

Ecological restorationists work with nature to heal coastlines *Nathaniel Hendry*



Rosmarie Lohnes says coastal property owners can play a vital role in supporting our coastlines.

If winter weather has you dreaming of getting out in your yard as early as possible in the spring, Rosmarie Lohnes has some low-cost suggestions for things you can plan to do yourself. Lohnes is the CEO of Helping Nature Heal, a Bridgewater-based firm of ecological restorationists working to reduce coastal erosion and the effects of climate change for Nova Scotia property owners.

She says changes as small as mowing in circles instead of lines, diversifying the species you plant, and reducing the hard-surface area on your property can all improve your land's resistance to erosion. Says Lohnes, "When above-ground water flow can account for up to 40 percent of the erosion rate, reducing the amount of paved or compacted surfaces in favour of more penetrable materials can win

half the battle for you." Over the past 23 years, Lohnes and her team have supported coastal remediation along Nova Scotia's South Shore, as well as in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Quebec. Lohnes says there are now plans for international growth.

In response to coastal loss that averages one metre per year, Helping Nature Heal promotes land-management practices intended to reduce the rate of erosion, which is worsened by unseasonal conditions. This is achieved through landscaping techniques and naturalized plants whose root systems reduce soil degradation and loss.

Lohnes says there is a definite connection between "management and mentality." "The hope is to move away from domination, or ownership, towards stewardship," she says. "Asking ourselves how we can serve the land so that the land can continue to serve us." Helping Nature Heal also uses and promotes a biostimulant (a natural product that stimulates natural plant growth and hardiness).

Another initiative from the team is Shore Up, a workshop to foster resilience and self-sufficiency in municipalities, non-government organizations, and community groups by working with them to complete each step of the coastal protection process together, and providing education on skills and methods to manage the land in the future. By providing participants with an understanding of the various factors at play in erosion and erosion prevention, property owners become stewards, with a healthy and informed relationship with the land under their management.

In promoting collaboration and scientifically informed decisions,

Lohnes says Helping Nature Heal hopes to alleviate some of the growing climate anxiety of recent years. Encouraging optimism comes naturally to Lohnes.

"Nature has already demonstrated a lot of the answers to us," she says. "By mimicking those systems and adding in new science and research, there should be no problem that we can't solve."

For more information on courses and other services Helping Nature Heals offers, visit the firm's website: helpingnatureheal.com.

Nathaniel Hendry has a BSc in environmental sciences and specializes in environmental communications.



Peggy's Cove. Photo credit: Nathaniel Hendry

Why mow in circles?

Rosmarie Lohnes, CEO of Helping Nature Heal, says there are two reasons to mow in circles instead of straight lines.

Yes, it's snow-shovelling season not lawn-mowing season, but when spring does return, here's some information on why Lohnes recommends mowing in circles. One reason is erosion.

"If you mow in straight lines year over year, you will create compaction, which reduces drainage. You will also create a very small ditch that forms and becomes a freeway for water to escape your yard. The escaping water takes soil with it."

The other reason for mowing in circles is to create small wild areas at the edges of your property.

"If you don't mow the corners, you're giving creatures like butterflies, bees, and birds a small zone of safety," says Lohnes. "Pollinators can quickly retreat from open areas in your yard to those safer zones, which helps make your property a more attractive place for them."

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Vision rehab after brain injury helps support recovery *The Masthead News Staff*

After working for two decades as a primary-care optometrist, Dr. Angela Dobson says she had a "thunderbolt realization" 11 years ago that took her into a different area of optometry.

"We were sent some people with post-concussion problems from a sports medicine doc, and she said she really needed an optometrist trained in concussion recovery for her patients."

That conversation piqued Dobson's interest in neuro-optometry, a treatment approach for people with visual issues, including those from brain injury. She decided to enroll in a 5-day course and on day 2, she had her thunderbolt moment.

"Many things I was learning were so different from primary care," she says. "I realized I needed to do this work."

Following hundreds of hours of specialized training she opened Vision Sense Optometry, located in Bayers Lake, in 2016. The practice focuses exclusively on neuro-optometry.

The knowledge involved in neuro-optometry has been around for 80 or more years, says Dobson, "but because concussions are affecting a lot of high-profile people, the subject has come to the fore."

The vision problems associated with concussion happen in the brain, in what Dobson calls the "visual programming—the



Neuro-optometrists Alice Yuan (left) and Angela Dobson.

software." These problems may include eye pain, fluctuating, double, blurred or painful vision, headaches, light sensitivity, dizziness or unsteadiness, and inability to read, work on a computer, or scroll on a device.

The symptoms can make it difficult to function.

"Let's say we're having a coffee with a friend," she says. "We're able to focus on our conversation, and we're filtering out other things, but after a brain injury, your filtering system is not able to do its job. It's overwhelming—like your brain is running a marathon all the time."

Treatment begins with a detailed assessment, using specialized equipment to very precisely assess how the patient's eyes are moving and whether the eyes are working together.

"There are many different eye movements," says Dobson. "For example, there are quick ones

when you're reading, and another type when you're following a target. I can determine if any of these aren't working correctly."

Treatment may involve vision therapy – specific exercises to aid recovery – and therapeutic glasses, with a prescription that will change throughout the recovery process.

Dobson says children with learning difficulties may have similar vision difficulties as someone with a brain injury. The other optometrist at Vision Sense, Dr. Alice Yuan, is residency trained and has a special interest in pediatric developmental vision.

"I am so grateful to have realized my dream to offer visual solutions to people recovering from brain injuries and those in need of visual development," says Dobson, who adds, "And I am very thankful to team with Dr. Alice, with her expertise."

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