



# Accountability Report 2020–21

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Lands and Forestry

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Accountability Report 2020–2021

ISBN: 978-1-77448-233-9

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## Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forestry for the year ended March 31, 2021 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 2020-2021 Business Plan.

*Original signed by*

*Original signed by*

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Honourable Tory Rushton  
Minister of Natural Resources and  
Renewables

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Karen M. Gatien  
Deputy Minister of Natural Resources  
and Renewables

## Message from the Minister and Deputy Minister

I am pleased to present the accountability report for the Department of Lands and Forestry for fiscal year 2020-21.

Nova Scotians have a deep connection to the natural beauty of our province. Proper stewardship and management of our Crown lands and natural resources remains at the core of everything we do.

Moving forward, we will work closely with stakeholders, industry and the public as we continue to manage our province's natural resources in a sustainable way.

Through this ongoing collaboration, we will ensure these resources can be enjoyed and accessed for generations to come.

## Financial Results

	2020-2021 Estimate	2020-2021 Actual Expense	2020-2021 Variance
Program & Service Area	(\$ thousands)	(\$ thousands)	(\$ thousands)
<b>Gross Departmental Expenses:</b>			
Senior Management	542	562	20
Renewable Resources	27,688	41,193	13,505
Regional Services	41,060	42,816	1,756
Policy, Planning and Support Services	5,183	5,605	422
Land Services	3,742	15,047	11,305
<b>Total: Gross Departmental Expenses</b>	<b>78,215</b>	<b>105,223</b>	<b>27,008</b>
<b>Additional Information:</b>			
Ordinary Revenue	9,478	9,603	125
Fees and Other Charges	2,381	2,414	33
Ordinary Recoveries	1,242	1,361	119
<b>Total: Revenue, Fees &amp; Recoveries</b>	<b>13,101</b>	<b>13,378</b>	<b>277</b>
TCA Purchase Requirements	4,650	4,471	(179)
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs)	591.2	567.3	(23.9)

### Variance Explanation:

1. Gross Departmental Expenses were \$27.0 million above estimate primarily due to expenses related to Forestry Transition Initiatives and implementation of the Forestry Review, as well as additional costs reserved for remediation of contaminated mine sites.
2. Revenue, Fees and Recoveries were \$277 thousand above estimate, mostly due to an increase in Timber & Fuel Wood Licenses.
3. TCA Purchase Requirements were \$179 thousand lower than estimated, primarily due to a delay in the Shubenacadie operations centre water/sewer project, offset by enhancements to the Crystal Crescent Beach parking area.
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 lands. 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
- Continue to expand trail access across Nova Scotia

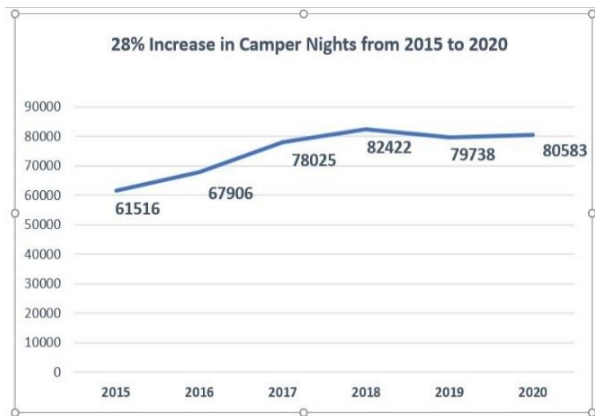
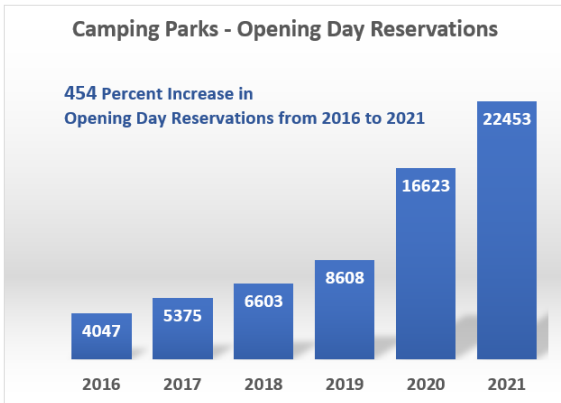
Lands and Forestry's work was guided by four strategic priorities in 2020/2021:

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

### Fast Facts

- Eight FireSmart Canada Community Preparedness Day grants were awarded to Nova Scotian applicants in 2020. The Lands and Forestry Wildfire Prevention Officer assisted and is nationally certified to train additional Local FireSmart Representatives and provide support for communities in preparedness planning and wildfire mitigation initiatives.
- The Department is monitoring the population of the eastern spruce budworm closely as well as engaging stakeholders through its Spruce Budworm Management Framework. Outbreaks of the spruce budworm occur every 30-40 years with the last outbreak collapsing in 1987, which damaged over 1.4 million hectares of forest land.
- The Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs and the Department of Lands and Forestry are working on a Collaborative Management Strategy for Moose on Cape Breton Island, integrating the best science and traditional knowledge available.
- In 2020, Nova Scotia's Provincial Parks System expanded with the addition of new parks to contribute to the Government's land protection commitments, including Barra Provincial Park, St. Mary's Provincial Park and 8 other protected sites. In March-April 2021, an additional 49 sites were identified to be considered for designation as provincial parks.

- There are 20 provincial camping parks and more than 100 operating day-use parks across the province. In 2020, our provincial parks experienced a record reservation launch with 16,600 bookings in the four opening days vs 8,600 in 2019. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, 96% of campers were Nova Scotians and 4% were from outside of Nova Scotia when typically, the breakdown would be 40% and 60%. Camper nights for 2020 were 80,583 compared to 79,738 for the previous year.



## Measuring Our Performance

### COVID-19 Measures

Throughout 2020-2021, Lands and Forestry continued to adapt to ensure safe and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In advance of the 2020 parks season, the Department worked with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and Public Health to have COVID-19 Operational Plans for camping and day use parks up-to-date and in place. Provincial campgrounds delayed opening to June 15 due to COVID restrictions. Campground operations followed public health guidelines. Bookings were delivered online to reduce face-to-face interactions with staff, the number of campsites available was reduced by 30%, and additional signage to communicate public health guidelines was posted throughout the park.

The Department took other emergency measures in response to COVID-19 to issue a “No Burn” restriction (fire ban) to reduce risk of wildfire incidents and protect the safety of firefighters and emergency responders who must work closely together when fires occur. Finally, the Department 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 2020-2021.



## Forestry Sector Support and Transition

The forestry sector continues to be 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.

- [Details on the achievements of the Transition Team can be found here: https://novascotia.ca/forestry-sector-support](https://novascotia.ca/forestry-sector-support)

Of those achievements, those that are most directly related to Lands and Forestry's programs in 2020-2021 are as follows:

- Expanded 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 October 21, 2020, \$7 million had been fully allocated.
- Lands and Forestry Minister led two **virtual missions** to Sweden, and Maine to learn more about best practices in forestry management, innovation, and diversification.
- Delivered support through the **Forestry Sector Safety Measures Fund** – a federal relief program to help individual businesses and the forest sector make a strong recovery from the pandemic. Nova Scotia's participation in this program was announced in January 2021. Through this federal fund administered by the Lands and Forestry for the province, a total of 20 of 24 applications were either fully or partially supported for eligible costs due to COVID-19 safety measures. In total, \$ 454,724 was provided to forestry sector businesses in Nova Scotia.
- Supported Nova Scotian forestry businesses by giving them the opportunity to sell their lands to the Province under the 2020/21 TCA **Land Acquisition Program to Support Forestry Businesses**.
- Continued priority work on **small-scale wood heat generation projects** (see page 10) and implementation of **implement ecological forestry** (see next section).

More than one year later, the sector continues to experience the impacts of employment loss, the elimination of pulp exports, and challenges to private wood supply. The good news is that in 2020 lumber exports grew, the demand for paper products bounced back and short-term solutions have been found for low value by-product. The forestry sector has also been actively participating in ecological forestry discussions as it creates a new vision for its future.

