

## EAC response to the NSECC Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy Engagement Survey

September 2023

### **What are the biggest opportunities for the Province in conserving more land and water? How can they be accomplished?**

Primarily by selecting and protecting more publicly owned Crown land. The Province needs to assemble and put forward a credible slate of proposed new protected areas on Crown lands in its upcoming Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy in December. These proposed new protected areas should be placed under interim protection (moratorium on development and resource extraction) until they are fully vetted for legal protection. Private land protection is certainly important and should continue and expand, but it must be recognized that the total area is relatively small. As of December 2022, protected private lands in Nova Scotia amounted to only 16,750 hectares, or about one third of one percent of the provincial land mass. In order to reach the 20% by 2030 goal, the bulk of new protected lands will, by necessity, have to come from public lands which is appropriate and where much of the best remaining large, high conservation value sites exist.

### **What are the biggest challenges for the Province to achieve the 20% goal? How could they be overcome?**

Resistance from extractive industries. They'll howl that the sky will fall. It won't. This is Nova Scotia's part in helping Canada meet its international commitment to protect 30 percent of the planet by 2030 and it has to be done. Protected areas contribute to nature-based climate solutions, and help nature and humans stay resilient during the challenging years ahead. Economic benefits flow from protected areas, as has been documented by the Province of Nova Scotia, and throughout the world. Remain steadfast. The public will support you.

### **How can the Province encourage private land owners to participate in meeting the provincial target of 20% protection?**

The Province should continue to work with and fund the private land trust organizations to acquire more high-quality properties for protection on private lands. They do a great job and can leverage government dollars with private donations.

The Province should institute a suite of financial and policy incentives to encourage more private landowners to protect more high conservation value private land. This could include tax incentives and perhaps a new program where private landowners could voluntarily have their land protected by the government.

The Province should also restore the Protected Areas Land Acquisition budget at Department of Environment and Climate Change. For many years the Department of Environment had an annual land acquisition budget of around \$10 million. The money was used each year to purchase small parcels of private lands that were either inholdings (private land parcels inside protected Wilderness Areas on Crown land) or private land parcels of high conservation value adjacent to Wilderness Areas. This annual funding pot should be restored and greatly increased in order to help reach the 20% by 2030 goal.

## **What should government consider when identifying new provincial lands and water for protection?**

An early focus on simply expanding a number of existing Wilderness Areas and Nature Reserves and adding already known and long-standing sites of high conservation value on Crown lands would be a good place to start. Staff are well versed on the IUCN principles and objectives for site selection so this can and must be done quickly. Then they must be moved quickly and efficiently through the rather long and laborious process to have them designated under legal protection. Six years is not a lot of time.

The Province should place a special priority focus on protecting wetlands, watercourses and old forests. The Province should aim to protect a minimum amount of these environmental features within each watershed across the province. There are 46 major watersheds in 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, 10% of each major watershed and 6% of each subwatershed should be protected and restored. Where possible, the protection in each watershed should take place at the headwaters. Likewise, areas identified as Species At Risk (SAR) habitat including Core Moose Habitat should be prioritized for protection.

## **What would you like to see included in the Strategy?**

Ecology Action Centre insists that, for the December 2023 draft Strategy to be credible, it must include a large slate of new proposed protected areas on Crown Land. The list should include the following sites:

### **WESTERN Mainland**

#### **Proposed Ingram River Wilderness Area, Halifax County**

Former Bowater lands north of St. Margarets Bay. A large area contiguous block of Crown land connecting central and western NS. Not the lesser-than Island Lake comprise proposed by government. Lots of intact forest and old forest stands but also some clearcuts. Great forest restoration and protection opportunity. (10,500 ha remaining) More details here: <https://www.protecttheingram.com/>

#### **Expanded Medway Lakes Wilderness Area, Annapolis County**

- 1. Close the huge gap between the western and eastern flanks of the wilderness area - Make the two halves into one large Wilderness Area (3,000 ha)**
- 2. Add Little Bear Lake – Significant concentration of rare old growth forests (550 ha)**



