

**Final report to Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund
Best Conservation and Stewardship Practices Strategy for High-elevation Forest Habitat in Nova Scotia**

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The overall goal of this project was to promote conservation of high-elevation forest habitat that is important for Bicknell's Thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*) and other high-elevation landbirds, which are unique components of Nova Scotia's biological diversity. To achieve this, our immediate project goal was to collaborate with scientists, managers and stakeholders to develop an easy-to-use document for landowners, land users, and land developers in Nova Scotia, to inform land-use decisions that will minimize damage to this highland forest habitat.

Our objectives and results are detailed below.

Objective 1) Preparation of an initial draft of the Best Conservation and Stewardship Practices Document for High-Elevation Forest Habitat in Nova Scotia that:

- a) describes Bicknell's Thrush biology, distribution, habitat and status in Nova Scotia;
- b) discusses current threats to highland forest habitat in Nova Scotia;
- c) recommends conservation objectives to reduce impacts of human activities on highland forest habitat in Nova Scotia;
- d) outlines best management practices for landowners, land users and land managers to minimize negative impacts on of their activities on highland forest habitat.

Objective 2) Consultation with biologists from NS DNR, Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and Parks Canada to prepare draft Document, as required. Revision of Document upon receipt of input from this group of reviewers.

Objective 3) Identification of stakeholders of high-elevation forest habitat, for example:

- a) existing and potential landowners and land users of highland forest habitat in Nova Scotia, including private landowners, corporate landowners such as telecommunication companies, potential wind power developers, and forest companies,
- b) municipal, provincial, and federal government departments and agencies responsible for managing and protecting highland forest habitat in Nova Scotia, and,
- c) the forest and bird conservation community in the province.

Objective 4) Initiation of comprehensive discussions at face-to-face meetings with these stakeholders to: a) discuss existing procedures for managing highland forest habitat, b) share ideas and discuss options to improve existing procedures, and c) solicit further input and comments on the Document.

Results: The initial draft was prepared in November-December 2007 and circulated to major partners (Stora Enso, NS Department of Natural Resources, NS Department of Forestry and Environment, Parks Canada) in January 2008. Two sets of meetings were held in January, primarily with the NS Department of Natural Resources and Department of Forestry, and New Page (previously Stora Enso) to discuss the content of the report and the path forward to protect the habitat of the Bicknell's Thrush. Two additional meetings with New Page were held during the course of the year to discuss management options for Bicknell's Thrush on industrial forest lands in Nova Scotia. A revised draft of the Document (attached) was produced and is currently being circulated amongst stakeholders, partners and scientists with the International Bicknell's Thrush Conservation Group for their review. We decided, through discussion with our primary partner (NS DNR), not to print a hard copy of the management plan. The Document is instead being produced as a living document on BSC's website. Hard copies of the report will be printed individually and mailed to those who request them. The Document will change considerably over the coming years as new research becomes available and potentially a new federal COSEWIC status is applied to the species. We did not feel it was money well spent and paper well used to print a document which is not static.