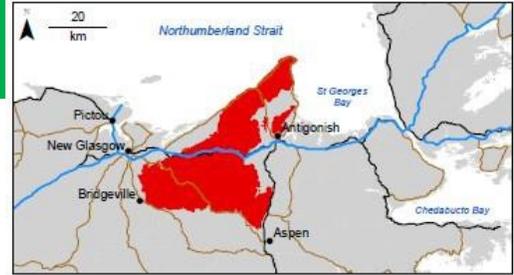


Ecodistrict Profile

Ecological Landscape Analysis Summary Ecodistrict 330: **Pictou Antigonish Highlands**



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 Pictou Antigonish Highlands Ecodistrict 330. 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.

This ecodistrict has been described as an elevated triangle separating the Northumberland Lowlands Ecodistrict 530 of Pictou County from the St. Georges Bay Ecodistrict 520 lowlands of Antigonish County.

Generally, the highlands at their summit become a rolling plateau best exemplified by The Keppoch, an area once extensively settled and farmed. The elevation in the ecodistrict is usually 210 to 245 metres above sea level and rises to 300 metres at Eigg Mountain.

The total area of Pictou Antigonish Highlands is 133,920 hectares. Private land ownership accounts for 75% of the ecodistrict, 24% is under provincial Crown management, and the remaining 1% includes water bodies and transportation corridors.

A significant portion of the highlands was settled and cleared for farming by Scottish settlers beginning in the late 1700s with large communities at Rossfield, Browns Mountain, and on The Keppoch. However, with the abandonment of these farms starting shortly after World War One and continuing as the rural population moved to urban centres, most of these lands are now back in a forested condition, often in stands of white spruce.



On the plateau portions of the Pictou Antigonish Highlands, Scottish settlers of the 1800's cleared the forest for farming which when abandoned reverted to white spruce forests.

Influenced by high elevations, the ecodistrict has late, cool springs, cold winters, and low annual temperatures.

Nearly 90% of the ecodistrict is forested. Current and potential old growth forest habitat has been identified for this ecodistrict, which will benefit a variety of wild species, including moose, as well as interior forest species that cannot tolerate forest fragmentation, and cavity nesters such as some of the song birds and owls. Winter surveys for owls in 2006 indicated a relatively large population of barred owls – the most common type of owl in Nova Scotia – in this ecodistrict.

Much of the province's geological history can be viewed in this ecodistrict, including ancient volcanoes and the fossils at Arisaig that are more than 400 million years old.



Fossils more than 400 million years old can be found in the cliffs along the Northumberland Strait near Arisaig.

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 Pictou Antigonish Highlands.

Tolerant Hardwood Hills is the matrix element, representing 64% of the ecodistrict. This element represents shade-tolerant hardwoods, such as sugar maple, yellow birch, and beech, typical of the Acadian Forest. This type of forest can be seen on the slopes along the Trans-Canada Highway in the Marshy Hope area.

Red and Black Spruce Hummocks is the largest patch element, generally found on the plateau-like top of the ecodistrict. Red spruce is usually found on well-drained soils while black spruce is more likely found on soils that are wetter.

The other patch elements, in order of size, are **Tolerant Mixedwood Hills**, **Tolerant Mixedwood Slopes**, and **Floodplain**. *A tiny Wetlands element is also part of the ecodistrict.*

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