### **Proposed Chain Lakes Wilderness Area, Kings County**

Contiguous to Cloud Lake Wilderness Area. Includes Gully Lake Crown block. Includes areas of rich habitat with old hardwood forest. Numerous SAR birds identified. (25,000 ha)

### **Proposed Goldsmith Lake Wilderness Area, Annapolis County**

High conservation value old and old-growth forests around an undeveloped Lake. Drive 25 minutes from Bridgetown, paddle 20 minutes and step out into an old-growth forest with Yellow Birch and Hemlock stands over 300 years old. Numerous SAR old-growth indicator lichens. Includes headwaters of Round Hill River where anglers report Bay of Fundy endangered Atlantic salmon parr and smolts (juvenile Atlantic salmon). Area includes Corbett Lake and extensive wetlands, creating a much-needed steppingstone between existing Protected Areas to east and west. (3,900ha)

More details here: <https://www.arlingtonforestprotection.ca/soof/goldsmith-lake-wilderness-area>

### **Rocky Point Lake, Digby County**

Core habitat for endangered Mainland moose. Connects existing Tobeatic and Silver Lake Wilderness Areas. (7,000 ha)

### **Beals Brook, Annapolis County**

Wildlife connectivity to the existing Cloud Lake Wilderness Area in area of significant clearcutting. Extensive bogs, wet meadows and forested wetlands linked by 80+ year old forests, unbroken by logging roads around McEwen Lake. Habitat for several rare and endangered species including mainland moose, wood turtle, American marten, SAR birds and lichens. Site of the historic Last Hope camps. (3,500 ha)

### **Proposed Big LaHave Lake Wilderness Area, Annapolis County**

Connects two major existing wilderness areas: Medway Lake and Cloud Lake, effectively creating a connected network of protected areas from the Annapolis Valley just south of Greenwood to Shelburne and Yarmouth counties via Keji and the Tobeatic wilderness. Core Habitat area identified in Nova Scotia's Mainland Moose Recovery Plan (2021). This would significantly increase opportunities for the Tobeatic population to interact and breed with the other populations. Significant numbers of wetlands and lakes. Headwaters of three major watersheds: Annapolis, LaHave and Medway River systems. (6,500 ha)

### **Proposed Minamkeak Lake Wilderness Area, Lunenburg County**

Crown Land blocks in and around Minamkeak and Milipsiate Lakes. Helps protect habitat for the last remaining population of Atlantic Whitefish in the world, a critically endangered species on the verge of extinction. Also helps protect the water supply for the rapidly growing town of Bridgewater. (<https://www.bridgewater.ca/town-services/water-services-psc/watershed-protected-area>). Both the provincial and federal recovery plans for the critically endangered Atlantic White Whitefish commit to pursuing Wilderness Area designation. There is strong support from local municipalities to protect the area. (925 ha of provincial Crown land plus several hundred additional ha of municipal land)



## **CENTRAL and EASTERN MAINLAND**

### **Crown lands between Economy River Wilderness Area and Portapique River Wilderness Area, Colchester County.**

Core mainland moose habitat in the Cobequid Mountains. Connects two existing Wilderness Areas to effectively make one large wilderness area. (6,000 ha)

### **Shatter Lake. Colchester County.**

Southeast of Wentworth Valley Wilderness Area. Core mainland moose habitat in the Cobequid Mountains. (1,500 ha)

### **Expanded Calvary River Wilderness Area, Colchester County.**

Lots of intact hardwood and spruce forest. Important for wildlife connectivity. (6,000 ha)

### **Additions to Toadfish Lakes Wilderness Area, Guysborough County.**

To make it into one contiguous area. Boreal felt lichen, old mixed and hardwood forest, rivers. (4,000 ha)

### **Connect Boggy Lake Wilderness Area and Liscomb River Wilderness Area, Guysborough County.**

Lots of lakes and hardwood hills. Makes for one a large contiguous area. (8,000 ha)

### **Expanded Archibald Lake Wilderness Area and Nine Mile Woods Wilderness Areas, Guysborough County.**

Lots of lakes and hardwood hills which should be protected. (1,000 ha each)

