

# Provincial Parks, Trails, Beaches, and Protected Areas

## *Protecting Learning Enjoying* A Legacy for Nova Scotia

A PANEL OF EXPERTISE REPORT ON PROVINCIAL PARKS, TRAILS, BEACHES,  
AND PROTECTED AREAS TO THE STEERING PANEL

February 2010



Cape Chignecto Provincial Park—Gerry Lunn

## PARKS PANEL OF EXPERTISE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Parks Panel thanks all those who provided submissions and/or attended information and consultative meetings. We also acknowledge those who participated in Phase I of the Nova Scotia natural resources strategy process. This report synthesizes the diversity of opinions that we heard, identifies issues, and makes recommendations pertinent to Nova Scotia's parks, protected areas, and outdoor recreation opportunities on Crown land. In doing so, we are grateful for the assistance provided by the Department of Natural Resources. However, the report, and any errors or omissions within, are the sole responsibility of the Parks Panel.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The natural resources strategy process has clearly shown that Nova Scotians love their parks. The Phase I report notes: “Nova Scotians see parks as a valued connection to the natural world and a necessary recreational and economic resource; parks form an integral component of a healthy environment and healthy lifestyle.” However, the provincial parks system has not kept pace with changing times, and there is a pressing need for updating and renewal.

## Protection Is the Top Priority

Today, many Nova Scotians recognize the importance of conserving our natural and cultural heritage, protecting our biodiversity, and taking land stewardship and ecologically based approaches to land management. There is also strong support for enhancing the educational role of the provincial parks program.

## Connecting Parks and Protected Areas

Provincial parks and protected areas are crucial to meeting the provincial commitment to protecting 12 per cent of Nova Scotia’s land base. Currently, however, parks are the responsibility of one provincial department (Natural Resources) and protected areas are within another (Environment). As a result, there is cross-departmental competition, too little co-ordination, inefficiency, and resources are spread too thin. Better integration within a unified parks and protected areas program is needed to co-ordinate the full range of responsibilities for provincial parks, trails, protected beaches, wilderness areas, nature reserves, heritage rivers, and outdoor recreational opportunities on Crown land.

## Restructuring the Department of Natural Resources

There is public concern that the Department of Natural Resources favours resource development and exploitation over conservation and protection. While it is understood that the department is moving toward more ecosystem-based approaches to land and resource management, there is a need for a transformation of the departmental culture to one that embraces conservation values. This kind of fundamental change is essential for parks and protected areas to be considered safe under the department’s direction and control.

## Improving Financial Support and Sustainability

The parks program is seriously underfunded. Only limited maintenance is possible, and new capital development has been shelved in most cases. Park capital budgets are not predictable from year to year, complicating long-range planning. Operational activities are limited to day-to-day tasks essential to the basic functioning of the park system.

## Involving Nova Scotians

There is a clear need to expand Nova Scotians’ participation in managing provincial parks and trails, and to support partnerships important to broadening the base of community and stakeholder involvement. However, to maximize the benefits of partnerships, respective roles and responsibilities must be clearly set out and adequate resources must be provided. Finally, given that linkages across many provincial departments are crucial to achieve the potential of the parks system, there is a need for better co-ordination of these linkages to improve co-ordination, effectiveness, and efficiency.

### Five Key Recommendations

- Protection of Nova Scotia’s natural and cultural heritage should be the overriding priority of the provincial parks system. Legislation, policies, management plans, and programs should all reflect this priority, fully incorporating ecosystem-based approaches, considerations of ecological integrity, and biodiversity conservation.
- A coherent, fully integrated, and functionally effective parks and protected areas program should be re-established within the provincial government.
- The Department of Natural Resources should be reworked, restructured, and renamed to demonstrate a fundamental renewal, with emphasis on land stewardship, biodiversity conservation, protection of provincially significant natural and cultural heritage, and an integrated approach to ecosystem-based planning and management.
- The mismatch between current low levels of park funding and the high expectations of Nova Scotians with respect to parks must be addressed. A comprehensive review of funding requirements should be undertaken for the provincial parks program to establish core funding targets. Actions should be taken to enhance funding levels as well

as to explore opportunities for cost savings and increasing efficiencies. This should take place in conjunction with the updating and completion of the deferred provincial parks system review process.

- Greater attention should be paid to involving Nova Scotians systematically in our parks and protected areas. This should include establishment of a Nova Scotia Parks and Trails Advisory Board, and of local park advisory boards. Partnerships in park and trail development and management should be encouraged, but clearer guidelines for these are needed. Particular attention should be paid to interdepartmental co-ordination, involvement of municipalities, and strong collaboration with local communities.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by the Parks Panel as part of the natural resources strategy process, which reflects the Nova Scotia Government's commitment to developing a new natural resources strategy. Operating within Phase II of the process, the Parks Panel reviewed materials from the broad-based Phase I, solicited written submissions from a wide range of stakeholder groups and individuals who participated in Phase I (see Research Addendum at [www.gov.ns.ca/natr/strategy2010/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/strategy2010/)), and convened a set of stakeholder meetings to collect further information (see Research Addendum). This report presents the results of this effort, identifying issues and recommendations pertinent to Nova Scotia's provincial parks, protected areas, and outdoor recreational opportunities.

The report is in keeping with the strategy's guiding principles, and with the citizen values described in Phase I: Sustainability, Diversity, Collaboration, Transparency, and Informed Decision-making.

The report is in keeping with Nova Scotia's *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act* (EGSPA, 2007), which aims for the province to have one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments in the world and to improve economic performance to the national average or better – and includes within it the goal of protecting 12 per cent of Nova Scotia's land base by 2015.

At the outset, it is important to describe what is being covered in this report. The Phase I report notes that there is often confusion about what is included under the heading "parks" in Nova Scotia. The Phase I report chose to limit use of the term "parks" to refer "only to Nova Scotia's provincial parks system, which includes campgrounds, day-use parks, and rail corridors" and to include the "walking trails, camping, picnicking, and beaches [that] are available on these lands." This limited the focus to only those aspects that are currently under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources.

However, the Phase I report also makes a telling suggestion that confusion over the meaning of "parks" was due to the fact that in addition to provincial parks per se, there are also "several types of lands [that] are set aside or protected and are administered by departments other than the Department of Natural Resources,"

including “wilderness areas, nature reserves, national parks, and more”— all of which tend to be seen by the public as “parks.”

The Parks Panel believes that the public is correct that these various components are logically discussed together. Although the pieces of the system currently cross provincial departmental lines and are managed under a variety of legislation, they all fit within the spirit and intent of the broader system of provincial parks, trails, protected beaches, wilderness areas, nature reserves, heritage rivers, and Crown land recreational opportunities.

Therefore, in the context of this process, the Parks Panel will refer to the system more broadly, in a manner consistent with existing provincial policy and legislation, as encompassing parks, protected areas, and outdoor recreational opportunities. Specifically, this report uses the following terms:

- “provincial parks” or “provincial parks system” refer collectively to all the provincial parks and park reserves in Nova Scotia – in other words, the physical land
- “parks program” refers specifically to the current management responsibilities of the Parks and Recreation division within the Department of Natural Resources, which includes provincial parks, park reserves, and outdoor recreational opportunities, as well as protected beaches and trails
- “parks and protected areas” refers to the broader system of provincial parks, protected areas, and outdoor recreational opportunities, including park reserves, protected beaches, trails, wilderness areas, nature reserves, and heritage rivers, as currently administered at the provincial level jointly by the departments of Natural Resources and of Environment. This also refers to the physical land.

This report considers strategic issues and recommendations relating to the provincial park system, the parks program or the broader parks and protected areas system under seven themes: Priorities, Policy, and Legislation; Organizational Structure; Financial and Human Resources; Provincial Parks, Trails, and Beaches; Partnerships and Public Engagement; and the Broader Provincial Perspective.

