

ACAP SAINT JOHN

ALL HANDS ON DECK

INCREASING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND
PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT IN SAINT JOHN



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The *All Hands on Deck* project is a true grassroots initiative that only exists through the selfless efforts of thousands of community volunteers, and through the organizations, community groups, and businesses that contribute to its success. We are proud to say that the list of dedicated contributors is large and ever-growing, and we sincerely appreciate the contribution of every individual, in making Saint John a more restorative environmental city.



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Introduction

ACAP Saint John's "All Hands on Deck" Project aimed to continue our essential role as environmental stewardship leaders throughout the Greater Saint John area by building on the success of past projects while incorporating new emerging environmental issues and interests.

The goal of this project was to increase environmental awareness and actions by engaging with our network of volunteers, recruiting new volunteers, and promoting and providing environmental education events/initiatives with the general public, students and youth, and other organizations across the city.

With support from the New Brunswick Environmental Trust Fund (ETF), ACAP Saint John staff was able to continue to coordinate initiatives to fulfill two ETF priority areas: environmental awareness/education, and protecting our environment. Focusing on new emerging issues such as cyanobacteria, as well as general issues (i.e., climate change and its impacts, water quality, harbour monitoring, healthy riparian areas, etc.), ACAP Saint John has increased environmental awareness for residents of all ages and demographics including decision makers, city staff, developers, community members, and students.

Despite the global pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, "All Hands on Deck" was able to fulfill all project deliverables including presentations to schools (both in-school and virtually) and community groups; hands-on field tours with school classes; organizing community cleanups and tree planting events; and creating online outreach materials that were posted to our webpage and multiple social media platforms.

The efficiency of this project lies in its ability to maintain a strong partnership with the City of Saint John for logistical support, the New Brunswick Environmental Trust Fund for financial support, and in ACAP Saint John's ability to maintain an established, growing, and dedicated network of volunteers. Through direct engagement, in-field and in-class education programs, tree planting and outdoor activities, citizens develop a sense of understanding and ownership of their environment, and are more likely to support other initiatives that promote good stewardship and restorative development. The following report demonstrates the achievements of the 2020-21 project season.

Priority Area Measures

The "All Hands on Deck" project met each priority measure that was outlined in the ETF grant proposal. Despite the global pandemic, ACAP Saint John was able to achieve the measures of two priority areas: Protecting our Environment and Increasing Environmental Awareness.

1. Protecting Our Environment – Through this category, ACAP Saint John was able to complete 3 events/initiatives and were separated into three different themes: Climate Change Education, Environmental Awareness, and Cyanobacteria Education. Although

in-person events, such as conferences, were very limited this year, ACAP was able to reach 15,000 participants through online media (i.e., social media and our website).

2. Increasing Environmental Awareness - ACAP Saint John was able to increase environmental awareness in Saint John through hands-on field tours with local schools, volunteer cleanups and tree planting events, through the distribution of educational materials, and online call-to-action initiatives (i.e., #PortCityPickup, virtual scavenger hunt, Unpaper Towel Rolls). Through the ETF funding, ACAP Saint John was able to reach over 500 active-learning participants and 15,000 observing participants.

Volunteer Engagement

Organized Cleanups

ACAP Saint John has helped community stakeholders organize cleanups throughout the Greater Saint John area for decades and has proved successful in developing a volunteer base, educating the public on the extent of littering and illegal dumping in the region, and establishing ACAP Saint John as a credible and trusted environmental champion. These actions are maintained through a strong partnership with the City of Saint John for logistic support, the NB Environmental Trust Fund for financial support, and in ACAP Saint John's ability to maintain an established and dedicated network of volunteers.

Volunteers interested in organizing a cleanup in the neighbourhood were provided essential items, such as gloves, garbage bags, safety tips, garbage disposal (via the City of Saint John), and a cleanup site if necessary. This helped volunteers to be prepared and ensured they had all the materials to complete a successful cleanup. Through a wide array of media channels including social media, ACAP Saint John's webpage, local media, and community outreach, ACAP Saint John was able to reach hundreds of volunteers to remove more than a thousand pounds of debris from the environment and our waterways in 2020.

