



**St. Francis Xavier University -
Interdisciplinary Studies of Aquatic Resources
Pictou Landing First Nation
& Nova Scotia First Nation's Forestry Association**

**Thousand Acre Project:
Pictou Landing First Nation Woodlot -
Enhancement, Conservation and Education**

Final Report - July 2003

Participating Partners:

- Pictou Landing First Nation
- First Nations Forestry Program of Nova Scotia
- Interdisciplinary Studies in Aquatic Resources, StFX University

Project Goals and Objectives

In the summer of 2001, a proposal for forest enhancement on the woodlots of the Pictou Landing First Nation was submitted to the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund. The partners to this application were the Pictou Landing First Nation, the Nova Scotia First Nations Forestry Program, and the Aquatic Resources program of St. Francis Xavier University.

This proposal grew out of the efforts of a joint First Nation - University working group, established at the invitation of First Nation staff in the spring of 2000, for the enhancement of the Pictou Landing Woodlot. Owned by the First Nation, this property had been awarded sustainable forest management certification from the Forest Stewardship Council one year earlier.

The Thousand Acre Project outlined a series of objectives. These included; the enhancement of habitat for animals, birds and plants; the increase in biodiversity of same; the provision of learning opportunities for local students, and citizens, in wildlife habitat and conservation; and the promotion of alternative methods and approaches to timber harvesting to ensure long-term sustainability.

Outline of Work Completed

On this basis, a series of plans were developed. The 1000 Acre Project was approved by the FUND in the summer of 2001. Over a series of meetings in the autumn and winter of 2001-2002, the Working Group planned and approved a set of activities. Throughout the process, the working group served as the coordinating body for the implementation of project work. Initiatives ranged from waterflow improvements, to the preparation of trails and meeting areas that would enhance accessibility, to the development of educational materials and community awareness of this valuable local resource.

1.) Watercourse improvements

A series of undertakings were identified with the aim of improving waterflow at several points within the woodlot. This work required the use of machinery and was completed in the summer of 2002.

It began with the excavation of a pond (in a natural basin), to a depth acceptable for overwintering fish. The lack of a source of "standing water" has been of concern to the woodlot managers for some time. In an effort to promote the flora, fauna and aquatic life that are attendant to a body of water, a .5 hectare pond was created utilizing the low, or downstream, end of existing wet ground. The pond was designed to have an irregular shape and a contoured bottom to a maximum depth of ten feet. It is felt that this depth will act as a thermal refuge for aquatic life in the warm season as well as for the 150 trout that have been introduced into the pond. An island was also included in the design of the pond to create a safe habitat for nesting birds and breeding aquatic animals.

Another element involved the creation of a dam. As a result of the depth of the pond, and the regular and seasonal movement of water through the pond, a significant control structure was required at the outfall. This structure was built using crib-work and shot rock constructed embutments. with removable centre stop logs thus providing total control of the water level and flow in the pond.

2.) Pathways

A second series of undertakings were proposed to provide enhanced physical access to key natural features of the woodlot. These included markings for the trail and sections of fencing near the water features (to protect the user safety).

A walking path has been constructed, and semi-rings the pond along with a post and rail safety fence. This path is in regular use and is a key tool for promotion and education in regards to wildlife habitat and sustainable forest practices. As well, in order to maintain and protect the site, a barricade constructed of 6x6 posts with 2x6 rails was put in place to prohibit vehicular traffic. There is regular evidence of wildlife presence, by deer and other animals.

3.) Outdoor Orientation and Meeting Area

Given the educational outreach objective, the value of an orientation and teaching focal point was recognized. Within the dedicated wildlife enhancement site of the Pictou Landing Certified Forest is an old abandoned farm, including the stone foundation of a farmhouse. In its found condition, this was something of a safety concern. Rather than demolishing or burying the foundation, it was decided to open it up and re-establish the stone walls. This

proved to be a wise decision. Not only did it curtail the need to appropriate forested land for a meeting place, but it now provides an interesting and useful area to conduct educational seminars, talks and group discussions, as well as to display maps and other educational materials.

4.) Educational materials

The work plan called for student research in the woodlot, to monitor animal and plant biodiversity and to develop materials for education and for public awareness. An investigation of birchbark use and harvesting methods and contributed to the preparation of the pamphlet *Maskwi: The removal of bark without harm to the tree*, 2001. Wisqog (Black Ash) have long held a special place in Mi'kmaw culture and a Black Ash trail has been established in the woodlot through the planting of seedlings germinated from a special collection of seeds. This is supported by the NSFNEP pamphlet *Wisqog (Black Ash)*.

5.) Community Awareness and Participation in Woodlot Use

The Working Group was also anxious to encourage awareness of the woodlot as a community resource. To this end, plans have been developed in partnership with teaching staff at the First Nation school. In the past several years many school classes and community groups have visited and learned about the woodlot. Additional tours have been arranged with university students, international visitors, and Native forest worker trainees, among others.

Results

The 1000 Acre Steering Group feels strongly that the project has met the objectives outlined in our application to the NS Habitat Conservation Fund. We can report a rounded package of results. The woodlot has emerged as a point of pride in the Pictou Landing First Nation community. It has become a point of attraction for Band members. The educational programs and physical improvements have given added momentum to an ongoing process of woodlot management for sustainable use. It is particularly rewarding to see the positive responses from the young people of the community, who have become (through the school) regular visitors.

Achievements and Lessons Learned

The Steering Committee is of the view that the partnership approach has been indispensable in achieving the desired project results. The cooperative efforts of Pictou Landing members, Band Office staff, School staff, First Nations Forestry officials and St. Francis Xavier University staff in both the Extension and Aquatic Resources programs, has proved extremely effective over the past two years.

The multi-pronged approach to woodlot enhancement has also been affirmed. By combining a program of social and physical improvement programs, an interesting balance has been achieved. The improved physical access and habitat diversity works to draw a broader range of woodlot visitors for a wider range of activities. At the same time, the curricular materials and field activities build community awareness. Not surprisingly, this has been especially

effective among Pictou Landing youth, who serve as a powerful avenue of communication with older generations.

Recommendations for Follow-up Steps to the Project

The Steering Committee has identified several lines of future endeavour. Several existing lines of activity can be extended and enhanced in the future. There are greater opportunities to integrate the woodlot as an educational site, particularly with adult Band members. There is also greater potential for research and research training activity, in consultation with both university-based and independent experts. Both of these initiatives will be pursued, along with consideration of site based habitat projects as the property requires.

Submitted on behalf of the 1000 Acre Project Steering Group

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