The following “vision” reflects the overall key messages:

Through conservation and protection of our natural and cultural heritage, Nova Scotia will have a diverse system of parks, protected areas, beaches, and trails that serve as cornerstones of effort to sustain the province’s ecological integrity, while enhancing our quality of life by providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, outdoor education, and nature tourism.

Parks programs will be delivered in an integrated, effective, and fiscally responsible manner through collaborative, participatory, and knowledge-based processes, with an emphasis on accessibility, community involvement, and, where appropriate, partnerships.

## 2.0 PRIORITIES, POLICY, AND LEGISLATION

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### Background/Rationale

Since the enactment of Nova Scotia's first *Provincial Parks Act* in 1959, the province's parks and protected areas system has evolved. In the early years, provincial parks were seen primarily as tourism amenities, and a system of small roadside campgrounds and picnic areas was developed along the province's highways and byways. In the 1970s and 1980s, attention turned to the provision of outdoor recreational opportunities for Nova Scotians. Coastal lands were acquired and beach parks were developed to provide beach-access facilities and to protect sensitive beach and dune systems from impacts of uncontrolled use. During the same period, larger natural environment parks were established and trails became popular.

In the last two decades, the focus has shifted to the protection of significant natural areas, and major steps have been taken to protect representative landscapes and sites as well as features of unique, rare, or otherwise significant natural values according to scientific criteria.

Over these years, the character of the provincial parks system has changed, as have park user values and public expectations. Today, there is a greater appreciation of the importance of biodiversity protection, as well as land stewardship and ecologically based approaches to land planning and management. There is a need to ensure that program objectives are in tune with current trends and priorities, and that enabling legislation is up to date.

### Objective

To plan, develop, and manage the provincial parks system in such a way as to highlight protection of both the natural environment and cultural heritage of Nova Scotia, while also providing a range of opportunities for complementary, ecologically sustainable outdoor recreation, education, and nature-based tourism.

## Issues and Discussion

### 2.1 Priority objectives

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Nova Scotia's *Provincial Parks Act* (1989) states four main objectives of the parks system. These are to:

- (a) provide opportunities for a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities ranging from relatively high intensity near-urban facilities to low intensity wildland experiences;
- (b) preserve unique, rare, representative or otherwise significant elements of the natural environment and historic resources of Nova Scotia;
- (c) provide opportunities for exploration, understanding and appreciation of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage through interpretation, information and educational programs; and
- (d) provide resident travellers and out-of-Province visitors with opportunities to discover, experience and enjoy Nova Scotia's distinctive outdoor recreational and heritage resources.

These objectives are often summarized by the terms: outdoor recreation, protection, outdoor education, and nature tourism.

The natural resources strategy process has highlighted that all four objectives remain valid today. However, it also demonstrated that many Nova Scotians see the goal of protection of our natural and cultural heritage as the top priority. If we do not adequately protect our heritage, other goals – recreation, education, tourism benefits – cannot be met.

The *Provincial Parks Act* takes a balanced approach to protecting both natural and cultural heritage. The rise in importance of protection-oriented objectives through the establishment of the Protected Areas Program in the Department of Environment has accentuated a strong tendency towards natural area protection in the overall parks and protected areas system. Within the provincial parks system itself, however, there is considerable potential – especially in light of the province's Heritage Strategy – to better balance protection of the natural environment and our cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the strategy review process demonstrated that, of all four objectives, education has received the least attention, despite its perceived importance.

## Recommendations

- Maintain the existing four core objectives for the provincial parks system.
- Place protection of our natural and cultural heritage as the overriding objective of the provincial parks system. Species at risk and unique or rare natural and historical elements should be given particular emphasis.
- Give greater emphasis to the protection and interpretation of cultural heritage assets within the parks program.
- Provide greater attention and support to the educational role of the parks program.

importance of ecosystem-based management approaches.

- Conduct a thorough review and updating of the 1988 document, *Parks: A new policy for Nova Scotia*, to ensure that policies reflect priorities among park system objectives described in Section 2.1 above.
- Conduct a thorough review and updating of all provincial park policies and guidelines to ensure that park lands are managed consistently, efficiently, and effectively across the province. Policies dealing with, among others, natural and cultural heritage, planning and maintenance procedures, visitor services, partnerships, and commercial services should be created and/or updated as necessary.

## 2.2 Policies and legislation

While a legislative and policy framework is in place to guide the establishment and management of the province's parks and protected areas (see Appendix), there is a need for comprehensive review and updating. The cornerstone statutes, the *Provincial Parks Act*, the *Trails Act*, and the *Beaches Act*, were all passed in 1989. Although some minor amendments have been made, this legislation has not kept pace with the emergent emphasis on protection and ecosystem-based approaches to biodiversity protection and land stewardship. As well, with the 1999 passage of the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*, there is overlap with the *Provincial Parks Act* that calls for reconciliation. There is no recognition in legislation or policy of the potential impacts of climate change. The 1988 document *Parks: A new policy for Nova Scotia*, which has particular relevance to provincial parks, trails, protected beaches, and Crown land recreation, has not kept up with trends in other jurisdictions and similarly requires review and updating.

## Recommendations

- Undertake a comprehensive review and updating of the *Provincial Parks Act*, the *Trails Act* and the *Beaches Act*, to ensure that they fully reflect the priorities described in Section 2.1 and meet evolving management needs and public expectations. In particular, revisions should incorporate a focus on protection of natural and cultural heritage, and the



## 3.0 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### Background/Rationale

The organizational structure through which the parks and protected areas are planned and managed has evolved and shifted over the past half a century.

Responsibility for the provincial parks program rests with the Department of Natural Resources, but is split across two separate branches: Parks and Recreation division, within Renewable Resources branch, is responsible for policy, planning, and design aspects for parks, and advice and direction regarding protected beaches, trails, and matters relating to planning for outdoor recreation opportunities and heritage resource protection on Crown land. Regional Services branch is responsible for park operation, maintenance, and enforcement in the field.

Responsibility for protected areas, including wilderness areas, nature reserves, and heritage rivers, was transferred in 1999 from the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Environment. This arrangement effectively involved planning staff only, who are now split between the two departments, with field management responsibilities for protected areas being left with Natural Resources.

### Objective

To ensure that the provincial parks system and the broader provincial parks and protected areas system are coherently, efficiently, and effectively managed with a clearly articulated mission, mandate, and organizational structure.

## Issues and Discussion

### 3.1 Parks and protected areas

The management of Nova Scotia's parks and protected areas system could be delivered more efficiently and effectively if the individual provincial parks and protected areas programs were better integrated. Most Canadian provinces have unified parks and protected areas programs. Nova Scotia's were also unified at one time, but were split to give greater emphasis to protected areas. However, this has led to inefficiencies ever since. A more seamless treatment of parks and protected areas is needed to provide the leadership that is essential to fulfilling the objectives of the program.

### Recommendations

- The parks and protected areas system in Nova Scotia should be conceived as being comprised of the full range of land- and water-based elements of the system, including provincial parks, park reserves, trails, protected beaches, wilderness areas, nature reserves, heritage rivers, and Crown land in terms of recreation opportunities.
- A coherent, fully integrated and functional parks and protected areas program should be established within the provincial government. The purposes and objectives of the program should be set out clearly, and a report to government on the status of the program should be submitted annually.

## 3.2 Departmental restructuring

The Department of Natural Resources has evolved over the years and now holds responsibilities for land, forests, minerals, wildlife, biodiversity, and other areas, as well as parks and, through a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Environment, field management of protected areas.

While the Department of Natural Resources is meant to balance resource development and exploitation with conservation functions, many submissions during Phases I and II reflected the belief that the department favours resource development and use over land stewardship and conservation. Concern was expressed that parks and protected areas are not safe under the department's direction and control due to the lack of attention to conservation and protection. Some have suggested that provincial parks should join protected areas as a responsibility of the Department of Environment.

