



Business Plan

2021–22

Lands and Forestry

**NOVA SCOTIA**

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Departmental Business Plans
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Department of Lands and Forestry 2021-22 Annual Plan

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Message from the Minister and Deputy Minister

On behalf of the Department of Lands and Forestry, we are pleased to present the 2021-22 Business Plan that outlines our strategic direction for the year ahead.

Implementing a Biodiversity Act for Nova Scotia along with the continued implementation of the *Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act* are priorities for the Department. Recovery teams are now in place for all species at risk and work is well underway on recovery plans.

Nova Scotians have a strong connection to their forests, and they have been clear about wanting to see change in how forestry is done in this province. This is why we are adopting ecological forestry practices and other policies that focus on prioritizing biodiversity, while working towards a more sustainable forestry sector.

We are committed to immediately implementing recommendations from the Independent Review of Forest Practices (the Lahey Report) and reaching our goals of protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, supporting economic growth, and keeping our forests healthy and sustainable. To date, our efforts have focused on adapting Crown land forestry policies which are being developed in close consultation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, stakeholders and the public. This year, we will continue to prioritize our work on a variety of complex and interconnected projects that are enabling the shift to ecological forestry. We will immediately implement the new Silviculture Guide for the Ecological Matrix and will finalize criteria for High Production Forestry. We look forward to Professor Lahey's independent evaluation of our work.

Nova Scotia's provincial parks attract more visitors each year. Investments in our campgrounds, beaches and day-use parks have demonstrated higher attendance and satisfaction. We will continue to invest in the growth and enjoyment of our parks.

Our province's Crown lands and resources belong to all Nova Scotians. We will amend the purpose of the *Crown Lands Act* to be more reflective of the full range of societal values and uses of Crown lands. We will continue to be transparent on how and why decisions related to our forests and other natural habitats are made. Our role is to ensure conservation and sustainable use of Nova Scotia's biodiversity, forests and wildlife to ensure they are healthy for generations to come. In doing so, we will integrate a climate change lens into all the work we do. We look forward to advancing this work in the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

Original signed by

Honourable Chuck Porter
Minister of Lands and Forestry

Original signed by

Paul LaFleche
Deputy Minister, Lands and Forestry

Ministerial Mandate:

The Department of Lands and Forestry (the Department) has broad responsibilities related to the stewardship, management, development, conservation and protection of Nova Scotia's biodiversity, forest, and park resources, as well as the administration of the province's Crown lands. In addition to our core operations and obligations, the Department is committed to deliver on the following actions:

- Implement Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia (Lahey Report).
- Implement the Silvicultural Guide for the Ecological Matrix.
- Introduce a *Biodiversity Act* and amendments to the *Crown Lands Act*.
- Develop a wood charter that supports turning residual wood materials into value-added products, using wood for construction, and for heat.
- Develop policies that support movement towards a more circular economy.
- Work with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to expand biodiversity education in the school curriculum.
- Work with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to designate sites in the Parks and Protected Areas plan.
- Develop a framework for identifying areas of protecting areas of ecological significance that:
 - incorporates Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas;
 - enables fragmented wildlife populations to connect with one another;
 - help wildlife to adapt to climate change; and,
 - increase biodiversity.
- With the Department of Energy and Mines, and the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture; expand energy efficiency upgrades for farms and factories.

Our Vision & Strategic Priorities:

The Department of Lands and Forestry's vision is for Nova Scotians to understand, value and benefit from the province's natural resources, including biodiversity and the land we manage. Guiding our work towards this vision are the Department's four strategic priorities:

- **People:** Cultivate an engaged, effective, empowered and diverse workforce;
- **Public:** Strengthen public trust in the stewardship of our natural resources;
- **Services:** Deliver services collaboratively, efficiently and effectively; and,
- **Natural Resources:** Provide stewardship of our natural resources for public benefits.

Fast Facts:

- Nova Scotia's 150 provincial day-use, beach and camping parks welcomed over 1.2 million visitors in 2020.
- Through new provincial park designations, the Department is contributing to achieving Government's land protection objectives.
- Lands and Forestry has the responsibility to administer approximately 3,397,922 acres of terrestrial Crown lands, which represents approximately 25% of Nova Scotia.
- Lands and Forestry staff responded to approximately 2500 human wildlife conflict incidents in 2020. Most of these incidents involved bears and raccoons.
- Hunters can now take Hunter Education training and apply for a Wildlife Resource System Card online. Visit: <https://wrs.novascotia.ca/>
- Nova Scotia hunters and trappers contribute an average of \$200,000 annually to the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund to support biodiversity conservation and research through the purchase of Wildlife Habitat Stamps.
- The Province's helicopter fleet is used to fight wildfires, respond to disasters, help with search and rescue missions, and conduct aerial surveys of wildlife populations.
- Lands and Forestry is closely monitoring the spruce budworm and continues to gather data we need to manage the environmental, economic, and social impacts of this natural forest pest cycle and other impacts to our forests.
- Lands and Forestry has recognized excellence in forest stewardship and resource management with the Woodland Owner of the Year award every year since 1990.
- Shubenacadie Provincial Wildlife Park is working with Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) to host a seasonal Wildlife Education Speaking Series. The speaking series has engaged over 90 participants in seven provinces.

