



Accountability Report 2019–20

Lands and Forestry



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Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forestry for the year ended March 31, 2020 is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against the Department of Lands and Forestry Business Plan for the fiscal year just ended. The reporting of the Department of Lands and Forestry outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by Department of Lands and Forestry management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forestry management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Department of Lands and Forestry 2019-20 Business Plan.

Original signed by

Honourable Iain Rankin
Minister of Lands and Forestry

Original signed by

Julie Towers
Deputy Minister of Lands and Forestry

Message from the Minister and Deputy Minister

We are pleased to report our activities and results for 2019-20. The Department continued its work to move the Province to an ecological forestry model as recommended in the *Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* by Professor William Lahey and his team of experts. Shifting how we manage our forests requires reviews of existing programs and policies and close consultation with public and stakeholders on changes and their implementation.

Key achievements in 2019-20 included developing a new draft Silvicultural Guide for the Ecological Matrix to align with goals of ecological forestry. Consultations on the new guide were started and will continue into 2020-21. Another consultation that began in 2019-20 related to defining site selection criteria for High Production Forestry - a key component to the ecological forestry triad model being adopted by the Province. The Department took initial steps to develop an environmental assessment process for forest management planning on Crown land and started preparations to review the *Crown Lands Act*. The Department remains committed to transparency and accountability and is supporting Professor Lahey's independent assessment of the Department's progress.

The Province continues to make progress to renew its Species-At-Risk Program. Over the course of 2019-20, the Department filled two key biologist positions and brought together partners and stakeholders through three action forums across the province.

Work also continues to finalize and implement the *Biodiversity Act* introduced in March 2019. Consultations were held with stakeholders to gather feedback on the legislation. The Biodiversity Council continued its work in 2019-20 providing advice on the Act and priorities for regulations.

The Department supported government-wide efforts to help the forestry sector transition following a major shift in Nova Scotia's timber supply chain. Lands and Forestry is directly involved in the transition team with other representatives from government and industry to support workers, contractors and others impacted by the closure. Specific to the Department, this included enhancing our existing silviculture and road programs with an additional \$7 million in funding and continuing to implement the province's wood heat initiative for public buildings. In 2019-20, six sites were selected, with the goal of being ready for the 2020-21 heating season.

In 2019-20 the Department continued to invest in its trails and provincial parks through implementation of its multi-year improvement plan. These investments support making facilities more accessible for all Nova Scotians. Through collaboration with municipal partners, we met our commitment to have at least one accessible beach in each region of the province by 2021.

In March 2020, the Department responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic as part of Government's overall response. Following public health orders and advice, the Department closed provincial parks and beaches, as well as controlling access to offices and facilities across the province. Despite this unprecedented event, staff at Lands and Forestry continued to deliver on the Department's mandate and implemented activities laid out in our Business Plan while protecting safety of public and staff.

Financial Results

	2019-2020 Estimate	2019-2020 Actual Expense	2019-2020 Variance
Program & Service Area	(\$ thousands)	(\$ thousands)	(\$ thousands)
Gross Departmental Expenses:			
Senior Management	522	565	43
Renewable Resources	26,551	28,326	1,775
Regional Services	40,897	42,380	1,483
Policy, Planning and Support Services	4,761	5,433	672
Land Services	4,019	2,957	(1,062)
Total: Gross Departmental Expenses	76,750	79,661	2,911
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenue	9,963	8,643	(1,320)
Fees and Other Charges	2,178	2,389	211
Ordinary Recoveries	1,214	1,641	427
Total: Revenue, Fees & Recoveries	13,355	12,673	(682)
TCA Purchase Requirements	5,000	3,544	(1,456)
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs)	591.2	562.4	(28.8)

Variance Explanation:

1. Gross Departmental Expenses were \$2.9 million above estimate due to \$2.11 million for implementation of Forestry Transition initiatives; \$471 thousand for expenses due to Hurricane Dorian damage; \$427 thousand related to an increase in recoverable expenses. These increased costs were slightly offset by \$100 thousand in savings in various areas.
2. Revenue, Fees and Recoveries were \$682 thousand below estimate, mostly due to a decrease in Timber & Fuel Wood Licenses offset by an increase in Park Fees and increased recoveries for out-of-province fire suppression expenses.
3. TCA Purchase Requirements were \$1.5 million lower than estimated, primarily due to a delay in the Shubenacadie operations centre water/sewer project.
4. Provincial Funded Staff variance was primarily due to various temporarily vacant positions throughout the year.

