

Crown land management

A conceptual plan for Western Nova Scotia

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Crown land in Nova Scotia west of the 101 highway includes several large tracts and many smaller pieces, which, when combined, cover one-and-a-half million acres. With the Province's acquisition of the former Bowater lands, an opportunity emerged to step back and look at the big picture of land management. Aided by input and ideas from engaged citizens and stakeholder groups, the government has developed a conceptual plan for the land, based on the values that Nova Scotians want to see guide the management of public land.

This is a Nova Scotian first. Crown land in western Nova Scotia has been broadly classified based on the application of values that will inform, but not dictate, local land management practices. Ultimately, land use will reflect community and local needs and aspirations, as well as economic, environmental and conservation objectives, all assessed within the larger conceptual framework. Activities on private lands in the area will not be limited or restricted by this conceptual framework.

Detailed management planning for the land and its resources is now beginning, with a focus on creating sustainable jobs, ensuring optimal social benefits from land use, and achieving environmental and conservation goals. The input received through the public consultation period will continue to be used and referred to as more detailed planning is undertaken. To ensure that government's internal processes are aligned and reflect the spectrum of interests and resource values, a working group has been established to consider the various and diverse local and broad interests in the Crown land.



The planning process for western Crown land complements and reflects the goals of the Natural Resources Strategy, completed in August 2011. Collaborative leadership from government, the private sector, interested citizens, Mi'kmaw people, stakeholder groups and communities in the western region has been embraced as essential to successful, collective management of Nova Scotia's land and wealth of resources. The strategy, based on the best available research and knowledge, strives to balance economic, social and environmental interests.



The principles and public values associated with natural resource management will be evident as the government moves through the process to develop detailed land use planning for all 1.5 million acres of Crown land in western Nova Scotia. The conceptual plan is, essentially, lines drawn on a map; not etched in stone.

This new Crown land planning process does not supplant other critical land and resource planning already underway. But ultimately all processes – including integrated landscape management planning and Parks and Protected Areas planning – will be mutually supportive. Each will inform decisions related to the others.

Community forests, respect for and designated use by Mi'kmaw people, sustainable employment, and stewardship of land for future generations are some of the outcomes Nova Scotians can expect as planning continues. Smart management practices that balance risks and opportunities, sustainable resource management and protection and maintenance of the wealth of biodiversity these lands hold and house, are central tenets to all planning, and together they articulate the vision for Crown land management in Nova Scotia.

Engagement

In the first stage of the planning process in March and April 2013, the Province hosted nine open houses which attracted almost 700 Nova Scotians. Some 13 meetings were held with various stakeholder groups and the Department of Natural Resources received 166 online and 44 paper submissions. While many comments concerned local or specific land issues, most recognized that, in the end, land management must balance many different needs and interests.

As well, the Province is consulting the Mi'kmaw community, consistent with the Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada umbrella agreement. To advance collaborative decision-making and shared stewardship of land and resources, the Mi'kmaq have been involved in the planning process, and will work with the Province on the development of a Mi'kmaw Forestry Initiative in western Nova Scotia. Through this collaborative process 17 known Mi'kmaw cultural areas located on Crown land that are not within proposed parks, nature reserves or wilderness areas have been identified.

Overall, participants in the consultation process on the best use of the Crown land in Western Nova Scotia said they want to be involved in managing their land; want long term environmental, social and economic sustainability; and recognize that different uses need to be balanced.

Nova Scotians said their key issues are: tourism and recreation, including hiking, skiing, canoeing, hunting and fishing; forestry; vehicular, ATV and snowmobile access; sustainability; resource protection; resource extraction; and a continuing consultation and engagement processes.

Much of this input will inform more detailed planning yet to come, where management and use of individual sites within the larger planning units will be considered. There will be opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement at ongoing intervals. An example of this process was evident in the decision by government to open selected roads in the former Bowater lands to allow recreational use that was clearly highlighted during the public consultation and of immediate concern. At the same time the decision making process highlighted the need to balance the gate opening with the need to protect sensitive areas. Thus not all roads and gates were opened to the public. While this was an issue-based response it does highlight a new approach to planning as a collaborative and informed decision-making model was used.