Despite the global pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, ACAP Saint John provided supplies for a total of 12 cleanups throughout the Greater Saint John area in 2020 (Figure 1). In 2020, 199 volunteers helped with these cleanups for a total contribution of 347 volunteer hours. During that time, more than 1,800 lbs of waste was removed and properly disposed of at the landfill (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Locations of the 2020 community or volunteer cleanups facilitated through ACAP Saint John's "All Hands on Deck" project.



Figure 2. Various community cleanups that were conducted throughout the 2020 field season.

Tree Plantings

Urban riparian enhancement is vital for improving watercourses and wildlife habitat in Saint John. Volunteers that participated in hands-on improvements to their local environment helped to provide immediate and long-term benefits to our urban ecology.

This year, a total of seven community tree and shrub plantings were organized by ACAP Saint John at five different locations. Through these events a total of 473 native trees and shrubs were planted by 139 volunteers, for a total of 160 volunteer hours (Figure 3). Volunteers had the opportunity to be involved in, and learn about, habitat restoration while experiencing nature first-hand and getting their hands dirty. A diversity of volunteers participated in planting events including a wide range of ages, experience, and backgrounds.



Figure 3. Various tree planting events that were conducted throughout the Saint John area in 2020.

In-person Engagement

Presentations

Through the “All Hands on Deck” project, ACAP Saint John was able to offer presentations to the youth in our community through three schools and two youth groups (reaching over 170 students). These students had the opportunity to learn about local environmental issues and environmental stewardship in Saint John. This has encouraged hands-on learning where youth had the opportunity to get outdoors and experience nature as a part of their education (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Critter dipping with students from Simonds High School on October 28, 2020.

Distribution of educational materials

Throughout the fall, ACAP Saint John attended local farmers markets to reach a wide range of people and community members. An educational booth focused on our Climate Change Adaptation project was set up at the market for the public to learn about our Climate Change background report and our current work being conducted in the community (Figure 5). Being present at these markets allowed for interested folks to ask questions about our ongoing work and to become members of our dedicated network of volunteers.

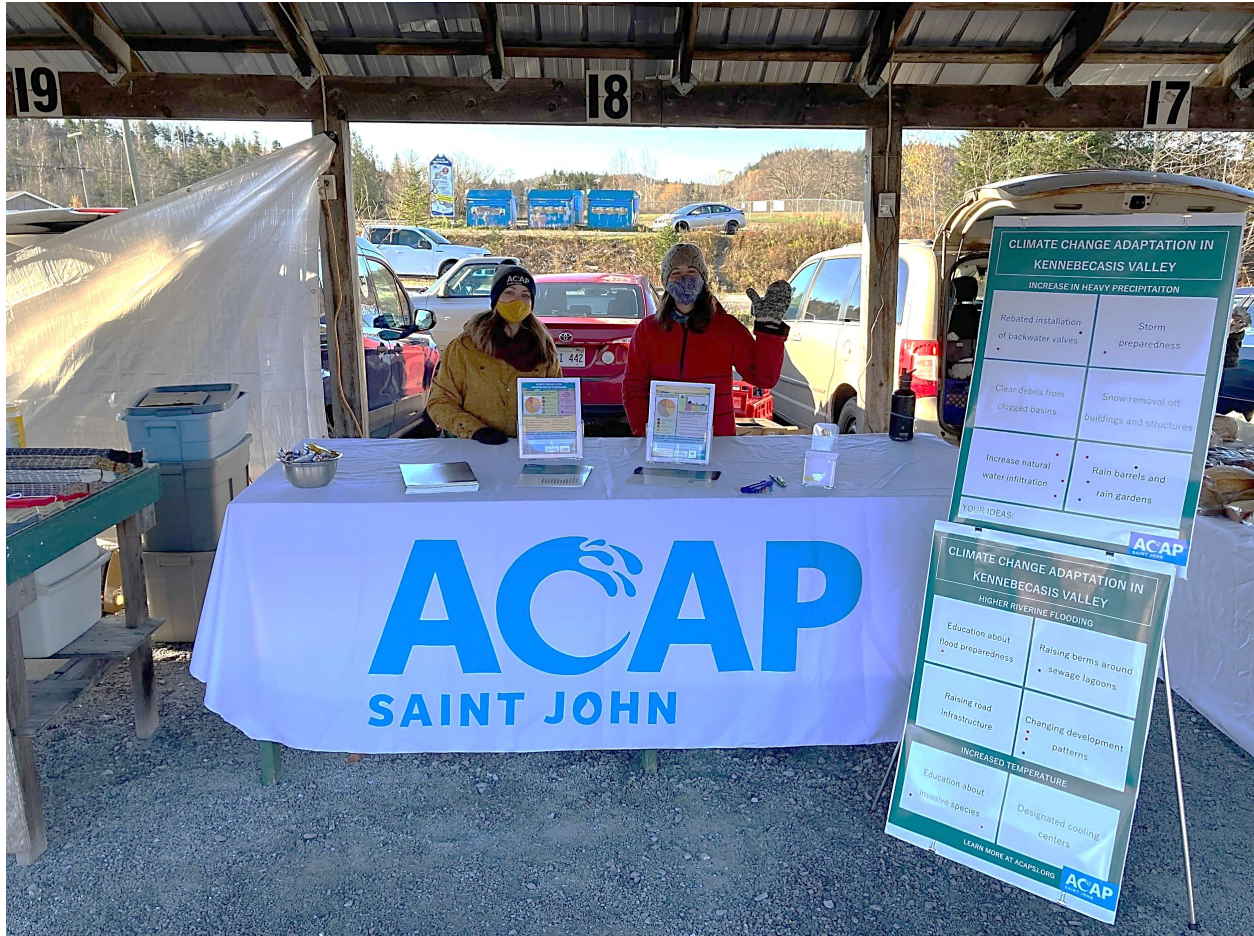


Figure 5. ACAP Saint John's Climate Change team at the Kingston Farmers Market to promote the Saint John Climate Change Background Report and all current work being conducted in the community.

Virtual Engagement

Although the global pandemic altered our original plans for environmental outreach, this allowed us to get creative through virtual engagement and we believe we still encouraged a connection between community members and nature like never before. In the form of education, protection, or just exploring.

#PortCityPickup

Many of our large, yearly cleanup events were cancelled due to the global pandemic. Organizations around the world were seeking creative ways to engage with community members through virtual workshops and social media.

During the month of October, ACAP Saint John launched the #PortCityPickup Challenge. This initiative encouraged citizens to collect litter and debris from around their neighbourhood and to dispose of it properly. Community members that participated in the challenge could post their cleanup photos on social media with the hashtag #PortCityPickup to be entered into a weekly

draw to win eco-friendly prizes. Rules regarding the contest can be found on our website: <http://www.acapsj.org/portcitypickup>.

The #PortCityPickup Challenge was a popular contest amongst social media followers. The Facebook post reached over 7,700 people (Figure 6). Overall, the challenge had over 15 submissions to the weekly giveaways, collecting and removing over 40 lbs of garbage and debris from our streets and shorelines.

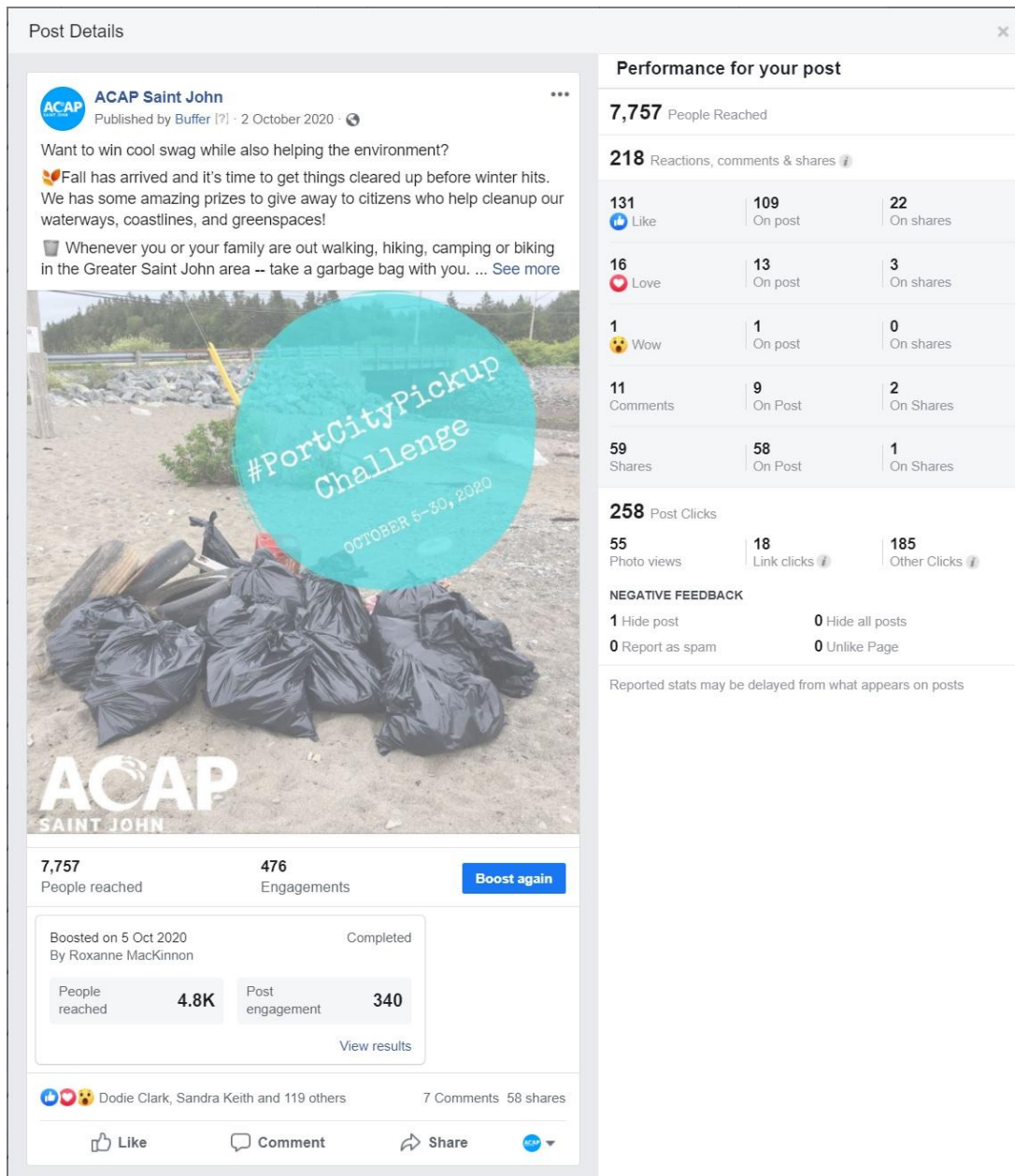


Figure 6. Social media analytics for the #PortCityPickup challenge (Facebook page).

Painted Rocks

Painting rocks and leaving them in public areas for people to collect became a viral trend during the pandemic. Rocks can often be found painted with inspirational messages or other themes. Generally, rocks that are hidden are intended to be picked up, photographed, and added to Facebook/social media, and then re-hidden in a different spot – a nationwide scavenger hunt. This community-building activity is meant to inspire generosity and creativity in all ages and energize people to connect with the beautiful area that we live in.

ACAP Saint John staff, along with two talented volunteers (six volunteer hours), painted over 25 rocks related to our ongoing projects (Figure 7). These rocks were then hidden around Saint John, specifically in areas where our work and observations take place. Although it is hard to track what happens to these rocks after they have been placed, they have all since disappeared from their original spot.



Figure 7. Example of the painted rocks that were hidden around Saint John in areas where ACAP Saint John ongoing projects are located.

Scavenger Hunt

The cold weather in January can sometimes be unmotivating for people to get out and enjoy nature. At the end of January, ACAP Saint John launched a virtual Winter Scavenger Hunt that encouraged Saint Johners to head outside and explore their beautiful city.

The scavenger hunt was presented on our social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) where a new item to find was posted daily. Items included on our scavenger hunt consisted of things based in nature (e.g., pine cone, softwood tree, etc.) or related to past ACAP projects (e.g., rain garden, ACAP animal signage) (Figure 8). This activity was a way for citizens to explore their backyards and neighbourhoods, and still be able to enjoy nature safely. It was encouraged for participants to post pictures of their findings and to be interactive throughout the challenge by using the hashtag #ACAPscavengerhunt when posting on social media.



Figure 8. Examples of posts made on different social media platforms.

This activity ran for 12 days and it was well delivered with many people participating in the online scavenger hunt. Through our three social media accounts we had over 18,500 post reach over the entire scavenger hunt. This initiative challenged participants to explore new places within the City that may have not been before. Each post included an educational description of the scavenger hunt item for participants to learn the importance of each daily feature.

Unpaper Towels

ACAP Saint John is always looking for new ways to help citizens in our community reduce their environmental impact and carbon footprint. In February, our creative staff produced a zero-waste alternative to the common paper towel roll. A full blog post was posted to our website detailing the effects of paper towel on the environment and how to make the switch to a greener substitute (<http://www.acapsj.org/staff-blog/2021/1/26/goodbye-paper-towels-hello-zero-waste-alternative>). The social media promotion of this blog received a post reach of 10,460 across our social media channels and over 550 clicks to the blog itself.

The blog post also included a detailed DIY project where people at home could make their own reusable paper towels. *Unpaper towels* are reusable paper towels that are made out of recycled fabrics that attach together so you can still have them on a roll on your counter and keep them

accessible (Figure 9). But when you are finished, you wash and reuse them instead of throwing them into your garbage. This leads to less plastic and paper waste in the trash and money saved from not buying paper towels in the long run, too! These towels are a homemade, DIY option to traditional paper towel that are easy to make right at home with the proper equipment.



Figure 9. Example of Unpaper Towels (reusable paper towel) made from recycled fabric.

ACAP was able to make enough Unpaper towel rolls as a give-a-way to our followers who were interested in making the switch from regular paper towels to a zero-waste alternative. This contest generated lots of interest, leaving our followers with the knowledge needed to create their own Unpaper towels at home and to be more environmentally cautious when grabbing a roll of paper towel for a small spill.

Social Media and Online Education Initiatives

The global pandemic and COVID-19 has forced organizations across the world to communicate via social media. To meet our ETF project goals, ACAP Saint John found that engagement through social media was most effective, where posts are easily and quickly distributed through wide networks. By the end of February 2021, ACAP Saint John had 4,227 followers on the organization's Twitter account, 1,124 followers on Instagram and 2,182 followers on Facebook.

ACAP Saint John's webpage also remains a vital component for sharing information. The website was visited by an audience of 9,568 visitors with over 22,000 page views this past year.

Our online educational initiatives have been categorized into three themes: climate change, environmental awareness, and cyanobacteria. Below describes what has been completed for each theme and how ACAP Saint John has met the ETF Program priority area measurements.

Climate Change

ACAP Saint John recognizes the role of education as a critical step for enabling climate action in our community. The launch of the Climate Change background report "*Understanding Climate Change in Saint John*" was promoted over social media using graphics and providing up-to-date science about the impacts that Climate Change will bring to the Greater Saint John Area. Bringing awareness about the impacts and opportunities to build resilience was a key focus of ACAP's social media outreach. The impacts were explored further by sharing news releases and preparedness resources, as well as the development of an online engagement tool that provides a local context to the changes that can be anticipated in the future. The online engagement promoted the Adaptation Planning being completed by ACAP Saint John and is useful to showcase familiar areas where impacts have been observed or where areas are at risk.

In November 2020, the City of Saint John adopted the "*Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Saint John*" completed by ACAP Saint John. ACAP promoted this achievement on social media as well as through interviews with local and provincial news outlets. The intent of the social media outreach was to provide an understanding of what Climate Change adaptation means for the community, and how individuals can take action in their lives. To demonstrate adaptation strategies for increasing rainfall (a priority impact for the City) ACAP developed posts describing the role of rain capture devices such as rain gardens and rain barrels, as well as a video on stormwater management in Saint John. The video highlighted the Social Enterprise HUB in Saint John's Central Peninsula where a rain garden and rain barrel system have been set up to manage stormwater.

Other climate change actions were promoted through social media including ways to reduce individual carbon footprints and greenhouse gas emissions, and ways to reduce food insecurity. ACAP Saint John recognizes that New Brunswick has one of the highest rates of children living in food insecure households and promoted the use of community gardens and backyard gardens to reduce food insecurity and adapt to Climate Change. Through social media, ACAP frequently encouraged the community to take climate action in their own lives.