Department Mandate and Core Functions

The Department of Lands and Forestry (the Department) has broad responsibilities relative to the stewardship, management, development, conservation and protection of Nova Scotia's biodiversity, forest, and park resources, and the administration of the province's Crown land. In addition to our core operations and obligations, the Department is delivering on the following actions identified as priorities in the Minister's 2017 Mandate Letter:

- Introduced a *Biodiversity Act*
- Created a new Nova Scotia Biodiversity Council
- Appointed an independent expert to review forestry practices
- Expanding trail access across Nova Scotia

Lands and Forestry's work was guided by four strategic priorities in 2019/2020:

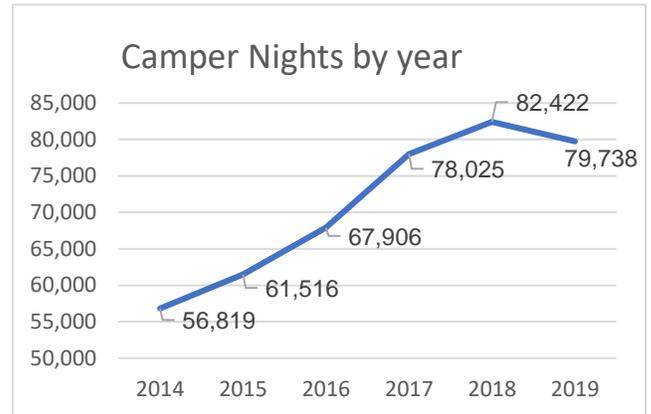
- **Our People:** Cultivate an engaged, effective, and empowered workforce
- **The Public:** Strengthen public trust in the management of our natural resources
- **Our Services:** Deliver services collaboratively, efficiently and effectively
- **Our Natural Resources:** Manage our natural resources for public benefits

Fast Facts

- Lands and Forestry staff continue to use their incident management expertise to support coordinated efforts to respond to emergency events when they occur. In January 2020, our staff members joined the Canadian team in Australia helping to battle wildfires. Staff also played a critical role in supporting the Province's response to Hurricane Dorian in September 2019.
- Forested wetlands can be biodiversity hotspots. In 2019-20, staff found 95 species of breeding birds in forested wetlands and many more bird species and individuals in forested wetlands than in mature or young upland stands.
- Lands and Forestry's Wildlife Division works with farmers to identify Best Management Plans to promote, maintain or enhance biodiversity on farms. In 2019, 21,721.3 ha of farmland and associated wetlands and forests were assessed under the Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation Plans program.
- In 2019 a Trail Strategy Coordinating Group was formed to help launch the province's first multi-year, multi-department trails strategy. The Department is working with municipalities and community groups in Western Nova Scotia to complete the western loop of Trans Canada Trail.
- The Department manages Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. The Park has posted 13 Feeding Friday Videos which have been watched 22,000 times. The vast majority of our viewers are from Canada, followed by UK, US, Japan and Australia. Our top video so far is Lynx

viewed 3,900 times, second is Emu viewed 2,800 times and third is raccoon viewed 1,900 times. See: [Shubenacadie Wildlife Park Friday Feeding Videos](#)

- There are 20 provincial camping parks and more than 100 operating day-use parks across the province. In 2019 our provincial parks experienced a record opening day in reservations with 8,600 reservations in the two opening days vs 6,600 in 2018. However, camper nights for the season declined in 2019 due to effects of Hurricane Dorian shutdowns. Camper nights for 2019 were 79,738 compared to 82,422 for the previous year.



- The Department conducts hunter safety training. In 2019, 2,250 hunters were trained in Nova Scotia.