At the same time, the panel also is aware of efforts within the Department of Natural Resources to move toward an ecosystem-based approach to land and resource management. If fully applied within a departmental culture that embraces conservation values, a renewed Department of Natural Resources could offer an appropriate home for parks and protected areas. However, in the course of its work, the panel heard clearly and consistently that protection and environmentally responsible management of Nova Scotia's parks and protected areas system must be the top priority.

A particular organizational issue within the Department of Natural Resources is that the Regional Services branch has become more involved in areas that traditionally had been the domain of the Parks and Recreation division. While an elevated interest in the parks program is positive in some respects, this trend seems to have occurred incrementally and without benefit of an overall organizational vision or plan, and has led to a degree of confusion regarding roles and responsibilities.

## Recommendations

- The Department of Natural Resources should undergo a fundamental reworking, restructuring, and renaming to emphasize a reorientation of the department toward land stewardship, biodiversity conservation, protection of provincially significant natural and cultural heritage, and an integrated approach to ecosystem-based management, particularly for parks and protected areas, and on Crown lands.
- If fundamental change along the above lines is carried out, then the parks and protected areas program should be brought together within the renewed department, reporting to the deputy minister.
- If the Department of Natural Resources is not fundamentally changed, responsibility for the provincial parks program should be transferred to the Department of Environment, thereby unifying the parks and protected areas program in that department. In this case, consideration should be given to integrating within that department responsibilities for managing the parks and protected areas program, biodiversity conservation and wildlife, and Crown land planning and management.
- If the parks and protected areas program remains split across departments, then co-ordination of closely related system elements and programs within and between departments is crucial, through the establishment of a clearly mandated and accountable interdepartmental program management committee, reporting to the respective deputy ministers.
- Regardless of the organizational arrangement adopted, the respective roles and responsibilities for planning and operations in the parks and protected areas program should be clarified and streamlined.

## 4.0 FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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### Background/Rationale

Adequate financial and human resources are required to deliver a quality provincial parks program. The provincial park system is funded by operational and capital budgets that are meant to meet basic operational, capital maintenance, and new facility development requirements. Additional but unpredictable funding is occasionally made available to the parks program by external sources, such as partnerships with other government agencies or federal disaster relief and federal infrastructure initiatives. However, since the early 1990s, funding levels from all sources have dropped.

### Objective

To provide an adequately and predictably funded, effectively managed, and efficiently operated provincial parks system that meets present and future program objectives.

### Issues and Opportunities

#### 4.1 Financial resources

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The parks program is seriously under funded. Only limited capital maintenance is possible. New capital development has effectively been shelved, except where funding is available through external resources. Furthermore, park capital budgets are not predictable from year to year, complicating long-range planning. Park maintenance and improvements are largely limited to addressing safety concerns and critical park infrastructure maintenance, but do not allow the system to meet its declared objectives. Notably, operational activities are limited to day-to-day tasks essential to the basic functioning of the park system, and there is little money available to provide interpretive programming or even to protect sensitive natural and cultural heritage.

### Recommendations

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- Undertake a comprehensive review of funding requirements for the provincial park program with the aim of establishing core funding targets for: park management and development, capital maintenance of existing park infrastructure, existing park upgrading, park redevelopment, and new park development.
- As part of a provincial park system review (see Section 5), take a balanced approach that recognizes the importance of upgrading existing parks and developing new parks, while also closing those that no longer meet park program objectives. Consider removing the latter from the system either through deregulation or transfer to local government, to which they may be of some value. The review should also propose removing or closing facilities and services offered within parks that no longer meet public needs or park program objectives.
- Cost saving and cost recovery objectives should not take precedence over social, economic, environmental, and community development objectives.
- Develop new funding sources and arrangements, new sources of revenue, and new partnerships to support the provincial park system and to deliver programs, while maintaining consistency with program objectives and priorities.
- Put a capital funding arrangement in place that is consistent and predictable from year to year.

#### 4.2 Human resources

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The 1999 transfer of some responsibilities from the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Environment (as described in Section 3.0) left planning staff split between the two departments. As a result, staffing levels in the Parks and Recreation division are insufficient to carry out the division's mandate. Most parks do not have management plans and there is limited capability to collect even the most basic park resource inventories.

This staffing challenge is exacerbated by the multi-functional organizational model within the Regional Services branch. Under this model, staff have responsibilities for a wide range of departmental programs, including forestry and fire protection, and may not have dedicated park-related training.

On the positive side, opportunities for improved staff training and access to technology have the potential to allow people to work more effectively and efficiently.

### Recommendations

- Provide staffing levels sufficient to deliver the provincial park program efficiently and effectively.
- Ensure that up-to-date technology is used in the workplace.
- Provide staff with professional and technical training to improve on-the-job effectiveness.

## 5.0 PROVINCIAL PARKS, TRAILS, AND BEACHES

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### Background/Rationale

The Department of Natural Resources has the responsibility to manage Nova Scotia's provincial parks, provincial park reserves, trails, and beaches for a range of present and future demands. These include protecting important natural and cultural heritage features and values, providing opportunities for outdoor recreation activities and outdoor education, as well as ensuring they complement provincial tourism objectives.

This section addresses a range of issues relating to provincial parks, trails, and protected beaches, focusing on policies and planning, facilities and services, and the knowledge base needed to achieve the objectives of Nova Scotia's *Provincial Parks Act*.

### Objective

To provide a system of provincial parks, trails, and beaches that meets present and future provincial protection and biodiversity goals, while incorporating educational, recreational, and tourism opportunities in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

### Issues and Discussion

#### 5.1 Planning the provincial park system

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Nova Scotia's provincial park system offers highly valued opportunities for public recreational access, use, and enjoyment, while protecting significant natural and historic sites and features. However, there is a need to bring many parks into better alignment with today's priorities of providing protection of both natural and cultural heritage elements, and outdoor education.

A 2005 comprehensive review evaluated the provincial park system on the basis of each park's contribution to the program's objectives and made recommendations on the future role of properties that were deemed to be less important in meeting those objectives. It also identified gaps in the present system and proposed opportunities to address them through the additional candidate park sites on Crown land. This review remains in draft form, its

completion having been deferred pending completion of the natural resources strategy process.

There is a general lack of individual park management plans, with only a small number being in effect or in preparation. The lack of management plans can lead to planning decisions that are inconsistent with overall park system objectives. This can lead to inefficiency in the use of human and financial resources, and to confusion on the part of the public.

The facility and service infrastructure of many parks is aging and worn, and requires upgrading to meet the changing needs of provincial park users and to increase park usage, while remaining consistent with program objectives and priorities.

### Recommendations

- Follow through on the 2005 provincial park system review, updating it where necessary and keeping in mind recommendations made in this report, as well as other circumstances that have changed since 2005. This review process should include provision for public consultation, and be co-ordinated with the parallel (and overlapping) systems planning process for protected areas that was initiated with the November 2009 acceptance by the Nova Scotia Government of the recommendations of the Colin Stewart Forest Forum.
- Ensure all major provincial parks have comprehensive management plans. More modest management statements should be prepared for smaller parks with limited protection values. Management plans and statements should be reviewed and revised regularly.
- Undertake capital development in the provincial park system only on sites where a management plan or statement is in place.
- Park management plans and statements should take an ecosystem-based approach that incorporates considerations of ecological integrity, biodiversity conservation, and impacts of park use.
- Upgrade and enhance park facilities and services to respond to public expectations while ensuring consistency with values and priorities of the provincial park system.

- The outdoor education contribution of provincial parks and trails should be enhanced. Increase the amount of interpretive programming and provide interpretive displays and signage at important points of interest.
- As part of the park management planning process, seek appropriate measures to lower maintenance costs.
- In co-operation with the federal government, if necessary, give consideration to expanding Nova Scotia’s provincial park system to include a marine element.