### **Expanded St. Mary's River Provincial Park, Guysborough County.**

To increase riparian zone protection and especially to capture and protect tributaries and headwaters of the St. Mary's River system. (10,000 to 20,000 ha)

## **CAPE BRETON**

### **Mathesons Lake/Marsh Brook, Victoria County.**

Upstream from Baddeck River Wilderness Area. Protects intact forests and upper watershed. (2,500 ha)

### **Expanded Fourchu Coast Wilderness Area, Richmond County.**

Add inland drumlin portion (3,000 ha)

### **Expanded Trout Brook Wilderness Area, Inverness County.**

To protect upper tributaries of Trout Brook watershed. (1,000 ha)



## Any other ideas for advancing Nova Scotia towards our protection and conservation goal?

We encourage the Province to continue working with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia to identify and protect Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) throughout this process.

Amend the Provincial Parks Act to provide greater protection and certainty for our nature-based Provincial Parks (Owl's Head, West Mabou, etc.) as committed to in the 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan.

Amend the Wilderness Areas Protection Act to remove the requirement for a socio-economic study for every new proposed protected area. It's an expensive and time-consuming process, serves no useful purpose and slows down the designation process. This would help government reach its target on time.

The new plan must include a commitment to measurable progress in each of the next 6 years. A goal of one percent per year should be established which will allow the government to meet its legislated target.

Staff up to meet the effort required over the next six years to reach the 20% by 2030 target. Increase the annual budget and human resources in the Department of Environment and Climate change to meet the task and considerable workload that will be required.

Don't rely heavily on so-called Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs) to carry the load. Many are weak and fail to adequately protect ecosystem. For example, the Province should not automatically count Protected Water Areas unless the government is prepared to pass new legislation to actually protect them from all activities that harm biodiversity. Some Protected Water Areas designated to support source water protection for municipalities allow resource extraction, which is the opposite of protected.

The 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan was based on widespread consultation. There were 20 public consultation meetings across Nova Scotia, hosted by Voluntary Planning, about the Natural Resource Strategy, which gathered public input about our provincial parks. The 17 open houses about the draft Parks & Protected Areas Plan were hosted by government after the draft plan was written, in order to get input. The new plan must include meaningful public consultation at more than just this stage, and require transparent and timely public reporting throughout.

The Province should keep completing the actions from the existing plan for Parks and Protected Areas Plan. There were 47 specific actions in the Parks and Protected Areas Plan. The public has seen no analysis of whether these actions were completed before moving into the new strategy, or heard any announcements about whether these actions will be moved forward into the new strategy. This is especially important because the 2013 plan had many actions focused on provincial parks and the parks system that still need to be done. The information available during the current consultation makes no mention of working on parks. There is still much to be done to improve the park system including its legislation and policies – do not drop all actions relating to parks.



Excellent elements of 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan that should be brought forward in the new Strategy:

- Sites for protection were identified at the same time as the plan.
- Interim protection and management guidelines for sites until they were legally designated.
- The “Six R’s” criteria for protected areas selection (all contribute to biodiversity conservation):
  - **Remote:** large areas in a mostly natural state with few human impacts
  - **Representative:** examples of the full spectrum of Nova Scotia’s natural landscapes
  - **Rich:** productive and diverse – where plant, lichen and animal life flourish
  - **Rare:** unique or rare landscapes, plants, or animals
  - **Restoration:** areas that fill important land gaps but need time to restore from past use
  - **Re-connection:** areas that provide important natural connections for plants and animals

We recommend adding a seventh “R” to the selection criteria: **Reconciliation:** areas identified by the Mi’kmaq as outstanding for working towards reconciliation.

In 2012 there was a Mi’kmaq–Nova Scotia Protected Areas Selection and Management Technical Advisory Group that advised on aspects of the plan like site selection and future management. Such an Advisory Group should be reconstituted for this process, in part to ensure that the principles of Netukulimk and Two-Eyed Seeing are applied.