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

Shifting how we manage our forests on provincially owned land to an ecological forestry approach is a multi-year initiative that responds to Professor Lahey's *Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* (August 2018), and the Government's Response (December 2018). As part of the Government's implementation of and commitment to ecological forestry, in 2020-2021 the Department:

- Developed a new **draft Silvicultural Guide for the Ecological Matrix** (replacing the Forest Management Guide) for the Acadian forest. The draft Guide was provided to targeted stakeholders in early March 2020, and a revised draft was released for public comment, which closed on February 19, 2021. It is anticipated that a final version will be available late summer/early fall.
- Completed a draft final report and a discussion paper seeking public input on **High Production Forestry** (second zone of the triad model). The draft final report outlines site selection criteria for high production forestry sites on Crown lands and highlights feedback received from public and targeted stakeholder consultations in 2020. A final report is anticipated to be released in 2021, with implementation to follow.
- Continued work to develop an **Environmental Assessment process** for forest management planning on Crown lands and an approach for **Outcomes-based Forest Management**.
- Continued progress to renew the **Species-At-Risk Program** by establishing 12 Recovery Teams for listed species and holding regular meetings. The Department also updated status reports and drafted recovery plans for Species at Risk for which the Province is solely responsible. All but one species for which Nova Scotia has sole responsibility have approved plans and the final plan is drafted. The remainder of jointly listed species are in various stages of work with the federal government. As Nova Scotia completes work on new Recovery Plans, work is shifting to the review and updating of existing plans. Over 90% of existing recovery plans are current.
- Continued work to improve 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. In 2020, a stakeholder survey was conducted and results were incorporated into the project plan.
- Published the first of two academic papers on **Natural Disturbance agents** in the journal *Environmental Reviews*. A second manuscript has been drafted and will be submitted for publication in 2021.
- Initiated work on reviewing the private and Crown **silviculture** programs.

- Continued work on identifying and protecting **Old Growth and Old Forests** in the province, including consulting with targeted stakeholders and developing a public website: [Old Growth Forests of Nova Scotia](#)

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:

- held regular meetings of the **Ministerial Advisory Committee** responsible for providing advice and input on the Department's overall approach to implementing ecological forestry and advice on how the Department can best engage with stakeholders.
- Published routine progress updates on the **ecological forestry website**: <https://novascotia.ca/ecological-forestry/>.
- Provided 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. The evaluation framework is expected to be completed in the summer of 2021.

### ***Biodiversity Act* and Regulations**

Biodiversity is a Ministerial mandate priority. The *Biodiversity Act*, the first of its kind in the country, was re-introduced to the legislature on March 11, 2021. The Bill was passed in the Spring 2021 Legislative Session following changes informed by the legislative process.

The new *Biodiversity 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, as well as the systems and processes that link them together in our province.

In 2020, the Department commissioned an independent consultant to review stakeholder feedback. Consultations were held with targeted stakeholders who expressed concerns primarily over perceived impacts to private lands and landowner rights. The new *Biodiversity Act* addresses these concerns while advancing biodiversity principles.

The Biodiversity Council, established in May 2018, has an ongoing role to provide advice on biodiversity priorities, and to help craft new regulations. Regulations will involve public and stakeholder consultation. The Department will continue consulting with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia through a parallel process.

## **Review of *Crown Lands Act* and Departmental Business Practices**

In the *Government Response to the Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia*, a commitment was made to undertake a review of the *Crown Lands Act*. The review was intended to develop recommendations for targeted amendments to the Act, in addition to addressing the review's recommendation to amend the purpose section of the Act.

In 2020-2021, the purpose clause of the Act was amended to include consideration of a broader range of societal values and uses of public lands as recommended by Professor Lahey. The Bill was introduced to the legislature on March 11, 2021 and passed in the Spring 2021 Legislative Session.

The Department continued its work on the review of business processes for operational decision-making and service excellence as part of a framework for Crown lands-use business process improvements. In 2021-2022, the Department also continues to work on developing new policies and updating existing policies concerning valuation of Crown lands, use of coastal Crown lands and accessing Crown lands 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. It supports both the implementation of ecological forestry and the Government's forestry sector transition work. In 2020-2021, the design, construction and operation of new, efficient wood chip heating systems that use wood chips from private woodlots or sawmill residues was completed for nine public buildings at six sites for phase 1 of this initiative. The Department is identifying candidate sites for further expansion of the program in Phase 2 in consideration with partner departments.