## 5.2 Provincial park use and demand

Accurate statistics are compiled only for usage of provincial campgrounds. In addition, user surveys are conducted periodically to measure the extent to which provincial campgrounds meet user expectations. Visitation levels are also recorded for provincial beach parks staffed by the Nova Scotia Lifeguard Service. Visitation levels for the remaining provincial parks, which would represent the largest portion of provincial park users, are, however, based on rough estimates only. Therefore, no one knows how many people in total use Nova Scotia’s provincial parks, trails, and beaches.

While usage cannot be fully documented, it is clearly beneficial to attract more park users. One approach is to respond to the interest of many Nova Scotians to use provincial parks outside the current short summer season, while another lies in increasing accessibility to and within the parks. Finally, to attract more users, there is a need for improvements to the promotional materials available on the parks system overall, as well as for each individual park, trail, or beach.

### Recommendations

- Put procedures in place to better measure provincial park use, including numbers of day users. Incorporate this information in the development of park system and management plans.
- Conduct public surveys at regular intervals to measure attitudes toward parks and visitor expectations.

- Explore options to facilitate use of provincial parks in the off seasons. For example, feasibility of a self-registration system could be examined to extend campground use.
- Explore options to expand use of parks by increasing their accessibility to Nova Scotians and visitors, both in terms of those with disabilities, and in terms of those using public transit and active transportation.
- Make better use of modern electronic media and high-quality promotional materials to reach present and potential park users. In carrying out these activities, partnering at a provincial level should be arranged with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage and the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia.
- Place greater emphasis on promoting individual parks by identifying, in conjunction with the local community, the key features of each park to highlight in promotional materials.

### 5.3 Monitoring and research

The availability of accurate and comprehensive information is necessary to make informed park management decisions. Currently, adequate resource inventory information is not available for most provincial parks, and resources are not available to collect this information. As well, the provincial park system's protection role makes it the ideal venue to conduct research; however, no concerted efforts are made to encourage research in parks by others.

#### Recommendations

- More resources should be devoted to inventorying and researching natural and cultural heritage values contained in the park system. In particular, an inventory should be carried out for each park, with priority attention to those parks with a provincially significant protection role. Information gathered from these activities should provide the foundation for park management plans.
- Priority attention should be given to monitoring species and natural processes deemed to be at risk. Changes to management practices should be based on the results of the monitoring.

- The Department of Natural Resources should encourage and foster inventorying, monitoring, and research activities in provincial parks carried out by qualified non-governmental organizations, universities, and other groups and organizations in consultation with department staff. Such work should contribute to the needs of the park system and the results must be made available to the department.
- Engage local communities, interest groups, and interested individuals in the park inventorying and information-gathering process. Consider developing an Internet-based information collection capability, and synergistic linkages with other educational, social, and cultural facilities near each park.

### 5.4 Provincial trails

An extensive network of trails has evolved across Nova Scotia, however, this section of the report concerns itself primarily with trails established on Crown land and on abandoned railway corridors, which are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources.

In recent years, the province has moved to what is called a community-based approach to trail development and management, in which trails are typically established and maintained by local trails organizations, with guidance and funding support provided by the provincial government and through licensing fees for off-highway vehicles (OHVs). However, these initiatives and activities are occurring on an ad hoc basis, without clear direction or guidance at the provincial level. Provincial trails legislation was passed in 1980 and updated in 1989, yet only one trail has been designated to date. There is also potential for tension between community aspirations and the management objectives that apply to the lands on which a trail may be proposed. In an attempt to deal with issues arising from what was seen as poorly regulated OHV use, the province released its *Off-Highway Vehicles in Nova Scotia Provincial Direction and Action Plan* in October 2005. Several of the recommendations contained within the report dealt with trails issues.

Responsibility for abandoned railway lines, which have become a particular focal point of dissension, resides within the Department of Natural Resources. There has been competition and contention between motorized and non-motorized users. Against this background, the

province has adopted a shared-use approach in an effort to accommodate conflicting demands for access, use, and enjoyment of these popular corridors. Many argue that this policy has proven successful. Certainly it has led to the active involvement of OHV organizations in developing and managing many of the rail corridor trails. On the other hand, there is continuing controversy involving adjoining land owners where motorized use occurs in close proximity to dwellings. As well, active transportation advocates argue that shared trails can lead to displacement of non-motorized users who feel they can no longer use the trails, and that the shared-use policy is therefore contrary to objectives relating to active living and healthy lifestyles.

The current process used to determine the trail uses that will be permitted on a given segment of rail corridor, and the manner by which a particular local group is permitted, through agreement, to develop and manage the trail is essentially a proponent-driven approach, “first past the post” in nature. Many feel that a more broadly based consultative approach should be adopted.

Finally, when the province took over the responsibility for abandoned railway corridors, it assumed the potential liabilities associated with creating trails systems on them. In particular the cost of removing or repairing unsafe railway bridges that are found on some trail segments is prohibitive.

### Recommendations

- Following review of the *Trails Act*, as recommended in Section 2.2 of this report, proceed with legal designation of rails-to-trails corridors and other provincially significant trails on Crown land in Nova Scotia.
- Establish, in consultation with the province’s trails community, a provincial plan for trails in Nova Scotia to provide direction and guidance with respect to the province’s outstanding trail resources and opportunities. This trail network should take into account the recommendations in the 2005 *Off-Highway Vehicles in Nova Scotia Provincial Direction and Action Plan*.
- Support community-based partnerships for developing and maintaining trails, ensuring that broad-based democratic processes are followed, placing a priority on partnerships involving municipalities, and taking into account provincial priorities.

- Review the shared-use policy, particularly with reference to abandoned railway corridors. Where populations and use levels warrant, give priority to active transportation and designate those segments for non-motorized use. Shared use should continue in more remote areas where OHV groups have taken on responsibility for trail development and maintenance, and comprise the predominant user group. Discussions regarding trail use should be subject to municipal and community review using democratic processes.
- Support efforts to establish long-distance hiking trails, where provincial parks, abandoned rail corridors, wilderness areas, or Crown land can provide linking opportunities.

## 5.5 Protected beaches

The recent State of the Coast report expressed concerns about the need for more ecologically oriented and integrated approaches to beach and coastal planning and management, particularly to respond to the effects of climate change.

### Recommendation

- Provincial land planning should involve careful assessment of areas around provincial protected beaches and associated coastlines to meet changing conditions, notably those resulting from climate change. This long-term planning will require expansion of designated areas around some beaches and associated coastal areas, to ensure that the natural beach systems are protected. Such actions must take a broad ecological perspective, and must occur within the context of major processes of change. In reviewing the *Beaches Act* (recommended in Section 2.2) the perspectives and approaches described here should be incorporated.

## 6.0 PARTNERSHIPS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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### Background/Rationale

A variety of partnership and engagement arrangements exists for Nova Scotia's provincial parks and trails. These include various formal and informal arrangements that have emerged, some involving municipalities, community groups, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

Nova Scotia's parks have also benefited from a long history of public consultation. Some consultation processes occurred through local advisory committees, others through provincewide processes. Over the years, a variety of additional mechanisms have emerged, including open houses, newsletters, and use of the Internet.

All of these processes have demonstrated the desire on the part of Nova Scotians to have a say in decisions relating to provincial parks and trails.

### Objectives

In planning, developing, and operating Nova Scotia's system of provincial parks and trails, ensure full and effective engagement of the public and stakeholders; encourage partnerships; build a strong attachment of Nova Scotia's communities to their local provincial parks and trails; and ensure strong, effective interactions across provincial government departments.

### Issues and Discussion

#### 6.1 Public consultation and participation

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There is clear potential to expand Nova Scotians' participation in managing provincial parks and trails. However, while public consultation processes have proven quite effective and have enabled significant public engagement, they have tended to be ad hoc, issue-oriented, and focused on new park establishment or policy review processes. Furthermore, ongoing consultation processes have not been established or maintained in reference to the management and operation of individual

parks, nor have mechanisms been put in place to facilitate stakeholder engagement in the overall system on a regular basis.