Key Initiatives for 2021-22

Biodiversity

Biodiversity has incalculable importance to our health and wellbeing, our environment, and our economy, yet it is facing serious pressures. Some species have declined to critical thresholds and are at risk of becoming extinct.

As a priority, the Department will work on the commitment to introduce a *Biodiversity Act* for Nova Scotia to address important and emerging challenges and opportunities facing biodiversity. The *Biodiversity Act* will establish a provincial mandate to improve the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The implementation of the Act will continue to be supported by the **Biodiversity Council**, and involve collaboration with the Mi'kmaw people and stakeholders. The Department will consult on regulations, starting with invasive species, and will work with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to expand biodiversity education in school curriculum. The *Biodiversity Act* will enable Government to take action for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. It will foster innovation, co-operation, communication, education, incentives and partnerships.

The ongoing renewal of Lands and Forestry's **Species at Risk Program** is also a priority. This involves updating the management system for the program to institutionalize a collaborative approach to species recovery, leverage diverse resources, and use risk management within a framework of robust and current policy for implementing the provincial *Endangered Species Act* in Nova Scotia. This work is addressing the outcomes of a recent judicial review, recommendations of the Auditor General, and delivering on a commitment in the *Government Response* to the Lahey Report.

🔗 **For more information visit:**
<https://novascotia.ca/natr/biodiversity/>

Prioritizing Biodiversity

As Lands and Forestry implements this work to achieve ecological forestry in Nova Scotia, it remains committed to protecting and enhancing ecosystems and biodiversity as an overarching policy priority. This means that the Department will first consider the protection and enhancement of ecosystems and biodiversity when making decisions on how Nova Scotia's Crown forests are managed.

Forest Sector Innovation and Transition

The forest sector continues to be in a state of transition with the shift to ecological forestry as well as the continued effects of the closure of Northern Pulp Nova Scotia Corporation (Northern Pulp). Lands and Forestry will continue its work to support this major shift in the forest sector with the immediate implementation of recommendations from the *Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* conducted by Professor William Lahey. This work enables the transition of the forest sector to an ecologically sustainable and competitive industry through ongoing delivery of programs and by supporting the Nova Scotia Innovation Hub, Forestry Transition Team, and Forestry Innovation Transition Trust.

Building on progress made over the first two years of implementing the priority actions identified in the *Government Response to the Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* (the Response), the Department will **continue implementing the series of complex and interconnected projects to enable the shift to ecological forestry** – many of which involve public, stakeholder and Mi'kmaw engagement and are being phased in over time. In 2021-22, the Department will:

- Immediately implement the new Silviculture Guide for the Ecological Matrix (previously known as the Forest Management Guide) and will finalize initial High Production Forestry site selection as a priority. The Department will also continue its work to introduce an Environmental Assessment process, submit a scientific paper on the application of Natural Disturbance Regimes to the Nova Scotia landscape for peer review, develop a revised Old Forest Policy, release a new State of the Forest Report, design an approach for Outcomes-based Forest Management, conduct a review of Crown and private land silviculture programs, and implement the **Forest Practices Review evaluation framework** recommended by Professor William Lahey.
- Continue to develop and implement processes to support public and stakeholder input into forestry-related decisions to improve openness, transparency and accountability, including utilizing the **Minister's Advisory Committee**.
- Invest in **research and technology**, including LiDAR, related to ecological forestry.
- Expand the collaborative multi-year **Small Scale Wood Energy initiative** to implement efficient, low carbon, renewable wood chip heating systems in medium to large scale public buildings. In 2021-22, nine public buildings at six sites selected in Phase One will continue to operate new, efficient wood chip heating systems for the duration of the long-term heating contract. Government will expand through Phase Two, involving a competitive procurement process for numerous candidate sites. The selected sites will be converted, targeting to be operational in time for the 2021-22 heating season.
- Adopt a **wood charter** that supports a culture of sustainably using wood for construction, heat, and other innovative uses. This includes fostering innovation in the forest sector by working with organizations promoting the use of wood such as Atlantic WoodWorks and FP Innovations.
- Continue its support and engagement as a founding member of the **Nova Scotia Innovation Hub**, including annual support to research and initiatives to advance Nova Scotia's low carbon, bio-circular economy, including new uses of wood fibre.

🔗 **For more information see:** <https://novascotia.ca/ecological-forestry/>

Land Titles Initiative

The Land Titles Initiative is a Government-led commitment to help residents in the five designated communities of North Preston, East Preston, Cherry Brook/Lake Loon, Lincolnville and Sunnyville get clear title to their land. Clarifying land title can be an expensive legal process. Under the Land Titles Initiative, most legal fees are covered at no cost and most other costs are covered as well. The long-term goal of this initiative is to foster economic prosperity in these five communities.

