

Provincial Parks

THE PATH WE SHARE

A Natural Resources Strategy
for Nova Scotia 2011-2020
Five-year Progress Report

APPENDIX 5

GOAL 19: SHARED STEWARDSHIP

Challenge Nova Scotians to work together to create a sustainable park system for 2020 and beyond.

73 Engage the public at provincial, regional, and community levels in a focused dialogue about provincial parks.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- In 2012, the department hired a consulting firm for a two-phase project to develop and implement a stakeholder engagement process that would inform the department about what Nova Scotians value in their provincial park system and what they think could be improved. A total of 47 stakeholder engagement sessions were held in 21 communities (4 virtually via videoconference) across Nova Scotia. These sessions drew 460 participants: 119 DNR staff members, 99 stakeholders, and 242 members of the public.
- Also in 2012, the department hired a consulting firm to conduct a survey of users and non-users of provincial parks to provide a clear understanding of their perceptions and preferences in relation to provincial parks. A total of almost 2,000 interviews were conducted:
 - A telephone survey of the Nova Scotian general population to identify 350 non-users—those who have not used the parks in the past year—their awareness of the parks, interest in outdoor activities, and the potential value they perceive in the parks versus other provincial programs.
 - On-site interviews with 700 day-park users to examine what they value about the parks, their awareness of the parks system, their frequency and usage patterns, perceived value and importance of Nova Scotia's provincial parks, and what funding options for the parks they would be comfortable with.
 - Online interviews with 765 parks users on their awareness of the parks system, their perceived value of provincial parks from a personal use perspective (experience with the parks) and taxpayer perspective (where provincial parks rank in the tax portfolio hierarchy of importance), and what funding options for the parks they would be comfortable with.
- In 2013, the province released *Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Plan for Nova Scotia*. This final plan reflects feedback received following the release of the proposed plan early in 2013. This included more than 2,000 written submissions and input from more than 1,300 people at 17 public open house sessions held across the province. Specific properties proposed for protection are also based on extensive consultation, with the public and Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, around land selection and use. This consultation was informed by the 2009 Colin Stewart Forest Forum report and the 12 percent lands review process (2011), which included numerous stakeholder meetings and more than 700 written submissions.
- The primary role of a park management plan or statement is to identify the contributions that a park makes to achieving objectives set out in the Parks Act. The plan identifies property-specific management policies to maintain or enhance those contributions and guides park planning, management, development, and operations of parks over time. Public consultation is a critical component of the parks planning process, and the department provides a number of opportunities for engagement. The department lists the current engagement sessions online at novascotia.ca/natr/parks/ and encourages people to attend public planning and information sessions, submit written comments, and complete surveys on the management planning of provincial parks.

- Since the release of the *Parks and Protected Areas Plan*, four management plans have been drafted, one is in progress, and three are upcoming.
- The department continues to gather feedback on how we are doing with respect to keeping parks relevant to Nova Scotians and visitors. The department provides a number of media to allow the public to offer feedback on their experiences. These include comment cards, a web-based comment form (parks.novascotia.ca/contact), a general email address and phone number, and Facebook.

74 Inform Nova Scotians about the current park system—what the parks offer and what they cost—and ask Nova Scotians what they value.

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- The department is developing enhanced online information sources, such as an updated website (parks.novascotia.ca) and a map illustrating the parks and protected areas identified in *Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Proposed Plan for Nova Scotia* (novascotia.ca/parksandprotectedareas/plan/interactive-map/). The map contains a link to fact sheets for each property and includes data on ecological, outdoor recreation, forestry, and other resource values as well as details on exclusions and vehicle access.

75 Involve Nova Scotians in setting priorities for a sustainable park system, addressing the issues of protection, education, recreation, and tourism.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- The department worked collaboratively with Nova Scotia Environment and consulted with municipalities; the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq; community groups; tourism, recreation, and natural resource industries; non-government organizations; and hundreds of individuals to complete the designation of more than 100 properties as wilderness areas, nature reserves, and parks. These designations mean that 12.26 per cent of Nova Scotia's landmass is now protected.
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- In 2011, the Mi'kmaq–Nova Scotia Protected Areas Selection and Management Technical Advisory Group was established. The group was formed to provide advice, information, and recommendations to the province and the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs respecting the scoping, selection, acquisition, designation, management, and use of certain provincial Crown lands established as parks and protected areas contributing to the 12 per cent goal.