### Recommendations

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- Public and stakeholder consultation should be reaffirmed as an integral and essential component of processes for the planning, management, and operation of parks, trails, and protected areas. Consultation processes should be designed to engage the primary stakeholders, local communities and the general public on an ongoing basis.
- As recommended in *Parks: A new policy for Nova Scotia* (1988) but not implemented to date, a Nova Scotia Parks and Trails Advisory Board should be appointed, reporting to the minister, to provide an ongoing mechanism for Nova Scotians to provide advice and guidance regarding the provincial parks and trails.
- Local park advisory boards should be established where interest warrants. Even for parks run entirely by the province (as opposed to within partnerships), a local park advisory board would have the potential to realize a range of benefits. The province should put in place a clear set of options and guidelines for such advisory boards, which could range in terms of level of activity and responsibility, to match local needs and capabilities.
- Specific sector-oriented consultation mechanisms should be initiated and maintained as needed. An illustration of this would be a forum for regular ongoing consultation among all parties in the camping sector.

#### 6.2 Community partnerships

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Partnerships broaden the base of involvement in building, maintaining, and promoting provincial parks and trails, and help to bring non-governmental expertise and local initiative and enthusiasm into the process. Partnerships with Nova Scotian communities also enhance the local value of parks, and connect them with other local assets, attractions, and economic development opportunities. However, the current situation in developing and supporting partnerships reflects a patchwork of approaches.



To maximize the benefits of partnerships, a number of concerns must be addressed. On the one hand, there is an ongoing challenge the government will face of how to properly achieve provincial objectives within a partnership, given that those objectives may not fully align with those of partnering organizations.

On the other hand, from the perspective of community organizations and non-governmental organizations, there is a concern that partnerships can become (or are seen to become) a mechanism to download provincial costs and responsibilities – perhaps even as the province continues to “take credit” for the parks. Some local non-governmental organizations currently do not feel that the department has provided them with adequate support in their park management and development efforts.

In addition, there is an overall concern about the sustainability of park management – and indeed of the existence of a given park – over the long term, within a partnership, given a shortage of resources and volunteers locally. This is exacerbated by the issue of insurance since, currently, local volunteer bodies developing and running parks must provide insurance, at significant cost, to cover their participants.

### Recommendations

- Community partnerships should be encouraged. However, clearer guidelines as to what constitutes a sustainable and equitable partnership for a provincial park or trail are needed. Partnerships should be based on long-term management agreements that clearly lay out roles and responsibilities, and which commit provincial resources to a reasonable extent. The Department of Natural Resources should establish a budget allocation specifically for community partnerships, with a priority on using the allocation to leverage funding from other revenue sources.
- As management plans are developed and implemented for each suitable provincial park, there should be strong collaboration with local communities and their residents, to enhance community benefits and to ensure consideration of connections to those communities’ historical/cultural and ecological values, landscape aspects, best “niche” for the park, use issues, and necessary facilities.

- Nova Scotia’s parks system needs to be seen within a community-centred place-based context that integrates considerations both within and beyond the parks themselves. As part of this approach to connecting provincial parks and other local assets, cross-publicity and cross-marketing of the various opportunities in a local area should be encouraged. This could include, for example, providing suitable information within parks about a local museum or sports facility, and, conversely, advertising a provincial park in those same sites. Furthermore, where possible, the natural and cultural heritage in a park should be linked to relevant local museums or other attractions; this is beneficial both for educational linkages and for tourism purposes.
- Particular attention should be paid to realizing the considerable potential that exists for greater involvement of municipalities in partnerships relating to both provincial parks and trails. Such partnerships can improve linkages with local historic and cultural assets, local recreational and educational facilities, and local businesses, as well as increase local participation in development and management of parks and trails. This also has the benefit of enhancing the stability of the partnership arrangement.
- In some cases, there may be potential for partnerships to be developed with the private sector to offer some services and facilities considered desirable, given park objectives, and which cannot be offered by the parks program.

### 6.3 Partnerships within government

Given the primary objective of the parks system is to protect key elements of Nova Scotia’s natural and cultural heritage, and given the additional objectives relating to recreation, education, and tourism, it is not surprising that linkages across many provincial departments are crucial to achieving program objectives.

Most prominent amongst these departments are Health Promotion and Protection (healthy living, active transportation, and trails) and Tourism, Culture and Heritage (tourism product development, marketing, museums, archaeological, and historic resource protection). There are also strong existing and potential linkages with Economic and Rural Development (community economic development initiatives based on parks, trails, and

protected areas) and, though yet to be established, with Education (outdoor education and interpretation). Co-ordination is needed to maximize benefits of program delivery across departmental lines, and to better serve Nova Scotians more effectively and efficiently.

### Recommendations

- An interdepartmental co-ordinating committee should be established to formally link the department or departments with responsibility for the parks and protected areas program (see Section 3) to the other departments with overlapping and complementary responsibilities, including Health Promotion and Protection; Tourism, Culture and Heritage; Economic and Rural Development; and Education.
- The departments of Natural Resources and Education should establish regular ongoing connections to take full advantage of the potential to improve the provision of outdoor education to youth. A more comprehensive and more year-round initiative is desirable, involving linkages from policy and planning levels through to those connecting individual schools and local provincial parks.
- Establish linkages between government departments and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of information sharing and to promote a shared approach to meeting park program objectives where areas of interest overlap.

## 7.0 THE BROADER PROVINCIAL PERSPECTIVE

### 7.1 Land use planning

#### Background/Rationale

Nova Scotia's parks and protected areas system is set within a mosaic of land uses on both Crown and private land. Integrating and balancing parks and protected area objectives with other land uses is a challenge as it must be accomplished within this complex mix of land uses and ownerships, and must also take into account adjoining land uses. Effective mechanisms to guide and co-ordinate land use are not available in Nova Scotia. As a result, decisions taken in favour of one land use may have detrimental effects on parks and protected areas, and in some cases, vice versa.

#### Objective

To establish comprehensive, transparent, and effective land use planning processes in Nova Scotia.

#### Issues and Discussion

Nova Scotia has the second-lowest percentage (24 per cent) of publicly owned land of all Canadian provinces and territories. This limited land base is under ever-increasing demands from a variety of land and resource uses and users. However, planning for the use of Crown land has traditionally tended to be equated with forest management planning, with secondary considerations given to wildlife and outdoor recreation uses. This approach, however narrow, aligns with the purpose section of the *Crown Lands Act*.

The department's Integrated Resource Management approach was meant to be a decision-making process that would co-ordinate resource use so that long-term sustainable benefits are optimized and conflicts among users minimized. It was to include planning for minerals, forests, recreation, wilderness, energy, wildlife, and parks. It assigned Crown lands to three broad categories, with the third being "lands specifically allocated to special uses" (e.g., parks or protected areas).

However, since the inception of the Integrated Resource Management process, only those Crown lands that already had special-use status have been classified in that third category. It has taken public advocacy or other initiatives to get any additional areas of Crown land protected.

Planning is done at the municipal level for private lands where the emphasis is on land development and associated controls. Parks and protected areas, and biodiversity conservation, generally do not enter the picture. There is provision for the province to adopt provincial statements of interest in the use and development of land, with which municipal plans must comply; however, only five such statements have been developed to date.

### Recommendations

- A comprehensive land use planning process should be established for Crown lands, which recognizes the full range and legitimacy of land and resource objectives that apply, includes provision for effective public and stakeholder input, and leads to a clear articulation of the intended role(s) of respective Crown land blocks and parcels. This process should adopt an ecosystem-based approach and give primary consideration to land stewardship and biodiversity conservation.
- A land use planning function should be established within the Department of Natural Resources, which is separate and apart from, but closely linked with, the various resource and program sectors with interests in Crown land (i.e., minerals, forestry, biodiversity, outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism, parks and protected areas).
- Provincial statements of interest should be expanded to give direction to the identification and protection of lands and resources of provincial significance as potential parks and protected areas, recreation and scenic resources, and lands of importance for biodiversity conservation and provision of ecosystem services.
- A provincial land use plan or framework should be developed for Nova Scotia, which would identify lands and resources of provincial significance and establish open and transparent consultation and decision-making processes to achieve a balanced approach to protection, use, and development.

