening the people and relationships that multiply recreation's impact.



Off-Site Venue Walk/Talks & Additional Sessions

Date: Oct 14 | Time: 3:30-5:00

Off-site

Railyard Mountain Bike Park

Location: 627 Young Street, Truro, NS - Transportation on your own

Overview: Visit the Railyard Mountain Bike Park in Truro's Victoria Park, one of Atlantic Canada's premier mountain biking destinations. With over 40 kms of trails for all skill levels and recent upgrades, including a pump track, trailhead amenities, and improved facilities, the Railyard showcases how community partnerships and strategic investment have created a free, accessible recreation asset that supports active living and outdoor tourism.

Off-Site

Battalion #2 Grounds

Location: 57 Golf Street, Truro NS - Group walk from hotel or transportation on your own

Overview: Explore the modern multi-sport complex built on a site of profound historical significance. Once the training and drilling grounds for the No. 2 Construction Battalion - the first and only all-Black battalion in Canadian military history - this facility blends recreation with remembrance.

On-Site

Why Recreation Facilities Have a Key Role to Play in Inclusion?

Gilles Roue | ZeroLimits

Overview: This presentation outlines a three-part structure addressing disability and recreation. The first part identifies the various barriers that prevent people with disabilities or mobility challenges from participating in activities and sports. The second part zooms in on one specific barrier, the high cost of adaptive equipment, and unpacks the different factors that drive those costs up. The third part shifts focus to recreation facilities themselves, examining the key role they play in fostering inclusion, going beyond just the financial dimension to look at how and why these spaces matter for accessibility more broadly.

On-Site

Plogging: Community and Environmental Impacts

Luke MacDonald, Jesse Sharratt and Kelsey Harvey | University of Cape Breton

Overview: "Plogging" combines physical activity, such as walking or running, with picking up litter. In this session, we will introduce you to plogging, how people engage with plogging (including the tools people use), and how to adapt plogging for people of different ages and abilities, as well as urban and rural communities. You will experience plogging and be introduced to resources, such as WorldLitterRun.com, a platform to turn plogging into measurable community benefit: ploggers pick, taggers log, businesses fund the cleanup of the areas in which they operate, and the money flows to charities the ploggers choose.

Day 2 October 15

Plenary Session

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 9:00-10:00

Demonstrating the Impact of Recreation

Location: Ballroom D/G/E

Overview: Recreation plays a vital role in community quality of life, health, well-being, connection, and belonging. This engaging plenary panel brings together recreation leaders and decision makers to explore how we capture, measure, and communicate recreation's impact in ways that demonstrate its value and build the case for investment. Panelists will share perspectives and practical approaches for using data, outcomes, and community stories to show decision makers why recreation matters—and why investing in recreation is an investment in thriving communities.

Breakout Session #2 Options

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 10:00-11:00

Retention of Permanent Rec Employees: Is It All About the Money?

Jen Heddon | Cole Harbour Place

Overview: This interactive session explores the factors that influence job satisfaction and employee retention among permanent employees in the recreation sector. Drawing on research conducted in Nova Scotia by Jen Heddon, the presentation examines whether compensation is the primary driver of retention or whether other workplace factors play an equally important role. Participants will gain insights into the impact of work-life balance, supervisory support, working conditions, and compensation on employees' decisions to remain with their organization.

In addition to reviewing key research findings, attendees will engage in facilitated group discussions and collaborative activities to reflect on their own workplace experiences and share strategies for addressing retention challenges. Through peer learning and practical dialogue, participants will identify actionable approaches that recreation leaders and organizations can use to enhance employee satisfaction, strengthen retention efforts, and build a more sustainable workforce.

Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Tots: Physical Literacy Enriched Play Spaces

Dr. Angie Kolen | St. Francis Xavier University, Human Kinetics

Overview: This presentation will share the successes of two popular movement programs Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Tots. Fit 4 Life is a low organized games program offered after school 3 days per week to children in grades 3 and. Fit 4 Tots is a movement exploration program offered as a drop-in program for children not yet in school. Both programs are created with physical literacy in mind and are used as experiential learning tools for university students and to promote physical activity in the Antigonish community.

You Need Program Evaluation, We Can Help! Work with Universities

Luc Cousineau | Dalhousie University

Overview: Curious about how to evaluate your programs but short on time, capacity, or expertise? This session explores how recreation organizations can partner with universities to conduct meaningful program evaluations that support decision making and demonstrate impact. Discover how academic partnerships can support program evaluation needs while creating hands on learning opportunities that introduce students to the breadth and impact of recreation programming across Nova Scotia. Learn about a collaborative model that benefits practitioners, supports student development, and strengthens connections between the recreation sector and post-secondary education. The session will share lessons learned from a successful university-municipal partnership in Nova Scotia and provide practical ideas for developing similar collaborations.

The Role of Recreation in Addressing Complex Social Issues

Josie Hatfield and Anna Haanstra | Tri-County Youth Wellbeing Network and CCTH

Overview: The partnership and mission-driven work of the Tri-County Youth Wellbeing Network (YWN) demonstrates how recreation facilities and youth-centered spaces can be powerful partners in addressing youth disconnection. Following the 2023 Youth Wellbeing Summit that used a tailor-made 8 domains of wellbeing framework, more than 50 local youth identified low levels of wellbeing and insufficient welcoming places and spaces where they felt they belonged and welcomed. In response, the YWN, with its front-line service providers coalition, partnered with the local recreation facility to launch regular Teen Takeover Nights—an initiative that has become central to the network's success in putting youth voice at the heart of collective efforts to improve youth wellbeing. This presentation explores how recreation's greatest contribution may not be the programs it delivers, but the sense of belonging it creates, and the role recreation can play as a key partner in building healthier, more connected communities for young people.

Plenary Session

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 11:00-12:00

Renewed Framework for Recreation & Parks in Canada

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 11:00-12:00 | Location: Ballroom D/G/E

Overview: The Canadian Parks & Recreation Association (CPRA) heard from more than 2,500 people across Canada through 2024-2025 to help craft a renewed Framework for Recreation & Parks in Canada, with a purpose of guiding and inspiring the collective work of the sector.

While The Framework will still be in draft form until early 2027, this session will draw upon key ideas from the renewed Framework for exploration in a Nova Scotian-context.



ADDITIONAL PROGRAM DETAILS

COMING SOON