76 Develop stable, mutually accountable partnerships.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

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- The department is collaborating with many provincial park associations on partnerships that support the four cornerstones of the parks program as set out in the Provincial Parks Act: protection, outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, and tourism. In a recent example, the department collaborated with the Long Lake Provincial Park Association and local developers to establish the Lakeview Trail at Long Lake Provincial Park, which is just minutes from downtown Halifax. The 5 km gravel trail, which opened in April 2016, will be managed by a team of dedicated volunteers from the Long Lake Provincial Park Association.
- The department is also collaborating with many “Friends of” societies on developing options for partnerships that reflect interests at the community level. There are currently approximately 10 “Friends of” societies for provincial parks around the province. They host events such as picnics, nature and historical tours, and garbage cleanups; maintain trails; and promote events. The Friends of Taylor Head Provincial Park organization offers guided interpretive tours of the park and is responsible for park maintenance beyond the scheduled closing date in October until December.

GOAL 20: FAR-SIGHTED PLANNING

Work collaboratively to guide the planning, management, and operation of a sustainable provincial park system.

77 Make an inventory of the biological diversity, cultural and heritage values, including Mi'kmaq archaeology and archaeological sites, and opportunities for nature-based recreation and education in provincial parks.

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- The department has completed an inventory of geoheritage sites across Nova Scotia, documented in an Open File Map and an online interactive Story Map, both pending release. Input was sought on developing the list of geoheritage sites at all available opportunities, including professional meetings such as the Atlantic Geoscience Society Annual Meeting and Colloquium; meetings of focus groups such as the Education Committee of the Atlantic Geoscience Society; public meetings; workshops with teachers; and consultation with individual geoscientists, prospectors, and members of the public. Consultation with staff of Tourism Nova Scotia has directed the geoheritage program to meet broader roles of economic development in rural areas.
- Although the Fundy Geopark is not part of the provincial parks system, the department has taken the lead role in engaging the community in identifying the economic development opportunity of a UNESCO Global Geopark along the Parrsboro shore. The Cumberland Geological Society, comprising community leaders and entrepreneurs, has embraced the opportunity and has informed the national committee for Global Geoparks of their intentions as an aspiring geopark.
- The department released “Story Circles: A Mi'kmaq Programming Plan” in the fall of 2011; this plan shows how Nova Scotia’s provincial parks could be used to increase awareness and understanding of Mi'kmaq heritage and culture.

78 Evaluate each park for its provincial, regional, and local contribution to the parks mandate (protection, education, recreation, and tourism).

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- *Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Plan for Nova Scotia* implemented a number of changes to provincial park properties. These changes included expanding, creating, and transferring a number of parks. Overall, these changes improve protection and better serve core park mandates—protection, recreation, education, and tourism—by supporting access to coastal and freshwater resources and a variety of natural and cultural heritage experiences.
- Changes to the park properties were based on several criteria:
 - their contribution to the core mandates of protection, recreation, education, and tourism
 - the level of government or non-governmental organization that is best suited to managing a particular property
 - how the management of an existing property could be improved by boundary revisions
 - how new park opportunities or experiences could be established

79 Identify parks that are essential to the provincial parks mandate, parks that are of secondary value to the mandate, and parks that are outside the mandate.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- *Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Plan for Nova Scotia* identified which properties are most important to maintain as parks and which should be managed as part of the general Crown land program or more appropriately managed as wilderness areas or nature reserves.

80 Identify gaps in the park system, and ways to fill the gaps.

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81

Involve municipal and federal government parks representatives when preparing the provincial park system plan.

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82 Monitor the implementation of the park system plan.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- The department worked collaboratively with Nova Scotia Environment and consulted with municipalities; the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq; community groups; tourism, recreation, and natural resource industries; non-government organizations; and hundreds of individuals to complete the designation of more than 100 properties as wilderness areas, nature reserves, and parks. These designations mean that 12.26 per cent of Nova Scotia's landmass is now protected.
- In collaboration with Nova Scotia Environment, the department contributed to Environment Canada's *Canadian Protected Areas Status Report 2012–2015*. This report provides information on the current state of protected areas in Canada and recent trends. Information is provided for Canada's protected areas system as a whole and at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels, respectively.

GOAL 21: PROTECTION

Make protection of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage a priority of the provincial park system.

83 Update laws and policies to emphasize protection in the planning and management of provincial parks.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- The department developed a legislation review plan. Reviews of several pieces of legislation began in the winter of 2013. The plan is updated annually to reflect department and government priorities. Timelines for completion of legislative reviews are variable and range over several months to several years. The review process is collaborative, engaging multiple stakeholders who are internal and external to government.
- Staff have started to identify issues to be addressed in law or policy.

84 Ensure that park planning, development, and operations protect significant natural and cultural heritage assets.

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- In April 2016, a new division named Parks, Outreach and Service Delivery was created within the department. The new division will focus on operating parks under one management structure that combines planning and operating of our parks. This realignment enables the sustainability of our parks program and allows us to better manage our provincial park system while providing the best possible experience for park users.