## **Potentially Contaminated Abandoned Mines Sites on Crown Lands**

The Province is responsible for the risk management and potential remediation of provincial public lands that may be contaminated. Crown lands are under the administration and control of the Department of Lands and Forestry. Where contamination on a Crown lands site is confirmed to be above an environmental standard, the Department is responsible for addressing the contamination in accordance with the *Environment Act* and the *Contaminated Sites Regulations*.

The Department is implementing a comprehensive plan to assess and, if necessary, address potentially contaminated abandoned mine sites on Crown lands, including 25 historic gold mines, 24 historic coal mines, and 20 other various historic mine sites. A cross-government committee, including Transportation and Active Transit/Nova Scotia Lands Inc., Energy and Mines, Environment and Climate Change, Health and Wellness, and Finance and Treasury Board, was established to support and provide advice on the implementation of the plan.

### **Nova Scotia Provincial Parks System Improvements**

Improving Nova Scotia's Provincial Parks is an ongoing priority for the Department. Provincial parks are a driver for increased tourism and economic development in rural Nova Scotia – they allow Nova Scotians and visitors to live active, healthy lives and appreciate and experience the provinces natural and cultural values in a recreation setting. In 2020-2021, despite a delayed opening and campsite reductions due to COVID-19 restrictions, Nova Scotia's provincial day-use, beach and camping parks welcomed over 1.5 million visitors. On August 31, provincial parks responded to water shortages in the province. Provincial parks opened to help people needing water due to dry conditions in southwestern Nova Scotia, providing showers and access to drinking water.

The Department also 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 2020-2021, the Department spent \$1.0 million on capital improvements, completing several infrastructure projects. These included new mobility accessible, gender neutral washrooms at Battery and The Islands, and a new mobility accessible park entry building at Blomidon. Working with Nova Scotia Tourism, a new looped trail has been constructed at Cape Split. Water and electrical services were added to campsites at Caribou, Valleyview and Ellenwood. The Department provided recreational improvements at Lawrencetown Beach and accessibility improvements at Melmerby Beach with the addition of adaptive equipment and a roll out boardwalk.

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

Park	Region	County	\$ Spent	Project Description
Amherst Shore	Central	Cumberland	9,000.00	Finish Group Use Shelter construction and Entry building lighting and roof
Battery	Eastern	Richmond	48,500.00	Accessible Washroom
Blomidon	Western	Kings	370,000.00	Entry Building - New
Cape Chignecto	Central	Cumberland	16,000.00	Trail bridget and Entry Building - Refresh -Windows, doors, heat pump
Cape Split	Western	Kings	358,000.00	Trail - Tourism Funding (\$350,000)
Caribou	Eastern	Pictou	66,190.88	Services - Campsites Loop B
Caribou	Eastern	Pictou	19,567.50	Loop C - storm damage
Clam Harbour Beach	Central	Halifax	33,500.00	Final bill from 2019-2020 Core Building Demo, site clean up and electrical service connection
Ellenwood Lake	Western	Yarmouth	14,500.00	Entry Building - Refresh - Windows & doors and serviced site start-up
Graves Island	Western	Lunenburg	11,000.00	Water building commissioning
Lawrencetown Beach	Central	Halifax	305,000.00	Phase I: Surfers Beach Phase II: Main Beach
Porters Lake	Central	Halifax	13,000.00	Finish Comfort Station - refresh started 2019-20
The Islands	Western	Shelburne	111,000.00	Upgrade Comfort station to universal and accessible
Thomas Raddall	Western	Queens	23,500.00	Finish Comfort Station - refresh started 2019-20
Valleyview	Western	Annapolis	64,000.00	Services - Campsites
			<b>1,472,758.38</b>	

### 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 African Nova Scotian Affairs (Communities, Culture, and Heritage), and in partnership with Nova Scotia Legal Aid (NSLA), the Department is providing support for African Nova Scotians who have been impacted by historical disparities and systemic discrimination to get clear legal title to their land. In Spring 2021, the Government passed the *Land Titles Initiative Acceleration Act* amending the *Land Titles Clarification Act*. Changes made for the Land Titles Initiative through this new Act include creating an expanded role for commissioners appointed under the Act, awarding compensation from a new \$3 million compensation fund and creating broader regulation making authority for applications. The compensation fund will be used to resolve cases that involve parties with competing interests and help speed up efforts under the Land Titles Initiative.

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

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2020-2021
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