Environmental Awareness

The global pandemic has helped us gain more online presence than ever before, which has helped us express our organization's mandate across to a wider audience. Through social media, ACAP Saint John was able to communicate to our many followers about local environmental issues and how they can become actively involved in community-based change. Our followers

were made aware of how ACAP Saint John can help organize their own street or beach cleanup safely by providing necessary knowledge, materials, and resources.

Our social media content had a wide range of topics that focused on our ongoing restoration and monitoring work. These posts highlight why it is important for this work to take place in Saint John, bringing awareness to the environmental issues we are currently facing as a community. Our website was updated to include and elaborate on some of these pieces through our staff blog post.

Cyanobacteria

Cyanobacteria is a growing concern for many people in New Brunswick and getting reliable New Brunswick based information out to people is paramount in helping citizens feel empowered to make risk-based decisions on when and where to interact with our waterways. To build awareness about cyanobacteria in the community, ACAP promoted not only our on-going research into cyanotoxins in the river, but also Government of New Brunswick (GNB) resources and information presented by Dr. Janice Lawrence from University of New Brunswick through our social media and dedicated cyanobacteria page on our website (www.acapsj.org/cyano).

The cyanobacteria page on the ACAP Saint John website provides a detailed overview of cyanobacteria, cyanotoxins, risks, how to reduce your risks, commonly asked questions, and a list of additional resources. Also included is a link to a factsheet on cyanobacteria created by ACAP Saint John with consultations from GNB staff and researchers at the University of New Brunswick and the Canadian Rivers Institute and was funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada. This factsheet, webpage, and cyanotoxin research project were all officially announced through our social media in June and had a post reach of over 20,000 and over 1,200 clicks to the cyanobacteria webpage. Other partner organizations also shared the factsheet and webpage through their networks and printed copies of the factsheet to citizens within their watersheds, broadening the reach of this webpage even further. To complement and remind people about cyanobacteria and the risk of cyanotoxins, posts were also made during field days to demonstrate the work being done and to direct people to read more on the webpage. These posts were also shared and copied by partner organizations to once again reach additional audiences. Lastly, ACAP Saint John staff provided expertise and liaison with researchers and GNB staff to help The St. John River Society complete an educational video about cyanobacteria in the river (to be released this spring). Through collaborative partnerships ACAP Saint John has effectively used social media to build awareness about cyanobacteria and the role of monitoring.

NB Equipment Hub

The NB Equipment Hub is a part of the Atlantic Water Network's Equipment Bank which provides monitoring equipment to community-based water monitoring programs throughout Atlantic Canada. Equipment that can be borrowed include YSI Professional Plus Multi-Probes, Secchi

Disk Kits, Global Water Flow Probes and CABIN Kits (Figure 10). ACAP Saint John's role is to ensure that equipment is calibrated and functioning properly so that organizations can collect the most accurate data possible. The program works similarly to a library loan program, where the equipment is borrowed free of charge. Descriptions of each piece of equipment can be found on our website at <http://www.acapsj.org/nbequipmenthub>

This year was ACAP Saint John's second year administrating the NB Equipment Hub for the Atlantic Water Network. There was a spike in community groups that were interested in renting out equipment from the Hub compared to last year, with most groups interested in borrowing the YSI. A total of 5 different community groups borrowed equipment through this program. This is encouraging as it suggests that the number of local groups having interest in and access to community-based water quality monitoring measures is increasing.



Figure 10. Example of equipment that can be rented through the NB Equipment Bank HUB.

Conclusion

Even during a global pandemic, ACAP Saint John's "All Hands on Deck" was a successful project hosting a diverse range of creative environmental outreach and engagement projects that may not have otherwise happened. ACAP Saint John was able to connect with many community members through volunteer and outreach activities, and through social media (Figure 11). We wholeheartedly believe that through "All Hands on Deck" 2020-21, and through encouraging community members to learn about environmental topics, to participate in environmental cleanups, or simply to get outside and enjoy nature during a global pandemic, we have played a strong role in enhancing our followers sense of connection and respect for our natural environment. With the help from our dedicated volunteers, ACAP Saint John still facilitated a total of 12 cleanups removing close to 1,800 lbs of waste from our environment. In addition, over 470 native tree and shrub species were planted throughout the City to restore our riparian and coastal areas. Along these two direct volunteer engagement avenues, ACAP Saint John was able to directly interact and dialogue with over 400 community members. Through our educational outreach activities, we were able to dialogue with an additional 250 students, providing them with both environmental education opportunities and the opportunity to learn in a hands-on setting out in nature.