Measuring Our Performance

COVID-19 Measures

The Department responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after public safety emergency measures were announced in March 2020, the Department closed provincial parks and beaches and Shubenacadie Wildlife Park to help ensure that Nova Scotians' health and safety were protected. It also took other emergency measures to issue a "No Burn" restriction (fire ban) to reduce risk of wildfire incidents and protect the safety of fire fighters and emergency responders who must work closely together when fires occur. The Department also rapidly transitioned to virtual work platforms and practices to ensure that it could continue its work and meet commitments made under the Department's mandate in fiscal year 2019-20.

Forestry Sector Support and Transition

The forestry sector is in a period of transition following the January 2020 closure of Northern Pulp Nova Scotia Corporation (Northern Pulp). Government responded by establishing a **Transition Team** made up of Government and industry representatives to identify short term actions to support workers, contractors and others impacted by the closure, on potential areas to invest a \$50 million transition fund, and to advise on longer-term approaches to support the sector's transition to an ecologically sustainable and competitive industry. Lands and Forestry participated on the Transition Team and implemented the following measures in 2019-20 related to the Department's programs:

- Expanding the Department's **private and Crown silviculture and roads programs** by announcing \$7 million, to support the sector to the end of March 2021, for contractors to conduct additional silviculture and roadwork. As of March 31, 2020, a total of \$2.11 million had been spent.

- Continuing work on **small-scale wood heat generation projects** with plans for further expansion (see page 9).
- Ongoing policy and program design and delivery to **implement ecological forestry** (see next section).
- **For more information on forestry transition and the role of Lands and Forestry, visit: <https://novascotia.ca/forestry-sector-support>.**

Implementation of the *Government Response to the Independent Review of Forest Practices*

Professor William Lahey was commissioned to conduct an *Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* in August 2017. The report was received in August 2018 and provided 45 recommendations to improve how Nova Scotia balances long-term environmental, social, and economic interests in managing the province's forests.

On December 3, 2018, the Government issued its response to recommendations made by Professor Lahey. The Response acknowledges that many recommendations are interconnected, and their implementation will need to be phased-in over time.

Shifting how we manage our forests on provincially owned land to an ecological forestry approach is a multi-year initiative. As part of the Government's implementation of and commitment to ecological forestry, in 2019-20 the Department:

- Presented a discussion paper in August 2019 for stakeholder feedback on scope and direction for revising the Forest Management Guide. Over 450 comments were received and thoroughly considered during the development of a new **draft Silvicultural Guide for the Ecological Matrix** (replacing the Forest Management Guide). The draft guide places more emphasis on ecological values and outlines silviculture and harvesting practices that can be used on Crown lands, including a further reduction in clear cutting on Crown lands, particularly where multi-aged and mixed-species forests in which late successional species would naturally occur. The draft Guide was provided to targeted stakeholders in early March 2020, and a revised draft will be provided to the public for comment later in 2020.
- In 2019-20, the Department received an additional \$1 million to the existing \$4.8 million base budget in Crown land **silviculture funding** to support partial harvesting, reduced clearcutting, and implementation of the triad model recommended by Professor Lahey. An additional \$1.0 million was committed late in 2019-20 by the province for silviculture activities on Crown land as part of forestry Transition Team funding. In 2019, the Department spent a total of \$5.767 million for Crown land silviculture, \$310 thousand of that from Transition Team funding.
- Worked to define site selection criteria for **High Production Forestry** (second zone of the triad model). The selection criteria are being designed to maximize ecological values by avoiding conservation areas, special habitats and a host of other environmentally sensitive areas while reducing transportation costs, yielding rapid tree growth and

considering existing land use. The Department consulted with the public in March 2020 and will consult with targeted stakeholders further in 2020.