Following the release of the draft conceptual plan in early August 2013, the public, stakeholders and other interested parties had the opportunity to provide feedback. The comments helped inform the updated plan as presented here. During this round of discussions, we heard a desire to identify more areas as having mineral values, Mi'kmaw cultural values, and recreational use. The designation for St. Margarets block was changed from a resource management designation to multiple values to better reflect the planned land usage in this area. Two areas now identified as Mi'kmaw Management Areas, were originally designated as Mi'kmaw areas of interest.



Conceptual Plan and Map



At this stage, the plan provides a strategic vision of how management of the diverse Crown land in western Nova Scotia could proceed. The land offers many opportunities and attracts many demands. The costs and benefits of these options will be reviewed and assessed as more detailed plans are developed. These large geographic tracts have each been designated under one of five planning units. Key, or focal values as well as secondary values, applied to each unit, helped determine their designation. Neither the designation of the units nor the focal or secondary values will necessarily preclude other activities within any unit. However, the designations and values will help inform future decision-making.

The tangible result of this planning is a map of western Nova Scotia, which delineates 19 areas (polygons). The accompanying legend shows

the values identified at this initial stage as important considerations in future planning for each area. The five overarching planning units are identified by different styles and colours of outline and cross-hatching.

The **planning units** are:

Park or other Protected Area: Government has identified the lands which will be protected for future generations with the release of the Parks and Protected Areas Plan in August of 2013. The management of these sites as Provincial Parks, Wilderness Areas or Nature Reserves is directed by specific programs and by legislation. These areas were identified through a detailed planning process that was separate from the Western Crown Land Planning process, but used to inform this document. No resource extraction is to be planned for these lands.

Resource Management Area: Areas have defined or known high-value resource development potential. Their primary use will be resource development and extraction for economic purposes. Subsequent planning work is expected to identify additional areas of significance; the implementation of special management practices will be required at that time.



Multiple Value Area: Have the potential for economic, social and environmental benefits. In these tracts multiple focal values are present and no dominant value or suite of values are identified. In other words, there is no single, overriding value to guide future management decisions. As a result, this area may be managed in a way that is consistent with a variety of values. More detailed site planning is required to support individual decisions at the local level and to determine specific areas for maximizing economic and social benefits.



Biodiversity-Rich Landscapes: A biodiversity-rich landscape is characterized by a breadth of species and ecosystems, including but not limited to species-at-risk. The dominant value is conservation. Although resource development can be undertaken in these areas, protection of biodiversity and habitats, will guide management and resource extraction.

Mi'kmaw Management Area: In these areas, the land's focal value is respect for use by the Mi'kmaw people. The land has been set aside for specific management purposes under agreement between the Province and the Mi'kmaq. Special management practices may be required depending on the activities that are proposed and the values of specific sites within the overall area. Decisions regarding these areas will be made in conjunction with the Mi'kmaq.

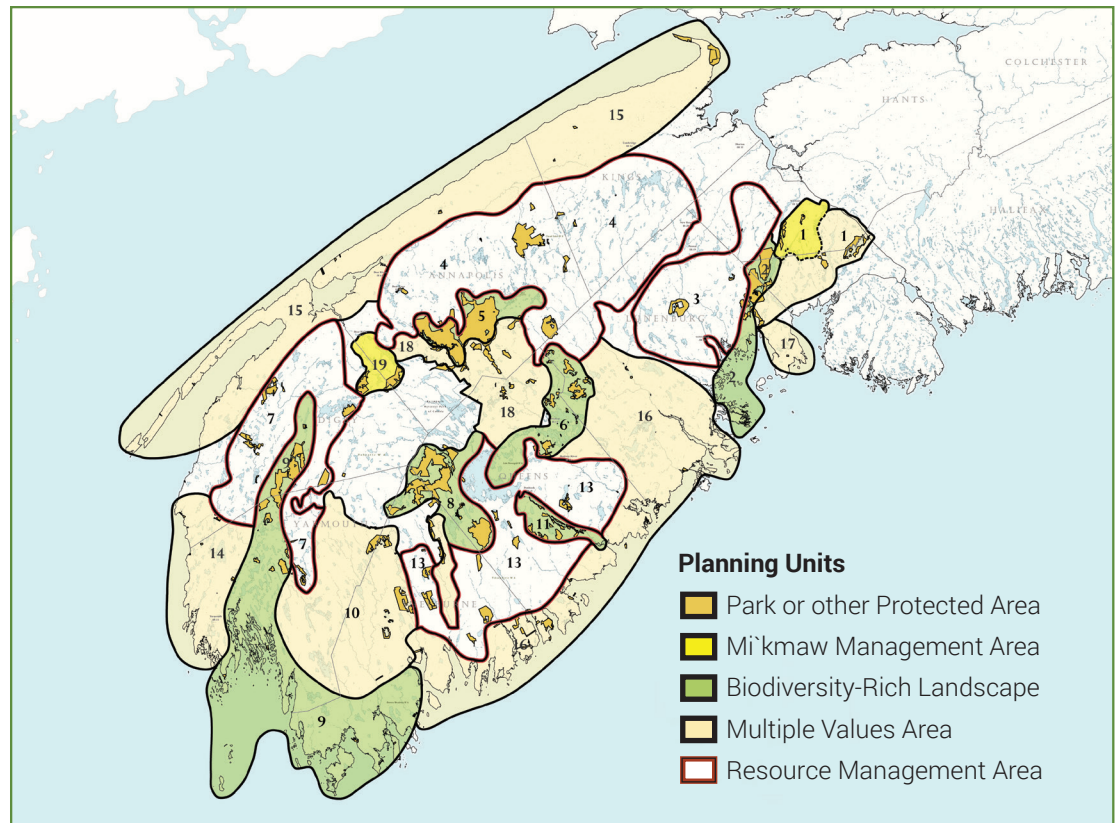
Key **planning values** reflect land management priorities and are based on various interests, resource capabilities and particular program mandates. Values may be either present in one form or another across the planning unit or uniquely significant that it will influence decisions on land use. Values are not explicit statements on management direction. Rather they are intended to help guide the more detailed planning and decision making required to implement the plan. The key planning values are:

- Agriculture and other renewable resources (e.g., cranberries, blueberries, grapes, maple sugar and other crops and products);
- Conservation of biodiversity (species, habitat, ecosystem protection, ecosystem goods and services, land and water connectivity);
- Energy (oil, gas, or renewable energy such as wind and water);

- Forestry (forest management and industry support);
- Historical and cultural (archeological, special places, cultural sites);
- Mi'kmaw interests (lands identified as having historic and cultural values, lands which have been traditionally used by the Mi'kmaq, or which are of interest for resource development by the Mi'kmaq);
- Minerals (e.g., aggregate, gold, tin, zinc, and other mineral and geological exploration and development) ;
- Motorized and non-motorized uses;
- Public access (public use, authorized activities);
- Recreation (land and water-based recreation, hiking, fishing, hunting, trapping, recreational berry picking, nature appreciation and exploration);
- Tourism (public touring, scenic viewsapes, nature-based tourism, coastal areas, tourism business);
- Watersheds (designated and municipal water supply areas, significant water based ecosystems).

The best way to illustrate area designation is by example. The East Lunenburg West Hants area is designated as a resource management planning unit. Forestry is the focal value, and other important values are mineral development, recreational activities, biodiversity and Mi'kmaw travel routes. Key features of this large area include waterways, wetlands, protected areas, certified forest management lots, historical Mi'kmaw cultural sites and a past history of silviculture. As the planning becomes more detailed these values will be more explicitly defined on the land, i.e., where they occur.

As well, the potential economic, social and environmental benefits and costs will be assessed, to ensure that the planning results in the best outcomes for all Nova Scotians. These plans will need to reflect the values from the larger planning units in this document. These characteristics will guide local land management decisions and designations, which would focus on commercial forestry and could include community forests, conservation lands and other economic or social uses as indicated.



A detailed, interactive map of the western Crown land may be viewed here:
<http://novascotia.ca/natr/land/western-land/>

Number	Block	Planning Unit*	Focal Value
1	St. Margarets	Mi'kmaw Management / Multiple Values	Forestry / Minerals / Mi'kmaw / Watershed / Biodiversity / Recreation
2	Panuke	Biodiversity-Rich Landscape	Biodiversity / Recreation / Forestry
3	East Lunenburg / West Hants	Resource Management	Forestry / Biodiversity / Minerals / Recreation
4	Annapolis / Kings	Resource Management	Forestry / Culture & Heritage / Minerals
5	Medway	Biodiversity-Rich Landscape	Biodiversity / Recreation / Tourism / Culture / Heritage / Minerals / Forestry
6	Ponhook / Molega	Biodiversity-Rich Landscape	Biodiversity / Culture & Heritage / Mi'kmaw / Forestry
7	Digby County North / Yarmouth	Resource Management	Biodiversity / Forestry / Minerals
8	Dunraven	Biodiversity-Rich Landscape	Biodiversity / Forestry / Culture & Heritage / Minerals / Mi'kmaw
9	Coastal Plain	Biodiversity-Rich Landscape	Biodiversity / Minerals / Forestry
10	Yarmouth Barrens	Multiple Values	Biodiversity / Recreation / Forestry / Wetlands / Agriculture / Minerals
11	Lower Mersey	Biodiversity-Rich Landscape	Biodiversity / Mi'kmaw / Forestry
12	Jordan River	Multiple Values	Recreation / Culture & Heritage / Access / Minerals / Mi'kmaw / Forestry
13	Rossignol	Resource Management	Forestry / Culture & Heritage / Mi'kmaw
14	Western Yarmouth / Digby	Multiple Values	Biodiversity / Forestry / Tourism / Recreation / Mi'kmaw
15	North Mountain	Multiple Values	Biodiversity / Forestry / Tourism / Recreation / Energy
16	South Shore	Multiple Values	Biodiversity / Forestry / Tourism / Recreation / Watershed / Minerals / Mi'kmaw
17	Aspotogan	Multiple Values	Biodiversity / Forestry / Tourism / Recreation / Mi'kmaw
18	West Caledonia / South Medway	Multiple Values	Biodiversity / Forestry / Tourism / Recreation / Culture & Heritage / Minerals
19	Bear River	Mi'kmaw Management	Biodiversity / Mi'kmaw / Recreation / Forestry

*Each block also contains a Park or other Protected Area Planning Unit.



Next steps in the planning process

Planning for the Western Crown Lands will become progressively more detailed as the focus moves from the strategic level of this concept plan to the development of regional plans and then the more detailed operational plans that guide individual activities on the ground. This work will result in planning units of this concept plan being further subdivided with specific management direction on individual Crown land blocks becoming evident.

The values and information developed in this document will be used to inform and guide future planning to maintain consistency in the planning approach. Additional information will continue to be gathered and analyzed, as will the opportunity for public engagement. Specific sectors of interest or values that are neither site specific nor limited geographically and cross planning units will continue to be utilized.

Conclusion

The Province has embarked on a new land management journey. Rather than starting at the end, and carving land into individual plots each for its own purposes, the government is starting at the beginning: looking at the big picture and basing initial land use designation on key values. Sustainable land, forest, biodiversity and resource management are provincial priorities and, as indicated by the level of engagement, a vital concern of Nova Scotians.