## 7.2 Private land conservation

### Background/Rationale

As only 24 per cent of Nova Scotia is publicly owned, and private lands are disproportionately rich in biodiversity, private land conservation is essential to achieving provincial targets for natural area protection.

### Objective

To recognize and support the role of private land conservation in contributing to the province’s protection objectives.

### Issues and Discussion

The Nova Scotia Government has recognized the importance of non-governmental land trusts in private land conservation. Land trusts can receive donations of land, enter into conservation easements, and bring matching funding to the table where purchase is necessary. In recent years, the province has taken steps to encourage and enable this approach, and it is recognized that additional measures are needed to enhance the effectiveness of private land conservation efforts.

### Recommendation

- There should be close collaboration and partnering between the provincial government (including the parks and protected areas program) and the land trust community to support provincial goals, both for the parks and protected areas system itself and to help achieve targets for land conservation and protection (notably EGSPA’s target). This collaboration should include the building of capacity among land trusts, and suitable data sharing.

## 7.3 Knowledge advisory panel

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### Background/Rationale

Now more than ever the Department of Natural Resources is challenged by environmental issues and conflicts over the management of its protected area system and Crown lands in general. Concern about climate change and its potential impacts on the province is gaining increasing attention. The department needs to put in place a forum for obtaining informed advice for dealing with these increasingly complex and divisive issues.

### Issues and Discussion

As has been mentioned earlier in this report, the Department of Natural Resources lacks budget and the staff capability to address even some of its highest priority tasks. Given the increasing complexity of issues and of public demands facing the department it is unlikely, even under the most optimistic scenario, that it would have the internal specialized knowledge resources available to carry out its work effectively.

### Objective

To increase the Department of Natural Resources' capacity to deal with issues requiring a high degree of specialized knowledge in an interdisciplinary manner.

#### Recommendation

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- Establish an interdisciplinary knowledge advisory panel to the Department of Natural Resources to provide a forum for assistance in making informed management decisions in areas that affect the department. This should incorporate a broad range of sources including traditional knowledge, and social and scientific knowledge.

## 8.0 PARKS PANEL OF EXPERTISE LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Maintain the existing four core objectives for the provincial parks system.
2. Place protection of our natural and cultural heritage as the overriding objective of the provincial parks system. Species at risk and unique or rare natural and historical elements should be given particular emphasis.
3. Give greater emphasis to the protection and interpretation of cultural heritage assets within the parks program.
4. Provide greater attention and support to the educational role of the parks program.
5. Undertake a comprehensive review and updating of the *Provincial Parks Act*, the *Trails Act*, and the *Beaches Act*, to ensure that they fully reflect the priorities described in Section 2.1 and meet evolving management needs and public expectations. In particular, revisions should incorporate a focus on protection of natural and cultural heritage, and the importance of ecosystem-based management approaches.
6. Conduct a thorough review and updating of the 1988 document, *Parks: A new policy for Nova Scotia*, to ensure that policies reflect priorities among park system objectives.
7. Conduct a thorough review and updating of all provincial park policies and guidelines to ensure that park lands are managed consistently, efficiently, and effectively across the province. Policies dealing with, among others, natural and cultural heritage, planning and maintenance procedures, visitor services, partnerships, and commercial services should be created and/or updated as necessary.
8. The parks and protected areas system in Nova Scotia should be conceived as being comprised of the full range of land- and water-based elements of the system, including provincial parks, park reserves, trails, protected beaches, wilderness areas, nature reserves, heritage rivers, and Crown land in terms of recreation opportunities.

9. A coherent, fully integrated and functional parks and protected areas program should be established within the provincial government. The purposes and objectives of the program should be set out clearly, and a report to government on the status of the program should be submitted annually.
- 10.a The Department of Natural Resources should undergo a fundamental reworking, restructuring, and renaming to emphasize a reorientation of the department toward land stewardship, biodiversity conservation, protection of provincially significant natural and cultural heritage, and an integrated approach to ecosystem-based management, particularly for parks and protected areas, and on Crown lands.
- b. If fundamental change such as that described in Section 3.2 is carried out, then the parks and protected areas program should be brought together within the renewed department, reporting to the deputy minister.
- c. If the Department of Natural Resources is not fundamentally changed, responsibility for the provincial parks program should be transferred to the Department of Environment, thereby unifying the parks and protected areas program in that department. In this case, consideration should be given to integrating within that department responsibilities for managing the parks and protected areas program, biodiversity conservation and wildlife, and Crown land planning and management.
11. If the parks and protected areas program remains split across departments, then co-ordination of closely related system elements and programs within and between departments is crucial, through the establishment of a clearly mandated and accountable interdepartmental program management committee, reporting to the respective deputy ministers.
12. Regardless of the organizational arrangement adopted, the respective roles and responsibilities for planning and operations in the parks and protected areas program should be clarified and streamlined.
13. Undertake a comprehensive review of funding requirements for the provincial park program with the aim of establishing core funding targets for: park management and development, capital maintenance of existing park infrastructure, existing park upgrading, park redevelopment, and new park development.
14. As part of a provincial park system review (see Section 5), take a balanced approach that recognizes the importance of upgrading existing parks and developing new parks, while also closing those that no longer meet park program objectives. Consider removing the latter from the system either through deregulation or transfer to local government, to which they may be of some value. The review should also propose removing or closing facilities and services offered within parks that no longer meet public needs or park program objectives.
15. Cost saving and cost recovery objectives should not take precedence over social, economic, environmental, and community development objectives.
16. Develop new funding sources and arrangements, new sources of revenue, and new partnerships to support the provincial park system and to deliver programs, while maintaining consistency with program objectives and priorities.
17. Put a capital funding arrangement in place that is consistent and predictable from year to year.
18. Provide staffing levels sufficient to deliver the provincial park program efficiently and effectively.
19. Ensure that up-to-date technology is used in the workplace.
20. Provide staff with professional and technical training to improve on-the-job effectiveness.
21. Follow through on the 2005 provincial park system review, updating it where necessary and keeping in mind recommendations made in this report, as well as other circumstances that have changed since 2005. This review process should include provision for public consultation, and be co-ordinated with the parallel (and overlapping) systems planning process for protected areas that was initiated with the November 2009 acceptance by the Nova Scotia Government of the recommendations of the Colin Stewart Forest Forum.
22. Ensure all major provincial parks have comprehensive management plans. More modest management statements should be prepared for smaller parks with limited protection values. Management plans and statements should be reviewed and revised regularly.