- Initiated work to develop an **Environmental Assessment process for forest management planning on Crown land**. This process will provide a regulatory framework to review Crown land forest stewardship plans of applicable Crown forest agreement holders. In 2019-2020, the Department hired a consultant to develop a guide for development of Crown land forest stewardship plans and worked with Nova Scotia Environment to identify regulatory options.
- Continued progress to **renew the Species-At-Risk Program** by establishing 12 Recovery Teams for listed species in the province and finalizing all appointments of members to these renewed teams. In 2019-20, the Department filled two new Species at Risk biologist positions. The Department also updated status reports and drafted recovery plans for Species at Risk for which the province is solely responsible. The Department hosted three Recovery Action Forums in regions across the province (February 26, 2020 in eastern region, March 4 in central region, and March 11 in western region) engaging close to 200 practitioners involved with recovery of Species at Risk. The public was also invited to attend a speaker series following these sessions delivered by experts working on recovery of Species at Risk.
- Formed a project team to work on improving the **State of the Forest Report** as recommended by Professor Lahey. The team is looking at ways to improve data used to report to the public, while also making the report more user friendly.
- Submitted an academic paper on **Natural Disturbance agents** to the journal *Environmental Reviews* for peer review and publication in 2020.
- Formed a project team to start work on designing an approach for **Outcomes-Based Forest Management**. This team has developed draft values and objectives informed by approaches in other jurisdictions and are in early stages of planning for public and stakeholder consultations in 2020.

The Department remains committed to building a culture of openness, transparency and accountability on how and why decisions related to our forests and natural habitats are made. As part of this commitment, the Department:

- Formed the Minister's Advisory Committee appointing 14 members from environmental non-government organizations, industry, the Mi'kmaq and academia to advise the Minister on the policies and priorities related to implementing the ecological forestry model.
- Launched an ecological forestry website and published routine progress updates. See: <https://novascotia.ca/ecological-forestry/>;
- Staffed a new position dedicated to support the Department's communications and

engagement with stakeholders and the public.

In addition, the Department is providing input to support Professor Lahey in his work to conduct an independent evaluation on the Department's progress towards implementing the ecological forestry model. An evaluation framework is also in development by Professor Lahey for 2020-21 and beyond.

Biodiversity Act and Regulations

Biodiversity is a Ministerial mandate priority. The *Biodiversity Act*, the first of its kind in the country, was introduced to the legislature on March 14, 2019. This Act is intended to provide essential tools for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. It will help us address a range of challenges, emerging risks and opportunities facing ecosystems, species, and genes, and the systems and processes that link them together in our province.

The *Biodiversity Act* was held in 2nd reading to undertake additional stakeholder consultations. The Department held consultations in the summer of 2019 with knowledgeable and interested parties who shared their advice and identified their concerns. The Department continued to consider this feedback and work on the legislation which is designed to provide a framework for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Nova Scotia.

The Biodiversity Council, established in May 2018, continued its work in 2019-20 and provided advice to the Department on the *Biodiversity Act* and future regulatory priorities. The Council consists of subject matter experts and has an ongoing role to provide advice on biodiversity priorities, and to help craft new regulations.

Review of Crown Lands Act and Departmental Business Practices

The Department made a commitment in the *Government Response to the Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* to undertake a review of the *Crown Lands Act*. The review will develop recommendations for targeted amendments to the Act.

In 2019-2020 the Department established a project team and initiated planning and research. Work commenced to review Crown land-use businesses processes focussed on the goals of consistent operational decision-making and service excellence as part of a framework for business process improvements within the Department. This included developing a new procedure on Applications for Use of Crown Lands for Agricultural Activities that engages the Department of Agriculture in the Department's review process. New policies are also underway for valuation of Crown lands, use of coastal Crown lands and accessing Crown land aggregate (quarried material) resources.

Small-Scale Wood Energy Projects

The Small-Scale Wood Energy initiative is a multi-year partnership to demonstrate that efficient wood chip heating systems are a low carbon, renewable heating solution for medium to large scale public buildings. This initiative also provides a new market for under-utilized lower quality wood chips sourced from private woodlot owners or other sources, while encouraging sustainable forest management practices.

This initiative involves multiple provincial departments, federal and municipal governments, schools, regional organizations, and industry stakeholders and supports principles of ecological forestry as committed in the *Government Response to the Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia*. This project is also part of the Government's forestry sector transition work.

