



Nova Scotia Old Growth Forest Policy Lands

Conserving Old-Growth Forests Across Nova Scotia

Photo Credit: Peter Bush

PROTECTED AREA (PA)

Old-growth forests are vital ecosystems that provide many benefits, including supporting biodiversity, storing carbon, regulating water flow, and conserving soil. Beyond their ecological significance, these forests hold profound social and cultural value, serving as spaces for Indigenous cultural practices and traditions.

In Nova Scotia, these ancient forests lie within the Wabanaki (Acadian) