



Ecodistrict Profile

Ecological Landscape Analysis Summary Ecodistrict 220: **Victoria Lowlands**

An objective of ecosystem-based management is to manage landscapes in as close to a natural state as possible. The intent of this approach is to promote biodiversity, sustain ecological processes, and support the long-term production of goods and services. Each of the province's 38 ecodistricts is an ecological landscape with distinctive patterns of physical features. (Definitions of underlined terms are included in the print and electronic glossary.)

This Ecological Landscape Analysis (ELA) provides detailed information on the forest and timber resources of the various landscape components of Victoria Lowlands Ecodistrict 220. The ELA also provides brief summaries of other land values, such as minerals, energy and geology, water resources, parks and protected areas, wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Victoria Lowlands, with an area of 18,457 hectares, is the second smallest ecodistrict in Nova Scotia and includes the gently rolling topography along the Atlantic coastline of eastern Cape Breton Island.

This ecodistrict contains most of the land suitable for farming in the northern part of Cape Breton Island. Where old fields and clearings have been abandoned, white spruce has reforested the sites. Coastal erosion is a concern for landowners.



The North, Middle and South Aspy Rivers flow into Aspy Bay near Dingwall in the Victoria Lowlands.

Much of the ecodistrict reflects a history of land clearing and harvesting. Much of this occurred on the gentle terrain adjacent to the coast and second growth forests tend to be dominated by balsam fir, white spruce, white birch, and red maple.



Barrier beach along St. Anns Bay near River Bennet.

On the hillier terrain with longer slopes, sugar maple, beech, and yellow birch prevail, along with scattered red oak, white ash, white birch, red maple, hemlock, and white pine. White pine

and hemlock will be found in the ravines along the rivers and streams flowing off the plateau. Near Neils Harbour, there are rare stands of jack pine.

Private land ownership accounts for 56% of the total area, with federal lands representing 24%, provincial Crown lands 16%, and the remaining 4% for other uses.

Landscapes are large areas that function as ecological systems and respond to a variety of influences.

Landscapes are composed of smaller ecosystems, known as elements. These elements are described by their physical features – such as soil and landform – and ecological features – such as climax forest type. These characteristics help determine vegetation development.

Element descriptions promote an understanding of historical vegetation patterns and the effects of current disturbances. This landscape analysis identified and mapped seven key landscape elements – one dominant matrix element, five smaller patch elements, and a corridor element– in Victoria Lowlands.

Tolerant Hardwood Hills, representing about half of the ecodistrict, is the matrix element. This element naturally supports long-lived and shade-tolerant hardwood forests of sugar maple, yellow birch, and beech. Red maple is also common. Secondary forests of balsam fir and white spruce are abundant in this element and reflect a modification of the original vegetation following European settlement.

In **Spruce Fir Hills and Hummocks**, the largest patch element, the forests tend to be dominated by black spruce on the moister sites. Balsam fir and white spruce, with a component of white birch and red maple, are found on the better-drained soils that are usually associated with the lower and middle slopes and ravines.

The other patch elements, which are all quite small, are **Coastal Beach, Wetlands, Salt Marsh** (located within the Valley Corridors element), and **Floodplain**.

Valley Corridors is a linear element associated with the main watercourses in the ecodistrict.