In 2019-20, six sites were approved in Phase 1 and the procurement process for private sector wood heat suppliers for these sites was launched. Work was also initiated to target operations of these six sites for December 2020. The Department is concurrently identifying future sites and assessing procurement options for Phase 2 of the project.

Nova Scotia Provincial Parks System Improvements

Improving Nova Scotia's Provincial Parks is an ongoing priority for the Department. In 2019-20 the Department continued its progress to advance a multi-year plan for park system improvements, including through the Department's annual Tangible Capital Assets (TCA) funding. In 2019-2020, the Department spent \$1.1 million on capital improvements in 12 parks across the province (see table). These included repairing/refurbishing aging infrastructure with a focus on water systems and core buildings and expanding services where possible by adding serviced camp sites. The Department spent over \$230 thousand for important water and sewer upgrades at parks in Cumberland, Halifax, Pictou, Yarmouth and Queens Counties. The Department invested \$250 thousand at Lawrencetown beach to design and build surfer amenities.

Table: Lands and Forestry 2019-2020 Tangible Capital Assets Spending

Park	Region	County	\$	Key Projects
Amherst Shore	Central	Cumberland	23,400	Water System and Group use shelter
Battery	Eastern	Richmond	77,000	Refresh admin building and construction of accessible washroom next to admin building
Blomidon	Western	Kings	275,000	Finish Day use stairs (33,000), water systems (54,500) and earth works for a new admin building
Caribou	Central	Pictou	8,000	Commission Water system
Clam Harbour	Central	Halifax	51,000	Demo core building
Ellenwood	Western	Yarmouth	150,000	Install serviced sites and upgrade water system
Graves Islands	Western	Lunenburg	45,500	Pave causeway
Lawrencetown Beach	Central	Halifax	250,000	Design and build surfers beach area
Porters Lake	Central	Halifax	16,000	Water system
Thomas Raddall	Western	Queens	37,000	Water system upgrade and refresh to comfort station
Valleyview	Western	Annapolis	135,000	Install serviced sites and replace disposal field
Total			1,067,900	

Land Titles Initiative

Lands and Forestry continued its work on the multi-year Land Titles Initiative, with the long-term goal of fostering economic prosperity in the five communities of North Preston, East Preston, Cherry Brook, Lincolnville and Sunnyville by helping address land title issues.

Working collaboratively across government under the leadership of Communities, Culture, and Heritage, and in partnership with Nova Scotia Legal Aid (NSLA), the Department is providing support for African Nova Scotian residents who have been impacted by historical disparities and systemic discrimination to get clear legal title to their land. The program continued its community outreach by program staff and has increased participation in the program. In 2019-20, the Department supported program implementation by providing survey services (where eligible) through a dedicated survey team and by processing applications under the *Land Titles Clarification Act*.

Access by Design 2030: Achieving an Accessible Nova Scotia

The Department continues to work towards implementation of the Nova Scotia *Accessibility Act*, the *Access by Design 2030* Framework, and the *Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan (2018-2021)*.

In 2019-20 the Department:

- Advanced progress to make provincial parks and beaches, as well as Department offices, more accessible. We have installed ramps to various pieces of infrastructure in our parks to promote accessibility, including comfort stations, toilets and picnic shelters. Upgrades or construction of accessible washrooms have been completed at Boylston, Caribou-Munroes Island and Pomquet Beach. Going forward, all new infrastructure that is being designed and built will have accessibility considerations incorporated.
- Delivered on its commitment to make at least one provincial beach in every region accessible before 2021. As of 2019-2020, the Department purchased and/or partnered with municipalities to install accessible beach mats (Mobi-mat®) at Clam Harbour (Halifax County), Mira River (Cape Breton County), Pomquet (Antigonish County), Rissers (Lunenburg County) and Heather Beach (Cumberland).



Pomquet Beach

Annual Report under Section 18 of the *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act*

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2019-2020
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing	N/A
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing	N/A