



BRIEFING NOTE: Wetlands Goals

Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act
March 2022

GOAL IN EGCCRA

8 (1): The Government shall create a strategic plan, prior to December 31, 2022, to be known as the "Climate Change Plan for Clean Growth" that addresses ... (b) adapting to the impacts of climate change and building a climate resilient Province;

10: The Government's goals with respect to the protection of land are (a) to conserve at least 20% of the total land and water mass of the Province by 2030 as protected areas and other effective area based conservation measures, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, in a manner consistent with national reporting criteria;

11: The Government's goals with respect to water and air are (a) to develop provincial water quality objectives to guide activities that affect water quality by 2026;

12: The Government's goal with respect to environmental assessments is to modernize the environmental assessment process by 2024 taking into consideration (a) cumulative impacts... (e) climate change.

OUR ANALYSIS OF THE GOALS:

8: We are looking forward to the release of the climate plan. We are pleased to see that it will include both mitigation and adaptation measures.

10: There is a lot of work to do in order to protect freshwater sources, including wetlands, and groundwater resources. Fortunately, we have many institutions and people whose knowledge and experience can guide planning to protect water, and we call on the government to collaborate with water-centered community groups when creating a protection strategy and making decisions.

ANALYSIS CONTINUED:

11: To ensure safe and healthy water for both human use and the local ecosystems, the water quality objectives must include consideration for the quality of surface water (i.e., lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands etc.) and groundwater, and prioritize watershed based decision making. We call on the Province to commit to encouraging nature based solutions to help address water quality issues and to supporting existing data collection efforts by investing in community-based water monitoring initiatives.

12: This is positive as the environmental assessment premise and process need a complete overhaul in Nova Scotia. Proper inclusion of these factors is long overdue and could result in improvements to environmental protection. The needed revamping of the system must be done in collaboration with partners outside government, who have been witnessing and documenting systemic problems with environmental assessments for years.

ACHIEVING THE GOALS:

- Update The Wetland Conservation Policy to provide stronger protection for the remaining wetlands in Nova Scotia.
 - While The Wetland Conservation Policy aims to protect wetlands in the province, there has not been effort by the province to evaluate or monitor wetlands loss, or the province's goal of achieving no net loss of wetlands. In order to account for wetland loss, regular up to date mapping and monitoring must be initiated. Supporting existing data collection efforts by investing in community-based wetland monitoring initiatives could help with monitoring and mapping efforts.
 - The Wetland Conservation Policy should take a watershed based approach to wetland protection

ACHIEVING THE GOALS CONTINUED:

- Establishment of a minimum buffer requirement for wetlands will contribute to the Province's commitment to address water quality issues.
- There are many active groups across the province doing wetland related work including nongovernmental organizations, academics, Indigenous Nations and organizations. Collectively, they have a strong understanding of local wetlands including how wetlands may be threatened, and also how to best protect these wetlands from further degradation and destruction. When planning watermass protection, including wetland protection, collaboration with these groups will make the process easier and more effective.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Wetlands are an important form of nature-based climate solutions that help with climate change mitigation and adaptation; their protection should be prioritized in the Climate Plan. By conserving and protecting existing wetlands, the province will be able to better achieve its commitment of building climate change adaptive capacity and resilience and its commitment to address water quality issues
 - Wetlands can absorb large amounts of rainfall, replenishing groundwater and providing protection against both floods and droughts.
 - Since they reduce damaging wind, wave, and current actions, coastal wetlands also protect communities and infrastructure during hurricanes and other severe weather events.
 - Wetlands, particularly salt marshes, store significant amounts of carbon in their soils, helping to mitigate climate change

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTINUED:

- Wetlands, and their ecosystem services, also provide a huge economic benefit for the province. An academic study published in 2020 titled, "Measurement and economic valuation of carbon sequestration in Nova Scotian wetlands", suggests through carbon sequestration alone, wetlands may provide \$10 billion worth of benefits to Nova Scotia.
- In their 2013 report called "How Much Habitat is Enough", Environment and Climate Change Canada highlights the importance of prioritizing a watershed approach for wetland protection. In addition, the report states that at minimum, the greater of 10% of each major watershed and 6% of each subwatershed should be protected and restored. Watershed based planning approaches are also supported by other wetland-centered community groups including nongovernmental organizations, academics, Indigenous Nations and organizations.
- Currently, there are no provincial buffer requirements for wetlands. Vegetative buffers help to better ensure the integrity of wetlands adjacent to development (i.e. residential, commercial, industrial) and agricultural, mining and forestry operations. According to Watersheds Canada, vegetated buffers are effective in removing over 90% of runoff when compared to non-vegetated shorelines and are critical in mitigating the effects of climate change.
- Wetlands function in networks within watersheds. An impact on one wetland in a watershed will likely have impacts on other nearby wetlands. The impacts of a project or development cannot be focused on the consequences to a single wetland. Watershed level planning is also important when considering the cumulative impacts on wetlands in the environmental assessment process.



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