

# Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy

An Action Plan for Achieving 20 Per cent







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# Message from the Ministers

In 2021, our government committed to protecting 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's land and water by 2030. Achieving this goal is so important that we legislated it in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act.

We are now pleased to present the new Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy for Nova Scotia, which sets the direction to achieve this conservation goal.

In addition to protecting our province's outstanding natural heritage, scenery, and significant ecological areas, protected areas improve our quality of life. They support our mental and physical health and well-being, give us clean drinking water, and are important for advancing reconciliation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. Natural areas and our economy are intertwined and we cannot have a strong economy without a healthy environment, and vice versa.

This summer was a heartbreaking reminder of the destruction and loss that climate change can cause. Nature is our ally in the fight against climate change. Forests capture and store carbon and protect us from extreme heat. Wetlands and nature-based solutions, such as living shorelines, help to protect people and our communities from flooding, wildfires, and storm surge. That is why Nova Scotia's Climate Change Plan for Clean Growth has actions to support conserving more land and water, and take action in the face of our changing climate.

Currently, 13.45 per cent of Nova Scotia is protected or conserved. Our government will complete work to deliver on previous commitments as part of our efforts to move quickly to achieve our 2030 protection goal. The Canada–Nova Scotia Nature Agreement announced this fall aligns with and supports our work to protect more of our natural areas, on which all life depends. We thank the Government of Canada for their collaboration and support.





It is an exciting time in Nova Scotia. We are experiencing unprecedented growth, transforming how we produce and use energy, creating a clean economy, and more. As this growth and transformation continues, and as needs for homes, health-care facilities, public infrastructure, and other services increase, it is more important than ever to have more natural areas protected in perpetuity. Protecting more natural areas is one of the greatest gifts we can leave to future generations of Nova Scotians.

Government cannot achieve the 20 per cent protection goal on our own. It will take an all-hands-on-deck approach. Nova Scotia is fortunate to have strong conservation partners and we thank them for their conservation work.

In closing, we want to thank the more than 600 Nova Scotians who provided their thoughts during public consultation on this strategy. They told us that land protection is important, that more work is needed on both private and provincial lands, and that we must continue to work together in order to be successful. The strategy has been informed by those views and outlines our path to achieving 20 per cent land and water protection by 2030.

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Minister of Environment and  
Climate Change

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Minister of Natural Resources  
and Renewables





# Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

## Vision

Significant expansion of Nova Scotia's network of protected and conserved areas to help maintain biodiversity, achieve sustainable prosperity, and support the health and well-being of all Nova Scotians.

## Guiding Principles

The following principles expand on the vision statement and will be used to guide decision-making to conserve at least 20 per cent of the provincial land and water mass by 2030.

**Protection of Biodiversity** – protection of ecosystems, wildlife, and habitat contributes to a healthy natural environment that, in turn, supports many societal values held by Nova Scotians.

**Shared Responsibility and Benefits** – recognizing the importance of provincial leadership, caring for our land and water is a shared responsibility among all levels of government, the private sector, Mi'kmaw communities, and all Nova Scotians.

**Connection and Collaboration** – creating connections and collaborating with the public, Indigenous communities, and partners is essential to the development and implementation of this strategy and all associated protected and conserved areas.



**Reconciliation** – Government will respect asserted and established Mi'kmaq Aboriginal and Treaty rights and meaningfully work with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.

**Netukulimk** – as defined by the Mi'kmaq, this is the use of the natural bounty provided by the Creator for the self-support and well-being of the individual and the community by achieving adequate standards of community nutrition and economic well-being without jeopardizing the integrity, diversity, or productivity of the environment.

**Etuaptmumk** – is the Mi'kmaw word for Two-Eyed Seeing, which refers to learning to see from one eye with the strength of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of western knowledge and learning to use both eyes together for the benefit of all.





# Where We Are

Nova Scotia's current network of protected areas covers 13.45 per cent of our lands and waters, spans all corners of the province, and includes some of our most iconic landscapes and visually stunning places—those protecting outstanding biodiversity values and those that provide Nova Scotians readily available access to nature.

The term “protected areas” in Nova Scotia refers to provincially administered wilderness areas and nature reserves; some provincial parks, as well as national parks and national wildlife areas administered by the federal government; and private lands protected by conservation land trusts (see page 6 for a depiction of their contributions to current protected and conserved area totals).

