

# Action Toolkit: Protect Sandy Lake and Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes from short-sighted development

## 1. Background:

Until recently, land-use planning was a municipal responsibility. But now, the Houston government is trying to override local planning rules and fast-track urban sprawl that favours developer interests over community wellbeing.

They're doing this through **Special Planning Areas (SPAs)** - areas the province has designated for accelerated development approvals. While not all SPAs are bad, where these areas are located is important.

Two of the SPAs are located at **Sandy Lake and the Highway 102 West Corridor (adjacent to the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes (BMBCL) Wilderness Area)**.

Both are outside Halifax's Urban Service Boundary, meaning they will require costly new infrastructure at taxpayer expense. They are not on public transit, making them car-dependent and certain to increase traffic congestion. These developments would cut down forests, destroy habitats for endangered species, degrade water quality, and eliminate valuable recreation opportunities.

**These forests aren't just beautiful** - they perform ecosystem services we rely on: filtering air and water, storing carbon, and providing natural flood and fire buffers. Losing them would be a permanent and costly mistake.

Nova Scotia needs more housing, but building in the wrong places is not a real solution. We need housing built in areas that already have services, are accessible by transit, and are part of complete, connected communities - not in sensitive, vital forests.

**Read on for details on each development, along with resources and tips on how you can take action.**

## 2. Main Issues with Each SPA

Here are the key reasons we strongly oppose development in these two Special Planning Areas. **Development in both areas would destroy sensitive wilderness, create costly taxpayer burdens, and worsen long-term problems for our communities.**

### ***Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes (Highway 102 West Corridor)***

- Announced as an SPA and moved to secondary planning *on the same day* — without adequate environmental or traffic studies.
- 11,500 housing units proposed in a wilderness area that is habitat for countless native species, including the endangered Mainland Moose.
- This is essentially a city the size of Truro!
- Would degrade water quality in surrounding lakes and waterways, and disrupt wildlife corridors.
- Loss of valued recreation space for hiking, biking, camping and swimming. *Nova Scotians have been fighting to protect this area for over 50 years!*
- Outside the Urban Service Boundary and not on public transit - making it costly for taxpayers to service, fully car-dependent, and certain to increase traffic congestion on Highway 102.



## ***Sandy Lake***

- Home to over 100 bird species and one of the last spawning grounds for the endangered Atlantic salmon.
- At least 6,000 housing units proposed on unserviced land, which would damage lake water quality, threaten safe swimming, and destroy critical habitat.
- Outside the Urban Service Boundary and not on public transit - increasing costs to taxpayers and adding to congestion on Highway 102 and Bedford Highway.
- Removes forests that filter air and water, store carbon and provide habitat for wildlife.
- Home to significant stands of old growth forest - some of the last of its kind in the HRM. Less than one per cent of old growth forest is left in Nova Scotia.
- Threatens recreational space valued by Nova Scotians and their families - encroaching on what little greenspace we have left in our city.

## **We are demanding the Province:**

- Remove Sandy Lake and Highway 102 West Corridor from the SPA list and protect these areas from future developments.
- Focus housing development in areas that make better use of taxpayer dollars, such as existing serviced land and brownfield sites.
- Prioritize truly affordable housing that meets community needs without unnecessarily destroying greenspace.
- Improve environmental standards for the Land Suitability Analyses that evaluate potential development sites, ensuring they fully account for ecological value and climate resilience.
- Take community feedback seriously – prioritize the wants and needs of your citizens over the economic interest of developers

## **3. How to Take Action**

### **A. Write or Meet with Decision-Makers**

A personal email, phone call, or meeting shows that you care enough to take the time — and that matters to your MLA. It doesn't have to be long: *even five minutes of your time can make a huge difference.*

**Use the key points and demands above to help craft your message.**

## ***Why personal is better than a template:***

- Template letters/emails are sometimes easier to dismiss; personal messages show genuine engagement.
- Sharing your own perspective makes your message stand out.
- When many people reach out individually, it's harder for elected officials to ignore an issue.

## ***Who to contact:***

- **Premier Tim Houston** – [premier@novascotia.ca](mailto:premier@novascotia.ca)
- **Minister Colton LeBlanc** (Growth & Housing) – [info@coltonleblanc.ca](mailto:info@coltonleblanc.ca)
- **BMBCL MLAs:** Rick Burns ([rick.burns.mla@gmail.com](mailto:rick.burns.mla@gmail.com)), Adegoke Fadare ([adegoke@adegokefadare.ca](mailto:adegoke@adegokefadare.ca)), Iain Rankin ([info@iainrankin.ca](mailto:info@iainrankin.ca))
- **Sandy Lake MLA:** Damian Stoilov ([contact@damianstoilovmla.com](mailto:contact@damianstoilovmla.com))
- **Your MLA** – [Find yours here](#)
- **The Mayor & your Councillor** – [Find yours here](#)

If you'd like help preparing for an in-person meeting, contact Jillian Ramsay, sustainable cities coordinator with the EAC, at [jillian.ramsay@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:jillian.ramsay@ecologyaction.ca).

**For more tips and resources on in-person meetings, click here to download our [Guide to Meeting With Your Elected Official](#).**

## ***B. Support Coalitions working on this issue***

Following and engaging with the local coalitions fighting these developments helps demonstrate public support and strengthens their advocacy.

- **Sandy Lake–Sackville River Regional Park Coalition** – [Instagram](#) + [Facebook](#)
- **Friends of Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes** – [Instagram](#) + [Facebook](#)
- Consider becoming a [member](#) of Friends of BMBCL – it's free!
- Subscribe to the [Friends of BMBCL](#) or [SLSRRP Coalition](#) newsletters to stay informed and ready to act.

**Together, let's send a strong message to the Houston government:**

No more short-sighted urban sprawl. No more band-aid fixes for the housing crisis. No more destroying beloved and crucial natural spaces for the benefit of wealthy developers.

**No More B.S.**