23. Undertake capital development in the provincial park system only on sites where a management plan or statement is in place.
24. Park management plans and statements should take an ecosystem-based approach that incorporates considerations of ecological integrity, biodiversity conservation, and impacts of park use.
25. Upgrade and enhance park facilities and services to respond to public expectations while ensuring consistency with values and priorities of the provincial park system.
26. The outdoor education contribution of provincial parks and trails should be enhanced. Increase the amount of interpretive programming and provide interpretive displays and signage at important points of interest.
27. As part of the park management planning process, seek appropriate measures to lower maintenance costs.
28. In co-operation with the federal government, if necessary, give consideration to expanding Nova Scotia's provincial park system to include a marine element.
29. Put procedures in place to better measure provincial park use, including numbers of day users. Incorporate this information in the development of park system and management plans.
30. Conduct public surveys at regular intervals to measure attitudes toward parks and visitor expectations.
31. Explore options to facilitate use of provincial parks in the off seasons. For example, feasibility of a self-registration system could be examined to extend campground use.
32. Explore options to expand use of parks by increasing their accessibility to Nova Scotians and visitors, both in terms of those with disabilities, and in terms of those using public transit and active transportation.
33. Make better use of modern electronic media and high-quality promotional materials to reach present and potential park users. In carrying out these activities, partnering at a provincial level should be arranged with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage and the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia.
34. Place greater emphasis on promoting individual parks by identifying, in conjunction with the local community, the key features of each park to highlight in promotional materials.
35. More resources should be devoted to inventorying and researching natural and cultural heritage values contained in the park system. In particular, an inventory should be carried out for each park, with priority attention to those parks with a provincially significant protection role. Information gathered from these activities should provide the foundation for park management plans.
36. Priority attention should be given to monitoring species and natural processes deemed to be at risk. Changes to management practices should be based on the results of the monitoring.
37. The Department of Natural Resources should encourage and foster inventorying, monitoring, and research activities in provincial parks carried out by qualified non-governmental organizations, universities, and other groups and organizations in consultation with department staff. Such work should contribute to the needs of the park system and the results must be made available to the department.
38. Engage local communities, interest groups, and interested individuals in the park inventorying and information-gathering process. Consider developing an Internet-based information collection capability, and synergistic linkages with other educational, social, and cultural facilities near each park.
39. Following review of the *Trails Act*, as recommended in Section 2.2, proceed with legal designation of rails-to-trails corridors and other provincially significant trails on Crown land in Nova Scotia.
40. Establish, in consultation with the province's trails community, a provincial plan for trails in Nova Scotia to provide direction and guidance with respect to the province's outstanding trail resources and opportunities. This trail network should take into account the recommendations in the 2005 *Off-Highway Vehicles in Nova Scotia Provincial Direction and Action Plan*.

41. Support community-based partnerships for developing and maintaining trails, ensuring that broad-based democratic processes are followed, placing a priority on partnerships involving municipalities, and taking into account provincial priorities.
42. Review the shared-use policy, particularly with reference to abandoned railway corridors. Where populations and use levels warrant, give priority to active transportation and designate those segments for non-motorized use. Shared use should continue in more remote areas where OHV groups have taken on responsibility for trail development and maintenance, and comprise the predominant user group. Discussions regarding trail use should be subject to municipal and community review using democratic processes.
43. Support efforts to establish long-distance hiking trails, where provincial parks, abandoned rail corridors, wilderness areas, or Crown land can provide linking opportunities.
44. Provincial land planning should involve careful assessment of areas around provincial protected beaches and associated coastlines to meet changing conditions, notably those resulting from climate change. This long-term planning will require expansion of designated areas around some beaches and associated coastal areas, to ensure that the natural beach systems are protected. Such actions must take a broad ecological perspective, and must occur within the context of major processes of change. In reviewing the *Beaches Act* (recommended in Section 2.2) the perspectives and approaches described here should be incorporated.
45. Public and stakeholder consultation should be reaffirmed as an integral and essential component of processes for the planning, management, and operation of parks, trails, and protected areas. Consultation processes should be designed to engage the primary stakeholders, local communities and the general public on an ongoing basis.
46. As recommended in *Parks: A new policy for Nova Scotia* (1988) but not implemented to date, a Nova Scotia Parks and Trails Advisory Board should be appointed, reporting to the minister, to provide an ongoing mechanism for Nova Scotians to provide advice and guidance regarding the provincial parks and trails.
47. Local park advisory boards should be established where interest warrants. Even for parks run entirely by the province (as opposed to within partnerships), a local park advisory board would have the potential to realize a range of benefits. The province should put in place a clear set of options and guidelines for such advisory boards, which could range in terms of level of activity and responsibility, to match local needs and capabilities.
48. Specific sector-oriented consultation mechanisms should be initiated and maintained as needed. An illustration of this would be a forum for regular ongoing consultation among all parties in the camping sector.
49. Community partnerships should be encouraged. However, clearer guidelines as to what constitutes a sustainable and equitable partnership for a provincial park or trail are needed. Partnerships should be based on long-term management agreements that clearly lay out roles and responsibilities, and which commit provincial resources to a reasonable extent. The Department of Natural Resources should establish a budget allocation specifically for community partnerships, with a priority on using the allocation to leverage funding from other revenue sources.
50. As management plans are developed and implemented for each suitable provincial park, there should be strong collaboration with local communities and their residents, to enhance community benefits and to ensure consideration of connections to those communities' historical/cultural and ecological values, landscape aspects, best "niche" for the park, use issues, and necessary facilities.
51. Nova Scotia's parks system needs to be seen within a community-centred place-based context that integrates considerations both within and beyond the parks themselves. As part of this approach to connecting provincial parks and other local assets, cross-publicity and cross-marketing of the various opportunities in a local area should be encouraged. This could include, for example, providing suitable information within parks about a local museum or sports facility, and, conversely, advertising a provincial park in those same sites. Furthermore, where possible, the natural and cultural heritage in a park should be linked to relevant local museums or other attractions; this is beneficial both for educational linkages and for tourism purposes.

52. Particular attention should be paid to realizing the considerable potential that exists for greater involvement of municipalities in partnerships relating to both provincial parks and trails. Such partnerships can improve linkages with local historic and cultural assets, local recreational and educational facilities, and local businesses, as well as increase local participation in development and management of parks and trails. This also has the benefit of enhancing the stability of the partnership arrangement.
53. In some cases, there may be potential for partnerships to be developed with the private sector to offer some services and facilities considered desirable, given park objectives, and which cannot be offered by the parks program.
54. An interdepartmental co-ordinating committee should be established to formally link the department or departments with responsibility for the parks and protected areas program (see Section 3) to the other departments with overlapping and complementary responsibilities, including Health Promotion and Protection; Tourism, Culture and Heritage; Economic and Rural Development; and Education.
55. The departments of Natural Resources and Education should establish regular ongoing connections to take full advantage of the potential to improve the provision of outdoor education to youth. A more comprehensive and more year-round initiative is desirable, involving linkages from policy and planning levels through to those connecting individual schools and local provincial parks.
56. Establish linkages between government departments and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of information sharing and to promote a shared approach to meeting park program objectives where areas of interest overlap.
57. A comprehensive land use planning process should be established for Crown lands, which recognizes the full range and legitimacy of land and resource objectives that apply, includes provision for effective public and stakeholder input, and leads to a clear articulation of the intended role(s) of respective Crown land blocks and parcels. This process should adopt an ecosystem-based approach and give primary consideration to land stewardship and biodiversity conservation.
58. A land use planning function should be established within the Department of Natural Resources, which is separate and apart from, but closely linked with, the various resource and program sectors with interests in Crown land (i.e., minerals, forestry, biodiversity, outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism, parks and protected areas).
59. Provincial statements of interest should be expanded to give direction to the identification and protection of lands and resources of provincial significance as potential parks and protected areas, recreation and scenic resources, and lands of importance for biodiversity conservation and provision of ecosystem services.
60. A provincial land use plan or framework should be developed for Nova Scotia, which would identify lands and resources of provincial significance and establish open and transparent consultation and decision-making processes to achieve a balanced approach to protection, use, and development.
61. There should be close collaboration and partnering between the provincial government (including the parks and protected areas program) and the land trust community to support provincial goals, both for the parks and protected areas system itself and to help achieve targets for land conservation and protection (notably EGSPA's target). This collaboration should include the building of capacity among land trusts, and suitable data sharing.
62. Establish an interdisciplinary knowledge advisory panel to the Department of Natural Resources to provide a forum for assistance in making informed management decisions in areas that affect the department. This should incorporate a broad range of sources including traditional knowledge, and social and scientific knowledge.



## 9.0 GLOSSARY

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### Active transportation

Any form of self-propelled (non-motorized) transportation that relies on the use of human energy such as walking, cycling, inline skating, and jogging. These modes can utilize on-road and off-road facilities (sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use trails) and may also be combined with public (land and water) transit, especially for trips to and from work, shopping and entertainment areas, school and other community facilities like recreation centres. (from: Active Transportation Plan. Prepared for Halifax Regional Municipality by SGE Acres Limited in association with Marshall, Macklin Monaghan and Go For Green. August, 2006).