Other effective area-based conservation measures, or “conserved areas,” represent a new and developing approach to nature conservation. Other effective area-based conservation measures currently recognized in the province include the Fortress of Louisburg National Historic Site managed by Parks Canada, and portions of Chignecto Isthmus and Eigg Mountain–James River Wilderness Areas, which protect municipal water supply areas.

Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas represent an important and growing approach to land conservation in Nova Scotia. Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in Nova Scotia are proposed and led by Mi'kmaq communities with leadership through the Assembly of Mi'kmaq Chiefs. Nova Scotia collaborates and supports their development through the joint Mi'kmaq–Nova Scotia Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas Steering Committee and the agreed process for establishing Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas on provincially administered land in the province.

Sites that meet national reporting criteria contribute to our 20 per cent conservation goal. Nova Scotia's protected and conserved areas contribute to Canada's national target of 30 per cent land and water protection by 2030, as well as international conservation targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

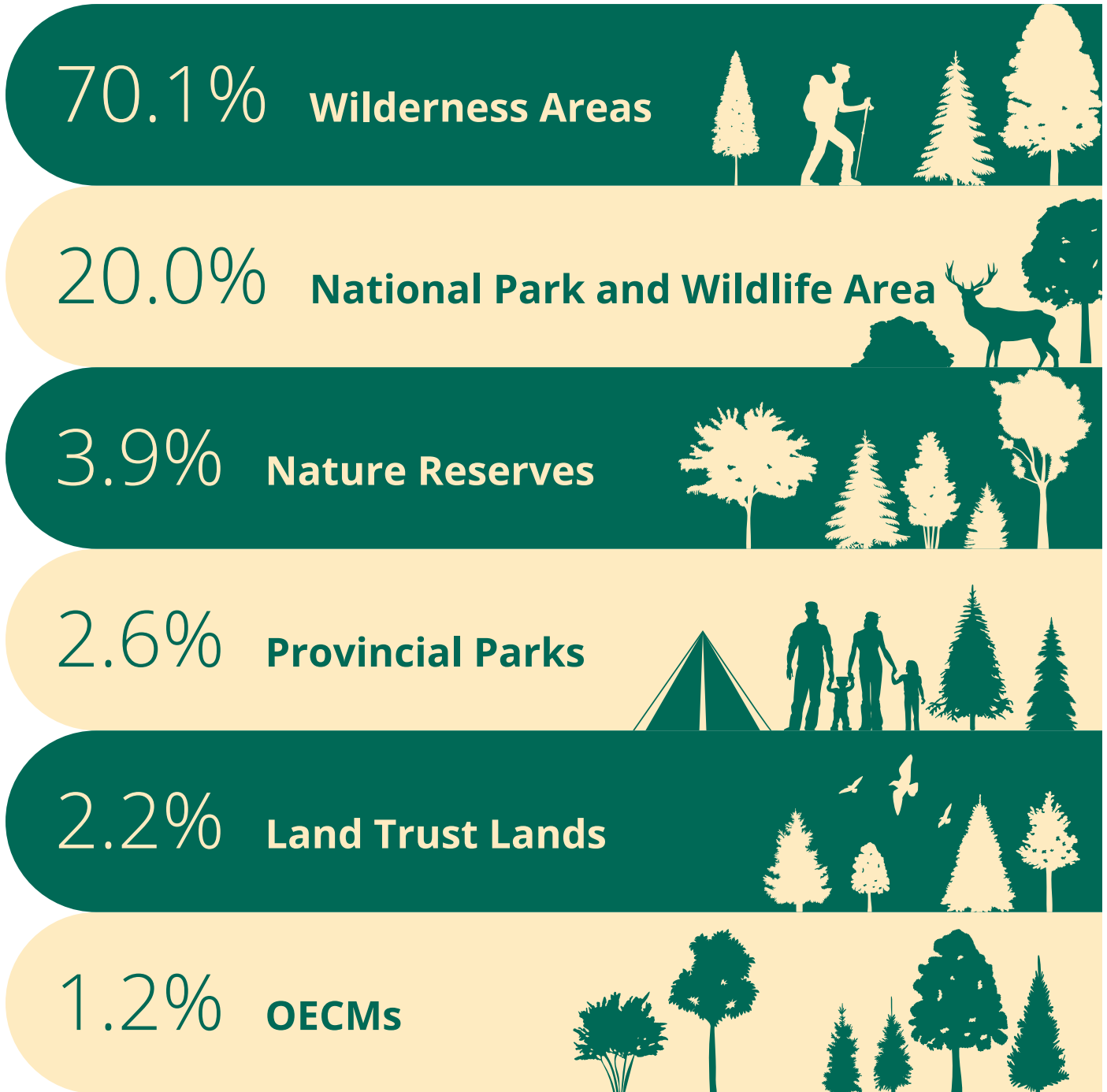
*Did you Know? **Other effective area-based conservation measures** are areas that are primarily managed for a purpose other than conservation but deliver biodiversity outcomes comparable to protected areas. To contribute to the 20 per cent land and water protection target, they must meet national reporting criteria.*

***Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas** are lands and waters where Indigenous governments, and Indigenous organizations have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance, and knowledge systems<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> [Indigenous Circle of Experts — Conservation 2020 \(conservation2020canada.ca\)](https://conservation2020canada.ca)



# Contributing Types of Protected and Conserved Areas



Types of protected and conserved areas and their proportions in Nova Scotia's current system of protected and conserved areas. OECM = other effective area-based conservation measures.



# What We've Accomplished to Date

Building on a strong foundation of progress in land and water protection, government has already taken many steps to advance the protection and conservation of Nova Scotia's land and water.

2021

Passed the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, including the goal to conserve 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's land and water mass

2022

**June** - designated Owls Head as a provincial park.

**August** - approved new provincial Old-Growth Forest Policy.

**October** - approved Monks Head and Dunns Beach as provincial parks.

**November** - designated six new nature reserves and one new wilderness area, and expanded eight existing wilderness areas representing 9,300 hectares of protected land.

**December** - invested \$20 million in the Crown Share Land Legacy Trust to support private land conservation by land trusts and other partners.

2023

**January** - signed the Shared Understanding Agreement between the Province and the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources outlining the terms of the relationship for the governance of the Kluskap Wilderness Area, which includes the sacred Mi'kmaw site Kluskap's Cave.

**March** - secured \$10 million in federal funding to acquire and conserve old-growth forests on private land to protect hemlock forests from the hemlock woolly adelgid, an invasive, non-native insect.

**March** - secured nearly \$600,000 in federal funding to support planning with the Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia Nature Trust, the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, and Parks Canada to establish a national urban park that includes Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area.

**October** - signed the Canada-Nova Scotia Nature Agreement and secured \$28.5 million in federal funding to support conservation activities in Nova Scotia.

**November** - approved Carters Beach as a provincial park.

**December** - designated or expanded 23 wilderness areas and nature reserves.







# What We Heard from Public Engagement

To inform the development of the strategy, the province engaged Group ATN Consulting Inc. to facilitate public engagement through an online survey, which was open between August 23 and October 6, 2023. Approximately 600 Nova Scotians offered their input. Five key themes emerged from engagement:

## ***1. Protect, conserve, and manage provincially administered lands and water***

Participants shared many ideas about what the province should consider when selecting a site for protection on provincially administered lands, while highlighting how this initiative will result in positive outcomes for Nova Scotians, ecosystems, and the economy. Participants suggested the province consider a range of ecological, economic, social, and cultural factors when selecting sites—such as the ecological significance of an area—and emphasized the need for evidence-based and collaborative decision-making. Participants also highlighted key barriers to protecting new areas, including competing interests in land, insufficient resources, and the importance of supporting private landowners. Acting quickly to protect land by leveraging past work to identify candidate sites was another common suggestion on this topic.

## ***2. Encourage private land protection***

Many participants viewed informing private landowners of their option to participate in the initiative as key to reaching our goal of protecting 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's land and water by 2030. Ideas to inform and engage with private landowners around land protection included education campaigns to increase awareness of their options. Offering incentives was another common idea.