Working collaboratively across government under the leadership of the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, and in partnership with the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, African NS Affairs, the Department of Justice, Service NS and Internal Services, and Municipal Affairs and Housing, Lands and Forestry continues to support the implementation of the Land Titles initiative. The Department provides eligible survey services through a dedicated survey team and processing applications under the *Land Titles Clarification Act* (LTCA) to break down land title barriers within African Nova Scotian communities.

🔗 **For more information visit:** <https://ansa.novascotia.ca/landtitles>

Review of the Crown Lands Act and Departmental Business Processes

The *Government Response to the Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* made a commitment to undertake a review of the *Crown Lands Act*. The Department will introduce an amendment to the purpose of the *Crown Lands Act* to be more reflective of the full range of societal values and uses of Crown lands, as recommended by Professor William Lahey. This change will provide guidance in implementing the Act and in managing Crown lands in the best interest of the public and for the long-term stewardship of our natural resources.

The Department will continue its work to review its business processes for the administration and management of Crown lands. The objectives of this work are to ensure consistent operational decision-making and service excellence to support economic development, not-for-profit organizations and individual Nova Scotians.

Potentially Contaminated Abandoned Mines Sites on Crown Lands

In collaboration with partner departments, Lands and Forestry is leading the implementation of a plan to evaluate the potential for contamination on abandoned mine sites on Crown lands. This includes first determining sites where detailed environmental site assessments are required, and subsequently determining any necessary remedial actions if contamination is confirmed. This work is being guided by an Advisory Group, led by Lands and Forestry with support from Nova Scotia Lands Inc., Transportation and Active Transit, Energy and Mines,

Environment and Climate Change, Finance and Treasury Board, and Health and Wellness. The immediate priority is to continue remediation of the historic Montague Mines and Goldenville Mines sites and to initiate the detailed environmental site assessments of other selected priority sites.

Nova Scotia Provincial Parks System Improvements

The Department will continue to advance a multi-year plan for renewing aging infrastructure within parks and identify initiatives for park system improvements to reflect the current operational needs and increased use of the Province's provincial parks.

The Department will also continue its promotion and support of accessible, inclusive, and sustainable public use and enjoyment of our parks in support of the *Access by Design 2030* Strategy.

🔗 **For more information visit:** <https://parks.novascotia.ca/>

Collaboration

The Department remains committed to collaboration with other levels of government, provincial departments, the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, stakeholders and the public. The Department will focus on expanding biodiversity education in the school curriculum through collaboration with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. The Department will work with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to designate sites in the Parks and Protected Areas plan. With the Department of Energy and Mines and the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture emphasis will be focused on expanding energy efficiency upgrades for farms and factories. In 2021-22, we will continue to rely on strong relationships with all our partners to collectively achieve our objectives.

Working with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia - The Department consults the Mi'kmaq on a large variety of Crown land activities as well as the on-going implementation of ecological forestry. The Department also collaborates with the Mi'kmaq on a range of initiatives, like the collaborative moose management strategy for Cape Breton. Our collaboration on the Mi'kmaw Forestry Initiative (MFI) is developing and applying Mi'kmaw management principles to forest management for about 20,000 hectares of Crown Land. The Department has also taken steps to increase Mi'kmaw participation in the work force by designating certain regional positions for Mi'kmaw applicants, and to foster greater inclusion through training to increase understanding of Mi'kmaw history, culture and Government's responsibilities regarding aboriginal and treaty rights.

Departmental Expenses Summary
Lands and Forestry
(\$ thousands)

<u>Programs and Services</u>	<u>2020-2021 Estimate</u>	<u>2020-2021 Forecast</u>	<u>2021-2022 Estimate</u>
Senior Management	542	564	435
Renewable Resources	27,688	39,458	27,788
Regional Services	41,060	43,164	41,718
Policy, Planning & Support Services	5,183	5,473	5,444
Land Services	3,742	2,921	3,648
Total – Departmental Expenses	78,215	91,580	79,033
Ordinary Recoveries	1,242	1,575	1,357
<u>Funded Staff (# of FTEs)</u>			
Department Funded Staff	591.2	567.3	596.7

Notes:

Expense Forecast is \$13.4M greater than Estimate due to Transition fund costs of \$9.4M, \$855K for private woodlot silviculture, \$750K due to seasonal staff salaries/benefits, Innovation support of \$700K, \$670K for the approved Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund, \$500K to implement Forestry Review recommendations, and \$500K for aerial photography/interpretation.

Ordinary Recoveries forecast is \$333K higher than Estimate due to Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund \$670K; offset by a decrease in out of province fire suppression costs, primarily due to COVID restrictions.

Funded Staff (# of FTEs) forecast is 23.9 lower than Estimate due to temporary vacancies.

Expense Estimate increase of \$818K primarily due to Land Titles Initiative.

Ordinary Recoveries Estimate increase of \$115K due to recoverable Fire Suppression costs.

Funded Staff (# of FTEs) Estimate increase of 5.5 due to addition of 7 staff for the Land Titles Initiative, offset by transfers to other departments.