### Colin Stewart Forest Forum

A protected areas planning process initiated by environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) and the four largest forestry companies operating in Nova Scotia. It formed to resolve conflict among ENGOs and the forestry industry over the future of Nova Scotia's remaining wilderness, and to provide the provincial government with a roadmap towards completing Nova Scotia's protected areas network.

### Cultural heritage assets

In the broader context of parks and protected areas, the term "cultural heritage assets" is often applied to tangible elements of historical, archaeological, ethnographic and palaeontological importance. These elements may include archaeological and palaeontological sites and deposits as well as human-influenced landscapes. In addition, intangible cultural assets may include traditions, customs and skills of historical, artistic, or ethnographic value.

### *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA)*

Passed by the Nova Scotia Legislature in April, 2007, EGSPA mandates that the long-term environmental and economic objective of the province is to "fully integrate environmental sustainability and economic prosperity." As a way of meeting this objective, EGSPA legislates the province's commitment to its economic development strategy and defines two primary goals that test the act's guiding principle. The first goal is that Nova Scotia will have "one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments in the world by 2020" and the second is that the province's economic performance will be "equal to or above the Canadian average by 2020." The act also

includes a number of specific targets, including the legal protection of 12 per cent of the total land mass of the province by 2015.

### Heritage rivers

Rivers designated and managed as part of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. Established in 1984 by federal, provincial, and territorial governments, the Heritage Rivers System helps conserve and protect the best examples of Canada's river heritage by giving these rivers national recognition, and encouraging public enjoyment and appreciation, including recreation. Nova Scotia's Shelburne and Margaree – Lake Ainslie River Systems were designated as Canadian Heritage Rivers in 1997 and 1998, respectively. Nova Scotia Department of Environment is responsible for guiding the management of these heritage rivers.

### Integrated Resource Management (IRM) process

A planning and decision-making process used by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources to co-ordinate resource use with the goal that the long-term sustainable benefits are optimized and conflicts among users are minimized. IRM brings together resource groups rather than each working in isolation to balance the economic, environmental, and social requirements of society. IRM includes planning for minerals, forests, recreation, wilderness, energy, wildlife, and parks.

### Natural areas

An area containing relatively undisturbed native terrestrial or wetland communities and where natural ecological processes and functions continue unimpaired.

### Nature reserves

Areas designated under *Nova Scotia's Special Places Protection Act* to preserve and protect, in perpetuity, representative and special natural ecosystems, plant and animal species, features, and natural processes. Scientific research and education are the primary uses of nature reserves and recreation is generally restricted. Nova Scotia Department of Environment is responsible for managing nature reserves.

### Nova Scotia's Heritage Strategy

In February, 2008, the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage released the first provincial heritage strategy. Entitled "A Treasured Past, A Precious Future," the strategy's stated objectives are to ensure Nova Scotia's rich heritage is preserved, protected and promoted for future generations. The strategy defines "heritage" as encompassing cultural heritage, such as artifacts, buildings,

folklore and languages, and natural heritage, including land and water.

### **Park management plans**

Park management plans define a vision and management philosophy that guide decisions affecting the long-term development and operation of provincial parks. These plans also typically identify the actions necessary to support that vision and philosophy. Authority to prepare park management plans is found in the *Provincial Parks Act*.

### **Parks program**

Encompasses the current management responsibilities of the Parks and Recreation division within the Department of Natural Resources, which includes provincial parks, park reserves, protected beaches, and trails along with associated responsibilities for the protection and conservation of park values, provision of complementary nature-based outdoor recreation and education experiences, and the support of provincial tourism objectives.

### **Protected beaches**

Beach properties designated under the *Beaches Act*. The purpose of the act is to protect beaches and associated dune systems, regulate and enforce the full range of land-use activities on beaches, and control recreational and other uses of beaches. The Department of Natural Resources administers the *Beaches Act*.

### **Provincial beach parks**

Provincial parks that offer public access, and associated facilities and services, to inland or coastal water bodies for the purpose of providing opportunities for quality water-based recreational activities. Provincial beach parks may also play an important role in protecting coastal ecosystems and providing opportunities for outdoor education.

### **Provincial campgrounds**

Provincial parks that provide opportunities for overnight stays. In addition to providing camping opportunities, provincial campgrounds may also include beach access and trails.

### **Provincial park**

While the *Parks Act* defines “provincial park” as land designated as such by the province under authority of the *Parks Act*, the term is widely used to describe those properties for which administrative responsibility has been assigned to the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation division, and which are

managed consistent with the purpose of the *Parks Act*, whether they are formally designated by legislation or not.

### **Provincial parks system**

The complete assemblage of properties managed through the provincial parks program, including provincial parks, park reserves, trails and protected beaches.

### **Provincial statements of interest**

Nova Scotia’s *Municipal Government Act* enables the province to adopt statements of provincial interest that are “necessary to protect the provincial interest in the use and development of land.” As of 2010 there were five statements in effect. They deal with drinking water, flood risk areas, agricultural land, infrastructure and housing. The act requires that provincial activities must be “reasonably consistent with a statement of provincial interest.” It also requires that municipal planning documents must be “reasonably consistent with the statements.”

### **Special-use status**

The Department of Natural Resources’ Integrated Resource Management planning process has assigned all Crown lands to one of three management classifications. Category 3 includes “lands specifically allocated to special uses where other resource activities may be limited, modified, or denied.” This “special-use status” includes properties such as provincial parks. Category 1 lands are available for the full range of resource uses and a low level of conflict among competing land use is anticipated. Category 2 encompasses lands with conflicting values for land and resource use.

### **Species at risk**

Nova Scotia’s *Endangered Species Act* defines “species at risk” as a species (plant, animal, or other organism) that is determined to be extinct, extirpated, vulnerable, threatened or endangered and that is formally listed under provisions of that act by the Minister of Natural Resources.

### **Wilderness areas**

Wilderness Areas are provincially significant protected areas designated under Nova Scotia’s *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*. Wilderness Areas are managed by the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and protect representative (typical) examples of Nova Scotia’s natural landscapes, native biological diversity, and outstanding natural features. They are used for scientific research, education, and a variety of recreation and nature-tourism related activities such as hiking, canoeing, sea-kayaking, sportfishing, and hunting.

## 10.0 APPENDIX

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### Appendix: Legislative References

Park lands in Nova Scotia as defined in this report are governed by several pieces of legislation:

1. **The Provincial Parks Act and Regulations** are administered by the Department of Natural Resources and establishes the mandate and departmental authority for the provincial parks program. It provides authority to designate or deregulate park land, develop a park classification and zoning system, establish park committees and a Provincial Park Trust Fund, regulate activities within provincial parks, and regulate the management and preservation of areas adjacent to provincial parks.
2. **The Trails Act and Regulations** provide for the establishment and regulation of trail opportunities and activities on Crown lands and over watercourses for recreational use and enjoyment. It also establishes a Recreational Waterways Program. No trails are designated under the regulations.
3. **The Beaches Act and Regulations** protect beaches and their associated dune systems as significant and sensitive ecological and recreational resources. It protects all lands below mean high-water mark and those areas above mean high-water mark that have been surveyed and designated under the act.
4. **The Wilderness Protection Act** governs the province's Protected Areas Program and is administered by Nova Scotia Department of Environment. Its goal is to provide ecological representation on a landscape basis.
5. **The Special Places Protection Act**, which protects nature reserves, is also administered by the Department of Environment.
6. **The Crown Lands Act and Regulations** provide for the most effective utilization of Crown lands by integrating wildlife and outdoor recreation considerations in the forest management planning process and by effectively administering and managing all Crown lands.

### 7. The Environmental Goals and Sustainable

**Prosperity Act** provides government-wide direction to meet the goal of sustainable economic development. In part, it commits the province to legally protect 12 per cent of its land mass, where those lands are managed primarily for the protection of biodiversity and natural processes.

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