## ***3. Build partnerships and emphasize collaboration***

Many survey participants emphasized partnerships and collaboration as critical to achieving the 20 per cent goal. Fostering meaningful relationships with the Mi'kmaq, land trusts, conservation organizations, and scientists were highlighted as important opportunities for the province to achieve 20 per cent with support from those with expert knowledge, networks, and resources. Improved intergovernmental collaboration with federal and municipal partners to ensure policy alignment and resource sharing was also highlighted.

#### **4. Update the policy approach**

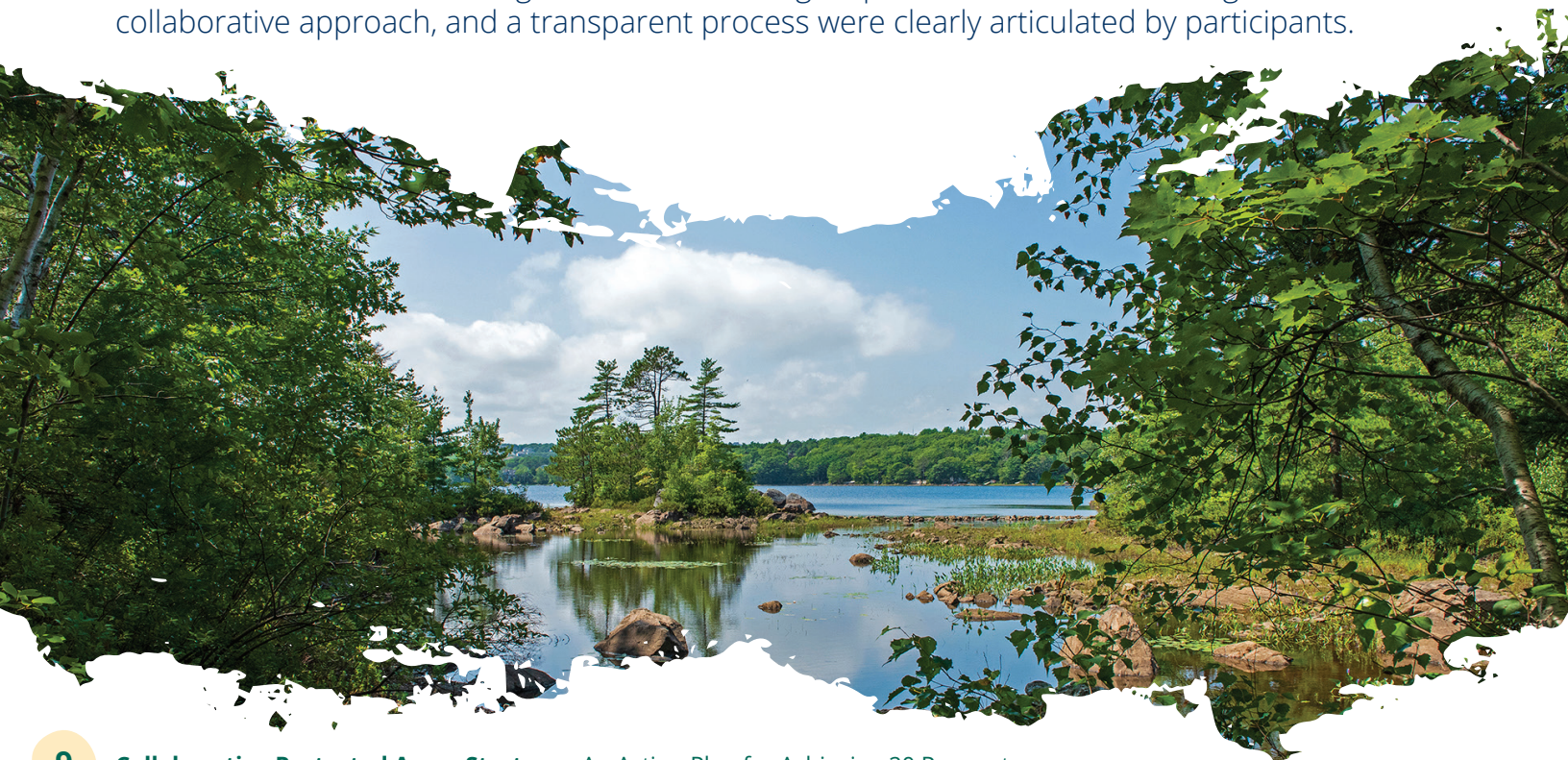
Nova Scotians expressed concerns related to the existing policy approach to protected areas. Many would like to see policies reviewed and strengthened, while others suggested new policy approaches that could be implemented—such as allowing for interim protection measures for candidate sites, new protections on old-growth forests, and others. Reviewing the existing land use management tools and decision-making processes to ensure decisions are made in a holistic fashion was suggested. Increasing resources dedicated to enforcing protective policies was also highlighted by many participants. A wide range of opinions were collected related to protecting the environment in relation to competing interests with industry and housing development. Many of the comments on this topic emphasized the need for urgent action.