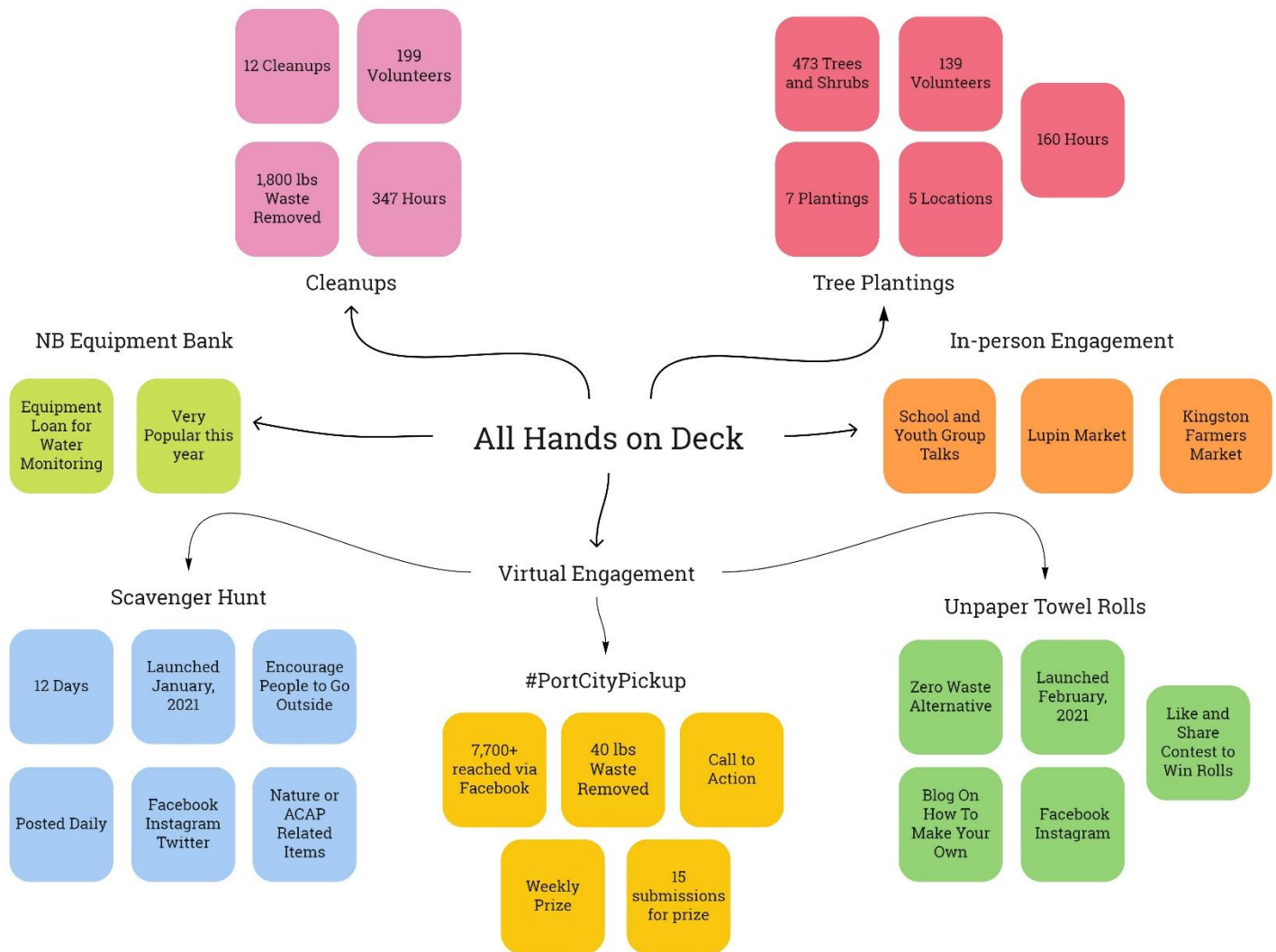


Figure 11. Word cloud demonstrating all the activities that were completed in ACAP Saint John's All Hands on Deck Project (2020-2021)