

Cloud Lake in Kings County is a protected representation of South Mountain Rolling Plain landscape. PHOTO: NS Dept. of Environment

How Protected Areas Are Chosen

by IAN JOHNSTON // EAC Volunteer

According to *Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Plan for Nova Scotia*, the government of Nova Scotia committed to protecting 12 per cent of Nova Scotia's land from exploitation and ecological harm by 2015. As of writing, 12.39 per cent is protected, with a new goal of 13 per cent indicated on provincial government websites. The Plan calls for the creation and expansion of provincial parks, wilderness areas, and nature reserves. It is an ongoing project, along with Canada's international commitment to protecting 17 per cent of terrestrial, and 10 per cent of marine territory by 2020.

Selection Criteria

Downtown Halifax would not make a particularly good nature reserve. So what would? According to Ray Plourde, Wilderness Coordinator at the EAC, there are a number of factors. Preserving representative samples of Nova Scotia's landscape is one criteria. Protecting rare and endangered species and their habitats is another. Ray explains it is "meant to save relatively large, relatively roadless, natural areas of habitat for wild creatures." The ideal is untouched, primordial wilderness. Unfortunately, Nova Scotia doesn't have much, if any, of that. Plourde estimates less than one half of a percent of Nova Scotia is old-growth forests, and these are only around one hundred years of age. True, mature old growth forest would be dominated by 400 to 600 year old trees. It is no wonder that species that once thrived in those forests are now struggling.

TAKE ACTION

Contact your MLA and ask them to prioritize completing the Plan and designate the remaining identified sites. From there, ask them to continue the designation of new and expanded protected areas. Find your MLA using the tool at: enstools.gov.ns.ca/edinfo2012/

The unfinished provincial *Plan* identifies the criteria used when selecting sites for protection, calling them the "6 R's":

REMOTE: large areas in a mostly natural state with few human impacts

REPRESENTATIVE: examples of the full spectrum of Nova Scotia's natural Landscapes

RICH: productive and diverse—where plant, lichen and animal life flourish

RARE: unique or rare landscapes, plants, or animals

RESTORATION: areas that fill important land gaps but need time to restore from past use

RE-CONNECTION: areas that provide important natural connections for plants and animals

Designation of new areas or expansion of existing protected sites often requires public input and consultation with Mi'kmaq communities. Private lands may also need to be acquired through purchase or trade.



Polletts Cove-Aspy Fault Wilderness Area in Cape Breton protects unique coastal habitat for endangered piping plover.



Initially designated as a game sanctuary, the Tobetic Wilderness Area is now the largest protected area in the Maritimes offering significant biodiversity protection.

Designations

The *Plan* explains that there are three designations for protected areas in modern use. Each designation protects against resource extraction and development on protected land. Special considerations may be made for existing mineral rights, for maintenance or easement of existing roads, and necessary infrastructure like electric lines.

There are Provincial Parks that are only counted by the *Plan* when their main purpose is protecting nature. They still allow recreational use. Parks that mainly protect culturally or recreationally significant sites do not count toward protection goals.

Wilderness Areas are generally large habitat areas that are less accessible than parks, but still available for low-impact recreation. They are selected to encompass Nova Scotia's typical natural landscapes and biodiversity, and tend to be further from areas of human activity when possible.

Areas designated as Nature Reserves are the most protected and are smaller areas that protect rare or endangered species and their habitats. They are generally only accessed for research and educational purposes.

RESOURCES

- Aaron Beswick: thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/1545009-nova-scotia%E2%80%99s-game-sanctuaries-protect-game-but-not-their-habitat
- Liscomb Game Sanctuary: novascotia.ca/just/regulations/regs/willicom.htm
- Interactive Map: novascotia.ca/parksandprotectedareas/plan/interactive-map/

Game Sanctuaries

The concept of protecting nature is not new, but it has historically been protected for human benefit. For example, in Nova Scotia we still have areas designated as game sanctuaries that have recently come into public scrutiny, as they surprisingly do not do much to conserve nature.

Around a hundred years ago, hunting was still a necessary source of food for many Nova Scotians. At the time, hunting was having a significant impact on many species. By the 1920s, there were few remaining moose or caribou. The beaver population was dwindling due to unrestrained trapping. The answer was the creation of game sanctuaries. The Liscomb, Tobetic, Waverley and Chignecto Game Sanctuaries were all created in the 1920s and 1930s.

These sanctuaries forbade hunting and trapping. In theory, the endangered animals would shelter and breed in the safety of the sanctuary, and eventually their numbers would require the surplus to migrate to unprotected areas. Of course, this was all for the purpose of preserving species that were valued for their meat or pelts.

On February 12, 2018, Aaron Beswick of the *Chronicle Herald* reported that large areas of the Liscomb Game Sanctuary had been clear cut for timber and dug up for gold mining. The regulations for the sanctuary clearly define restrictions on hunting, but have no protections for the land itself or the habitat required by wildlife species. Resource extraction within the Sanctuaries is perfectly legal with normal permits.

The animals were protected, but their environment was not. Today we recognize that you cannot safeguard the former without concern for the latter. Game sanctuaries are not currently counted toward Nova Scotia's conservation goals. If they ever will, the regulations around game sanctuaries will need to be updated, or the sanctuaries could be designated as protected areas.

Conclusion

Nova Scotia has been a regional leader in its designation of protected areas for nature. But our progress in recent years seems to have stalled, with almost one hundred sites identified in the *Plan* still waiting for official protection designation from the provincial government.

Ecology, boardgames, Shakespeare, mental health, fantasy, and real estate are the unusual topics Ian Johnston writes about. He received an Master of Arts from The University of Western Ontario and a Master of Education from The University of Ottawa. He lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.