



MEDIA RELEASE

- For Immediate Release -

Valley Waters Officially Opens Visitor Information and Fossil Centre

New Village Celebrates 350 Million Years of History with New Centre

(Thursday 17 July 2024, Norton, NB) Shortly after the new municipality of Valley Waters was formed in 2023, the new Mayor and Council identified “Tourism Development” as one of several key focus areas for its mandate.

Officials of the new government were already planning to construct a modest Visitor Information Centre when they were approached by staff of the New Brunswick Museum, seeking support for an international scientific publication regarding the discovery of a bizarre new species of fossil tree in the local area. The Council agreed to support it, and the genesis of a plan to include local fossil history with the tourism development was born.

Fossil finds are not new to the area, which has a rich history of fossil discoveries dating back to the early 1900’s. In 2004, NBM palaeontologist Dr. Randy Miller discovered a 350-million-year-old fossilized forest with over 700 trees. The area has captured the imagination of geologists and earth science professionals ever since.

In 2008, the Council for the former Village of Norton undertook a feasibility study for the development of a Fossil Forest Centre. Unfortunately, funding could not be secured and the project did not materialize. However, locals never lost sight of the opportunity.

According to Mayor Randy McKnight, “We have always known that the entire Valley Waters area is rich in natural history, including significant fossil finds throughout the region... from Norton to Wickham. We want to celebrate and interpret these exciting discoveries of international importance taking place on our doorstep. To have an opportunity to work with the New Brunswick Museum and the UNESCO Stonehammer GeoPark seemed like a no-brainer to help us bring the story to life in a credible way in our new Visitor Information and Fossil Centre.”

Matt Stimson, Assistant Curator of Palaeontology at the New Brunswick Museum, who helped with the installation of the fossils at the new Centre, agrees. “This is a two-way partnership which benefits not only Valley Waters, but also benefits the research community by profiling a lifetime of incredible scientific work in the local area,” he says.

Stimson adds, “When our team discovered a brand-new tree, fossilized in 3D in Norton in 2017, we knew the world would be interested. That tree is unlike any other tree in the fossil record or in modern

forests. It has been a lengthy process to have the science verified and the results publicized. We're thrilled to now be able to tell the story, in Valley Waters, where the fossil was actually discovered."

The scientific publication ultimately gained worldwide attention, including coverage by CNN, the Wall Street Journal, NY Times, Globe and Mail, and CBC, and as a result, it is expected that the Valley Waters area will continue to attract local and international paleontology researchers.

Catrina Russell-Dolan, Programs and Operations Manager for Stonehammer UNESCO Global Geopark, designed the fossil interpretative material and assisted with the installation. She says Valley Waters has much to celebrate. "This is so exciting. This area which is so rich in fossil history is now considered to be the Gateway to the GeoPark. We look forward to working with Valley Waters staff to further develop programming that can be offered through the new Centre."

Mayor McKnight says Council is pleased with the way the new Centre has come together so quickly. He says, however, that it is just the beginning. "Valley Waters has a significant natural, cultural, and industrial history. We expect this story will gain significant public interest and we have an opportunity to develop an exciting, worthwhile visitor experience that our own residents will be proud of."

He adds that Council considers this to be a building year. "We have a long-term view toward enhancing tourism, including geo-tourism, in our area. Excursions, educational programs, recreation and retail opportunities, and a larger Interpretation Centre are just a few of the ideas we are exploring."

The Valley Waters Visitor Information and Fossil Centre is located at 10 Municipal St., Norton. The Official Opening is scheduled at **11:00 a.m., Tuesday, July 23**. Everyone Welcome!

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Contact:

Angela McLean
Chief Administrative Officer
Valley Waters
506-839-3013
cao@valleywaters.ca