

Final Report for Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund

Old Growth Forests: Policy Analysis and Community Engagement

OBJECTIVES

The estimated area of old growth forest (OGF) in the Maritime Provinces is less than one percent of the total forest cover. This is drastically lower than that of the temperate coastal rainforest found on the Pacific coast of British Columbia where OGF constitutes 55 percent of total forest cover. This demonstrates the dire need for the conservation of OGF as well as the restoration and protection of forested areas that have the potential to develop into OGF in the Maritimes. MTRI and partners have conducted a comprehensive comparative analysis of OGF policy in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia to offer recommendations as to improve the protection of OGF in the Maritime provinces.

METHODS

- To collaborate with government officials, policy analysts, academics, students and environmental organizations to mobilize knowledge and conversation regarding old forest policy.
- To analyze relevant old forest legislation, regulatory frameworks and policy in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia.
- To provide recommendations to improve the current old forest regulatory framework and policy.
- A list of 32 comparative analysis criteria was developed and reviewed by members of MTRI's Old Forest Working Group, which is comprised of leading forest experts, scientists and policy makers in the Maritimes.
- Six students were recruited to participate in the preliminary analysis and contributed 150 volunteer hours.
- East Coast Environmental Law Association was contracted to complete the analysis of regulatory frameworks and legislation and create a report.
- MTRI held a participatory comparative analysis session in Sackville, New Brunswick, where leading forest experts, scientists and policy makers in the Maritimes were invited to provide feedback on the report.

- MTRI transcribed the feedback from the meeting and conducted a comprehensive policy analysis examining relevant forest policy from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia.
- MTRI presented these findings at their Old Forest Conference and facilitated a participatory discussion titled: “Discussion about Future Directions for Old Forest Policy in the Maritimes” alongside partners at Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and Environment Canada.



Photo of Amy Berry from one of the YouTube video showing Old forest policy discussions at Old Forest Conference in Debert October 2016

RESULTS

- Nova Scotia's OGF policy is a great model for other Atlantic provinces, in demonstrating the ways in which science can be integrated into the conservation of OGF. The old forest score sheet is scientific, quantitative and can be utilized to guide best management practices. Moreover, Nova Scotia has an old forest GIS layer and Old Forest Coordinator to oversee all matters relating to old forests. That being said, although there is an Old Forest Policy, there are currently no provisions in place to ensure that eight percent of the land within each of the 38 eco-districts is preserved for OGF conservation or restoration. Moreover, although the policy suggests representation of topography typical to a given ecodistrict, it may prioritize the conservation of stands that have the least commercial value, whereas it should prioritize the stand with the highest conservation value. There is no guarantee that an area protected within the eight percent of each ecodistrict will remain protected in perpetuity, unless it is designated a protected area and can be exchanged for another stand in the same ecodistrict
- Neither Nova Scotia nor New Brunswick have regulatory frameworks that require the conservation or protection of OGF. Whereas, British Columbia has legally enforceable tools to promote the retention of OGF through Old Growth Management Areas.
- The objectives of Old Growth Management Areas (OGMA) are legally binding. All forest licensees in British Columbia, with approved Forest Stewardship Plans, are subject to these objectives and old growth retention requirements. Any OGMA in a given licensee's harvesting or development region, must be included in their Forest Stewardship Plan. That being said, British Columbia does not have a legally mandated provincial monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of old-growth retention and could improve their current framework by implementing such a program.

PARTNERS

Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund (contributions from hunters and trappers)

East Coast Environmental Law

Environment Canada

Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education