



AHOI Dives into Marine Research Program with New Partnerships and Submersible ROV Technology

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Norris Point, N.L.- Atlantic Healthy Oceans Initiative (AHOI) is taking its marine conservation work to new heights — or rather, depths. The non-profit organization, known for its plastic-waste reduction work with coastal communities and along beaches, is teaming up with Bonne Bay Marine Station, Grenfell Campus of Memorial University (BBMS) and the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) for its new project, ***gathering baseline data to enrich a marine network plan for protection and sustainable livelihoods in the Gros Morne region of western, N.L.***

AHOI will conduct underwater research using a professional drone that can reach a depth of 300 meters and withstand harsh conditions. Using the Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV), AHOI will map out, film, and analyze 15 sites thought to have important marine habitats and species by scientific experts and local fish harvesters. This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada.

“Offering recommendations for increased protection in an area where many communities depend on the ocean for their livelihoods is not something we do lightly,” explains Rebecca Brushett, AHOI founder and Marine Planning and Engagement Coordinator with the EAC. “This new technology will not only allow us to identify important marine species and habitats that may need protection, but it will also inform the marine spatial plan EAC is building with the region. To add to this, we will also have the ability to assess any environmental damage that may need to be addressed.”

This project will ground truth areas where certain species and activities have been said to occur, such as aquatic invasive species, rare, sensitive or at-risk species; spawning sites for fish stocks in the critical or cautious zone, historic oil spill or dumping sites; and natural seepage sites, to name a few.

“Areas such as Bonne Bay are of critical importance for biodiversity and are likely to be highly sensitive to climate change,” says Professor Duncan McIlroy, Director of the

BBMS. "The region lies at a critical position in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where warm waters of the Gulf interact with cold isolated fjord basins such as the Eastern Arm of Bonne Bay. There is an urgent need for marine protection combined with baseline studies and community outreach that AHOI is uniquely placed to provide."

The data collected will feed into a larger body of work as well. EAC, a project partner, is currently working with communities in the Gros Morne region to create a marine spatial plan for the region. The baseline data gathered using the drone will strengthen the plan and help identify ways to have a sustainable blue economy while also conserving areas of the ocean that need it most.

"One of the challenges with marine planning is that we often run into knowledge gaps because it is so difficult to study marine species in deep and cold areas. This creates a lot of uncertainty in the planning process," says Jordy Thomson, Senior Marine Coordinator with the EAC. "Having a research-grade drone to work with will allow us to gather some really amazing information and footage to inform conversations with communities."

Over the next year, AHOI will conduct research in the coastal and marine management areas throughout Bonne Bay, St. Paul's Inlet and the coastal regions surrounding the towns of Glenburnie - Birchy Head - Shoal Brook (GBS), Woody Point, Norris Point, Rocky Harbour, Cow Head, St. Paul's, and Trout River. All 7 municipal councils support this project and AHOI looks forward to showcasing what they find with the public and creating solutions with the region to improve the health of these marine ecosystems.

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About Atlantic Healthy Oceans Initiative (AHOI):

[Atlantic Healthy Oceans Initiative](#) is a registered non-profit organization in the Gros Morne region of N.L. Its mission is to build awareness of our changing ocean and facilitate actions to protect it and the people that depend on it most. Looking after the marine biodiversity of our ocean and the coastal communities' way of life together is essential to protecting our environment, building successful stewardship and a sustainable blue economy for generations to come.

About Bonne Bay Marine Station (BBMS):

The [Bonne Bay Marine Station](#) is a research, teaching and conference venue located in Norris Point, N.L. It is part of the Grenfell Campus - Memorial University and collaborates with researchers and professors from all disciplines interested in teaching and learning in the Gros Morne region. It provides experiential programming and undergraduate courses, as well as field research opportunities. It has a Public Aquarium which operates seasonally and showcases local marine flora and fauna.

About Ecology Action Centre (EAC):

The [Ecology Action Centre](#) is a member-based environmental charity in Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia) taking leadership on critical issues ranging from biodiversity protection to climate change to environmental justice. EAC strives to catalyze change through policy advocacy, community development and acts as a watch-dog for the environment. It takes a holistic approach to the environment and our economy to create a just and sustainable society.



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