#### **5. Provide a clear, transparent path to 20 per cent**

In order to ensure the strategy is collaborative, many survey participants wanted to see ongoing, meaningful engagement with the public and partners throughout the process of site selection and strategy implementation over the next six years. Ongoing education campaigns to build awareness about the strategy and why it is important were also encouraged. Nova Scotians also expressed that they wanted to see a clear path to reaching 20 per cent in the strategy, including an action plan with clear solutions, a commitment to resources for implementation, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, public engagement resulted in detailed, thorough, and thoughtful input into the development of the strategy, with key themes that can guide the Province's approach to reaching the 20 per cent goal by 2030. Participants displayed passion for the subject of conservation, clear expectations related to site designation and strategy implementation, as well as innovative ideas related to circumventing barriers to reaching 20 per cent. The desire for urgent action, a collaborative approach, and a transparent process were clearly articulated by participants.







## Where We're Going

Achieving 20 per cent land and water protection is an ambitious goal that will require unprecedented collaboration, commitment, and persistence.

Extensive planning work will be required to identify and advance new designations of protected areas, as well as to identify lands that may meet national criteria for other effective area-based conservation measures. In consultation on this strategy, we heard clearly that Nova Scotians want to provide input on candidate sites for protection.

With approximately 60 per cent of the province in private ownership, we will continue to support the work of conservation land trusts, while seeking new and innovative approaches to conservation of private lands.

Following completion of existing protection commitments, approximately 300,000 hectares of additional protected and conserved areas are required to achieve the goal. Consultation will provide opportunity for Nova Scotians and all interested parties to comment on specific provincially administered sites being considered for protection.

### Climate Risks and Land Conservation

Weathering What's Ahead is Nova Scotia's provincial climate change risk assessment. This important work helps us understand how the climate is changing in Nova Scotia, as well as where there are opportunities to act. Top concerns identified in the risk assessment include flooding, wildfires, and extreme heat. These climate hazards are expected to affect both people and ecosystems. For example, Nova Scotia's forest and wetland ecosystems face multiple climate impacts from flooding, heat stress, and more. Protecting and conserving sensitive ecosystems is an important action we can take to respond to this risk and prepare for future climate impacts.

# Our Path to 20 Per Cent

Achieving the goal of protecting 20 per cent of our lands and waters will be achieved through a combination of new and established approaches, ideas, and innovations. We will work with existing partners and build new partnerships to deliver the following solutions and actions.

## **Solution 1: We will identify, protect, and manage provincially administered lands and inland waters by**

- identifying lands to support achieving 15 per cent by 2026 and 20 per cent by 2030. Each phase will include identification of a list of proposed sites, consultation, and designation of sites. Following consultation, sites within each phase will be under interim management.
- establishing other effective area-based conservation measures on provincially and municipally administered lands by evaluating Crown land policies and programs for consideration as other effective area-based conservation measures, including forestry policies, municipal parkland, water supply areas, and wildlife management areas, among others
- identifying opportunities for policy development and modernization to enable effective establishment and management of protected and conserved areas
- exploring innovative tools, such as carbon credit sale and biodiversity offsets, that may help meet conservation targets as well as other provincial priorities
- continuing to collaborate with our federal partners, including securing resources to support conservation programs and priority initiatives such as the proposed national urban park at Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes
- monitoring and managing protected and conserved areas to maintain and restore the ecological, natural, and cultural values for which they were established

## **Solution 2: We will work with people and groups to support education around the expanded conservation of private lands by**

- extending the lifespan of the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust<sup>2</sup> to facilitate continued funding support for conservation land trusts
- continuing delivery of government-led private land conservation programs
- continuing existing incentives, such as the conservation property tax exemption
- developing approaches to further incentivize and reduce barriers to landowner participation in private land conservation
- fostering relationships and awareness of conservation opportunities with large private landowners
- identifying and establishing other effective area-based conservation measures on private land

<sup>2</sup> Established by the Province in 2008, the trust provides funds for securing and protecting ecologically significant, threatened, and irreplaceable natural areas on private lands in Nova Scotia.



