

Government kills key forestry commitments

Clearcutting reduction target, whole-tree harvesting prohibition and herbicide ban abandoned under proposed new Crown Land Forest Resource Management Policy

Forestry reform took a major step backwards this week on the 5-year anniversary of the Natural Resources Strategy, a policy framework that promised major changes to forest management practices in Nova Scotia when it was released in 2011.

Yesterday, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) [released a 5-year update](#) on implementation of the Natural Resources Strategy that effectively killed previous commitments to limit clearcutting, prohibit the destructive practice of whole-tree harvesting for biomass, implement an annual allowable cut (AAC) that would cap annual provincial harvest levels and eliminate public funding for herbicide spraying.

The update indicated that DNR is instead developing a new Crown Land Forest Resource Management Policy that abandons the 2011 clearcutting reduction policy, allows continued whole-tree harvesting (harvesting tops and branches to feed biomass markets), may reinstate public funding for herbicide application and once again permit herbicide spraying on Crown lands. DNR has also abandoned plans to implement a provincial annual allowable cut.

The table below tracks the scaling back of language surrounding the commitments throughout the life of the Strategy.

Commitment	2010 Framework for Forestry	2011 Natural Resources Strategy	2016 Strategy Update
Clearcutting	“Reduce the proportion of wood harvested by the clear cut method to no more than 50% of all forested lands over a five-year period.”	“The policy framework set a target for reducing clearcutting to no more than 50 per cent of all harvests . The target, to be phased in over five years, will be set in regulation. ”	“The Department of Natural Resources is moving away from a system that determines the amount of clearcutting based on its percentage of harvested land. ”
Whole-Tree Harvesting	“ Prohibit the removal of whole trees from the forest site in order to maintain woody debris at these sites.”	“ Rules for whole-tree harvesting will be developed as part of ongoing legislative and policy review actions, consultation, and engagement.”	(no update on the status of this commitment; no rules have been created) Whole-tree harvesting continues to be allowed in NS.
Herbicide	“ Public funds will not be directed to herbicide spraying for forestry. ”	“ ...public support will no longer be extended to the use of herbicides. Woodland owners and operators may use herbicides at their own expense and in compliance with all safety and environmental regulations.”	“As we move forward with implementation of the tools and systems that support ecosystem-based management at the landscape scale, we will continue to assess the effectiveness of various forestry practices, including herbicide use. ”
Annual Allowable Cut	“Undertake an analysis of options regarding a province-wide Annual Allowable Cut in order to limit total harvested amounts. ”	“Evaluate the effects of implementing an Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) to ensure the sustainability and productivity of Nova Scotia forests.”	“In consideration of the high percentage of private land and the rights of small woodlot owners, the department has no plans to implement a province-wide AAC. ”

Yesterday's announcement continues a trend of government not living up to public commitments and legislative responsibilities for biodiversity conservation and signifies a significant change in the government's stance on clearcutting.

In March, DNR [dropped the world-leading Forest Stewardship Council forest certification certificate](#) for Crown lands in western NS barely a year after [committing to expand](#) the certification to all Crown lands.

In April, the [Auditor General blasted DNR for not living up to legislated commitments for Species-at-Risk recovery](#).

The Deputy Minister of the DNR [recently appeared in front of a legislative committee](#) and stated that "clear-cutting harvesting and its impacts are generally misunderstood" by the public. In Tuesday's announcement, DNR Minister Lloyd Hines went so far as to praise clearcutting as a tool that can help improve the forest

"The implementation – or, more accurately, the lack of implementation – of the Natural Resources Strategy represents a massive failure in public policy" says EAC's Forestry Coordinator, Matt Miller. "The public sent a clear message to government to make substantial changes to the way the forests of Nova Scotia are managed. Unfortunately, with this week's update, it is clear that message has fallen on deaf ears."

Natural Resources Strategy Timeline:

Phase One (2009) – Voluntary Planning undertook a public consultation on behalf of government to inform the development of the new strategy, engaging thousands of Nova Scotians across the province. The [Phase One report](#) concluded that *"The status quo cannot sustain the biodiversity of our natural environment, enhance the economy, or preserve the rural lifestyle so valued by the citizens of this province. During a citizen engagement process on the future of the province's natural resources, Nova Scotians made it clear that change must happen in all areas of natural resource management—and happen soon."*

Phase Two (2010) – A Steering Panel was formed to guide panels of experts in four areas – Parks, Minerals, Forests and Biodiversity – and produce a set of recommendations to inform the development of the new Strategy. [The Steering Panel Report](#) concluded that *"The status quo is not an option. Unless there is change, Nova Scotia's natural resources will continue to be destroyed."*

Panels of experts were formed to help inform the development of the Strategy. The Forests Panel was split and unable to produce one common report. Donna Crossland, a Parks Canada ecologist, and Bob Bancroft, a retired freshwater fisheries biologist, [penned a majority report that concluded that](#) *"Nova Scotia has already surpassed the threshold of ecologically sustainable forest harvesting and is now faced with resolving major restoration issues to sustain viable populations of many forest species."* The report recommended significant reductions ecologically-damaging practices like clearcutting, whole-tree harvesting and herbicide spraying.

Jonathan Porter, a senior forestry executive with Bowater-Mersey Paper Company (BMPC) at the time, wrote a much more subdued [report](#) urging government to “*support a range of management practices, including clearcutting and herbicide application*” and called for better public education on forestry issues. Following the closure of the Bowater mill in 2012, Mr. Porter was hired as the Executive Director of the Renewable Resources Branch of DNR and given responsibility for the “[management and conservation of the province's forests, parks and wildlife resources](#)” in May, 2014.

The Strategy was due to be delivered by the end of 2010, but was not released until August 2011. In December 2010, however, DNR released [A Policy Framework for the Future of Nova Scotia's Forestry](#), a set of six Strategic Directions that would “*provide the basis for future forestry policy*”. Included were commitments to; “*reduce the proportion of wood harvested by the clear cut method to no more than 50% of all forested lands over a five-year period*”; “*Prohibit the removal of whole trees from the forest site in order to maintain woody debris at these sites*”; “*Public funds will not be directed to herbicide spraying for forestry*” and; “*Undertake an analysis of options regarding a province-wide Annual Allowable Cut in order to limit total harvested amounts*”.

Phase Three (2011) – The final [Natural Resources Strategy](#) was developed in-house at DNR and released in August 2011. It contained an [Action Plan, a list of 32 commitments](#) that included a regulated limited on clearcutting, rules for whole-tree harvesting and the elimination of public funding for herbicide, which had the effect of stopping all spraying activity on Crown lands.