

# Government Response

to the Independent Review  
of Forest Practices  
in Nova Scotia

December 2018



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Department of Lands and Forestry  
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# Government Response to the Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia

Government accepts Professor Lahey's Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia and agrees with the spirit and intent of his recommendations. Many of Professor Lahey's recommendations are interconnected, and their implementation will be phased in over time.

The key to Professor Lahey's report is the adoption of a new paradigm – ecological forestry. As Professor Lahey states, "ecological forestry is primarily concerned with the effects of forestry on ecological values such as water, soil, and habitat for species that inhabit and constitute those ecosystems. In place of a philosophy of mitigation, it seeks to align forestry with ecological protection and biodiversity conservation by integrating ecological knowledge, principles and concepts into how forestry is conducted." After careful consideration of all of the recommendations, we have identified priority actions that are foundational to achieving ecological forestry in Nova Scotia. This response outlines those priority actions.

Nova Scotia will protect and enhance ecosystems and biodiversity as the overarching policy priority, as they are the foundation for other values.

Nova Scotia's forest policies and operational decision making will be guided by the practice of ecological forestry through a triad model. This will represent a significant change in the way Nova Scotia's forest will be managed and will require modelling for habitat and wood supply. Using this approach, Crown land will be managed with a greater emphasis on ecological considerations which will result in changes on the ground, including less clearcutting. Lands and Forestry will begin work on a process to identify appropriate areas for high production forestry on Crown land. High production areas will be managed to maximize timber production but will still be subject to environmental protection for values like watercourses and species at risk. Once identified, government will allow the regulated use of herbicides in areas identified for high production forestry but will not use public funds. In future, Government will also conduct a review of its existing Crown and private silviculture programs.

The Department of Lands and Forestry will immediately initiate revisions to its Forest Management Guide to place more emphasis on ecological values. The Forest Management Guide dictates the types of forest practices that can be used on Crown land. As revisions are implemented, this will have the effect of further reductions in clearcutting on Crown land, particularly where multi-aged and mixed species forests in which late successional species would naturally occur. The revisions are expected to take approximately 12 months to complete and will involve external expert advisors and input from stakeholders.

Likewise, the department will initiate a peer review of its current approach to Natural Disturbance Regimes mapping and methodology, to ensure alignment with ecological forestry, as recommended by Professor Lahey. It is anticipated that the peer review can be completed in 2019. This work will also involve external scientific experts and input from stakeholders.

Government will increase its focus on wildlife and species at risk and will take actions including making revisions to pre-treatment assessments to encompass and address wildlife issues and by completing outstanding recovery plans and status reports in 2019.

To support the move to ecological forestry, the department has developed interim retention guidelines that will put greater focus on multi-aged management practices. Interim retention guidelines are required to begin the shift to more ecological forestry practices on the ground, and to provide direction and clarity to licensees while the longer-term work on the Forest Management Guides is underway. This will provide an opportunity to conduct operational trials to test the ecological and economic outcomes of different levels of retention. These interim retention guidelines will be communicated to all licensees and available for public viewing on the Lands and Forestry website. ([https://novascotia.ca/natr/forestry/Forest\\_Review/](https://novascotia.ca/natr/forestry/Forest_Review/))

In addition, Government will extend forestry licensing agreements by one year. This will allow time to begin the work required and, in the interim, provide continued access to Crown land for Crown licensees.

Government will introduce a Biodiversity Act in 2019 which will create a legislative framework that supports ecological forestry by recognizing the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Nova Scotia. Government also commits to undertaking a review of the Crown Lands Act.

Lands and Forestry will develop and implement an outcomes-based approach to forestry management of Crown land. Government is reviewing options for the way forward on Outcomes Based Management and will involve stakeholders in its development. As outlined in Professor Lahey's report, this process will require the completion of several other pieces of work, so it will take some time to fully implement this recommendation.

Government accepts the recommendation to improve and demonstrate a culture of openness, transparency and accountability within the Department of Lands and Forestry. To further this commitment, Government will:

- Within the next year, establish options for an independent process for environmental reviews for proposed long term forest management licenses that includes the opportunity for public involvement;
- Report on progress and inform and involve stakeholders and the public as work moves forward. As part of this commitment, Professor Lahey has agreed to come back to lead an evaluation of Government's progress;
- Increase the use of academic partnerships, peer-review, and external scientific expertise in research and program development;
- Improve the department's State of the Forest Report, with input from the academic community;

The Department of Lands and Forestry will work with private land owner organizations to encourage adoption of Professor Lahey's recommendations, particularly with respect to implementing ecological forestry through a triad model. While the department will be examining Professor Lahey's recommendations in more detail, its immediate priority is to proceed with implementation of recommendations that pertain to Crown land. Policy changes pertaining to private forest land will be considered when implementation of recommendations on Crown land are more advanced.

Many of Professor Lahey's recommendations relate to work that is currently underway in the department. Where appropriate, existing work will be revised to respond to Professor Lahey's recommendations. For example, in practice, whole and full tree harvesting in clearcuts is already prohibited on Crown land. Government commits to formalizing this practice into policy.

Lands and Forestry has existing work on landscape level planning currently underway which involves internal and external scientific expertise. This work will continue and will be accelerated in response to Professor Lahey's report.

Likewise, Government has been exploring opportunities for small scale wood energy projects. The departments of Lands and Forestry, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and Energy and Mines are in discussions on this project.

Finally, Lands and Forestry has been involved in research, frequently with the cooperation and collaboration of external scientists and experts and has established a Forest Biodiversity Science Advisory Committee. Further research in the areas such as natural disturbance regimes, wildlife clumps, watercourse buffers, old forest, and forest harvesting adjacent to protected areas will be included in research planning. Much of this work will involve external scientists and experts.

### Next Steps:

We acknowledge that this response does not address all of Professor Lahey's recommendations, however it highlights the initial steps that we will take. It is important to recognize that there is more work to be done and not all of the changes can happen at once. We will keep our stakeholders and the public informed and involved in our progress as we move ahead.