85 Monitor the protection of natural and cultural heritage assets.

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86 Work with Nova Scotia Environment to integrate the planning and reporting of the parks and protected areas programs.

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- The Department of Natural Resources, Nova Scotia Environment, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada are currently undergoing a joint planning process for the pending New France Provincial Park (Electric City), the northern portion of the pending Silver River Wilderness Area, and adjoining lands recently acquired by the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

GOAL 22: EDUCATION

Deepen public understanding and appreciation of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage.

87 Create new opportunities for people to explore and experience the province's natural and cultural heritage.

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- In May 2016, the government launched the Grade 4s Outdoors program. This program invites students and their families to enjoy camping and provides a provincial park passport to encourage exploration of any park. In June, every grade 4 student in the province received a package containing a provincial parks passport and a campsite coupon for two free nights in any of Nova Scotia's 20 provincial camping parks. The colourful passport encourages kids to explore the park by checking off items and activities they experience while camping with their friends or families. The materials will be available in English and French.
- Although DNR has previously offered the Learn2Camp program, the department is partnering with Scouts Canada in 2016 to offer the Learn2Camp program as another way to encourage camping. People who apply will learn essentials, such as how to build a fire, cook a meal, set up a tent, and choose camping equipment. The weekend program is at Blomidon Provincial Park.
- In May 2016, the department announced it would offer discounted campsite fees at all provincial parks for military veterans who have spent at least three years serving the military for Canada or any country allied with Canada.
- The department is collaborating with many provincial park associations on partnerships that support the four cornerstones of the parks program as set out in the Provincial Parks Act: protection, outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, and tourism. In a recent example, the department collaborated with the Long Lake Provincial Park Association and local developers to establish the Lakeview Trail at Long Lake Provincial Park, which is just minutes from downtown Halifax. The 5 km gravel trail, which opened in April 2016, will be managed by a team of dedicated volunteers from the Long Lake Provincial Park Association.
- The department is also collaborating with many "Friends of" societies on developing options for partnerships that reflect interests at the community level. There are currently approximately 10 "Friends of" societies for provincial parks around the province. They host events such as picnics, nature and historical tours, and garbage cleanups; maintain trails; and promote events. The Friends of Taylor Head Provincial Park organization offers guided interpretive tours of the park and is responsible for park maintenance beyond the scheduled closing date in October until December.

- We're working to make our parks system more accessible. In September 2014, the department invested \$25,000 in wheelchair accessibility at Martinique Beach Provincial Park. Improvements include widening the boardwalk from the parking lot to the beach edge, adding a new stone path that can support heavy wheelchairs and scooters, and installing a larger change house and a larger outdoor washroom to accommodate people with mobility disabilities.
- The department is working with Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency to develop a new plan for education and interpretation at the Shubenacadie Provincial Wildlife Park as well as to make physical improvements to the park and the Ducks Unlimited Canada Greenwing Legacy Centre. These improvements are designed to update the existing high-quality education and outreach programs, provide an improved visitor experience, and continue the work of engaging Nova Scotians of all ages in the stewardship of our biodiversity.

88 Work with communities and other partners to showcase and interpret significant aspects of Nova Scotia's culture and heritage.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- The department released “Story Circles: A Mi’kmaq Programming Plan” in the fall of 2011; this plan shows how Nova Scotia’s provincial parks could be used to increase awareness and understanding of Mi’kmaq heritage and culture.
- The department continues to publish a park guide both in print and online (parks.novascotia.ca/events). The park guide includes a comprehensive listing of nature-based events being offered in the provincial parks system, wilderness areas, nature reserves, and on Crown land. Agencies, organizations, and individuals are encouraged to submit events to be listed in the guide.
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89 Inform Nova Scotians and visitors about the wealth of learning and recreational opportunities in our provincial parks.

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GOAL 23: RECREATION

Provide nature-based recreation that supports a healthy way of life for Nova Scotians, while protecting our natural and cultural heritage.

90 Identify new nature-based recreational opportunities in each park.

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 - Four new properties were added to the provincial park system: Petit-de-Grat, Richmond County; Port Bickerton, Guysborough County; New France, Digby County; and Port L’Hebert, Queens County.

GOAL 23: RECREATION

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91 Ensure that recreation activities are environmentally sustainable.

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- The Nova Scotia Trails Federation and the Government of Nova Scotia have partnered and formed the Trails Strategy Working Group (TSWG) to co-lead the process of developing a strategy for the advancement of trails in the province. While the TSWG has initiated and will guide the process, the final strategy will be the result of multiple opportunities for all members of the trails movement to provide input, create vision, set directions, identify priorities, and in the end, take responsibility for implementation.
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