### **Solution 3: We will support Mi'kmaw leadership in conservation by**

- respecting asserted and established Mi'kmaq Aboriginal and Treaty rights by meaningfully consulting with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia on new candidate protected areas consistent with the legal duty to consult and accommodate
- collaborating and supporting development of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas proposed by Mi'kmaw communities and partners for provincially administered lands
- collaborating with and supporting development of Mi'kmaw-led private land conservation
- contributing to the development of new tools and approaches to implement and govern Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas
- creating a Mi'kmaq–Nova Scotia protected areas advisory group to facilitate ongoing engagement regarding this strategy and other shared priorities
- collaborating with the Mi'kmaq to further understand and incorporate Netukulimk and Etuaptmumk in protected areas planning and management
- exploring opportunities for stewardship and conservation co-learning including further collaboration with Mi'kmaw Earth Keepers.

### **Solution 4: We will foster partnerships to highlight community and economic benefits derived from our protected and conserved areas, including**

- exploring, with government and non-government partners, how best to position our system of protected and conserved areas in branding Nova Scotia as a great place to live, work, and visit
- encouraging long-term, effective collaboration that supports sustainable stakeholder, community, municipal, business, and Mi'kmaw partnerships, such as for trail development
- engaging other government departments on shared priorities (e.g., trails, healthy living, ecotourism) to participate in planning, site development, and program delivery, including development of the Jajiktek Seawall Trail
- exploring opportunities to partner with organizations working in the mental health and healthy living sectors
- working with partners to consider access and accessibility to protected and conserved areas in ways that align with conservation objectives

## Selection of sites on provincially administered lands will be guided by the following foundational ecological priorities.

**Relatively Intact** – areas in a mostly natural state with relatively few human impacts compared to other lands in the surrounding landscape. Larger areas are preferred but smaller intact areas are also important for biodiversity conservation.

**Representative** – examples of the full range of Nova Scotia's diverse natural landscapes.

**Rich and/or Rare** – areas rich in biodiversity as well as rare or unique landscapes, such as old-growth forests, salt marshes, and habitats that support species at risk.

**Ecological Connectivity** – lands that provide connections, allowing species to move across the landscape, including between protected areas.

**Watershed and Water Protection** – areas maintaining aquatic habitat, water flows, and water quality.

**Restoration** – areas important for protecting nature in the long term but which require time to restore to a more natural condition.

## Additional priorities that will be considered in selecting candidate sites for protection include the following.

**Expansions or Improvement of existing sites** – lands that expand existing protected areas to better protect nature, simplify boundaries, and improve management or enhance public access.

**Climate Adaptation and Mitigation** – lands that enable species movements as our climate changes, that can moderate climate impacts such as flooding, storm surges, and extreme heat, or can store large amounts of carbon.

**Advancing Reconciliation** – lands that support Mi'kmaq areas of interest.

**Resource and Renewable Impacts** – site selection will attempt to minimize impacts to rural resource industries and clean energy developments.

**Healthy Communities** – lands that provide important ecological services, such as protection of drinking water, or spaces for outdoor recreation and access to nature.



## Provincial Park Improvements

We will seek to improve and enhance the existing provincial parks system by exploring opportunities to add adjacent lands that support the mandate of the provincial parks program to deliver natural and cultural heritage conservation, nature-based outdoor recreation, education, and tourism.







## Keeping Nova Scotians Informed

We are committed to keeping Nova Scotians informed on progress to achieving the goal of protecting 20 per cent of our land and water by 2030. Annual reporting associated with the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act will serve as an important source of information on progress. We will develop approaches to raise awareness and update Nova Scotians on progress and achievements.





# **Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy**

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Photos by Province of Nova Scotia and Nature Conservancy of Canada

