

Fox inspired environmental treasure hunt

By Mark Browne
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The National Environmental Treasure is hoping to collect \$30 million in loonies to go into an endowment fund for small-and medium-sized environmental organizations.

"The concept is to get every Canadian to donate a loonie," said Ann Dale, the Greater Victoria-based chair of the organization.

The idea of collecting loonies, she said, came from the late Terry Fox who once collected \$1 donations for cancer research when he attempted to run across the country 25 years ago.

The endowment fund initiative came out of a feasibility study that Dale conducted in 1996. The focus of the study was concerned with funding gaps in the environmental movement due to a decrease in government funding, she pointed out.

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However, the study also revealed that medium-sized environmental groups and the local, community-based organizations were struggling to make ends meet, she said. The executive-directors of such organizations typically spend about 95 per cent of their time scrambling for funding, Dale said.

Those organizations need money for areas such as communications as they have difficulty spreading their messages.

"So the National Environmental Treasure was created to try to build this \$30-million trust fund and devote it to the non-sexy stuff, the nuts and bolts that keeps an organization running, which is communications, research and sustained livelihoods," Dale said.

Established in 1995, the organization has grown slowly, having incorporated as a not-for-profit charitable group in 1998.

"We're still working on how to build the infrastructure to collect the loonies," she said. For more information or to make an online donation (and receive a tax receipt), visit <http://oursafetynet.org/>.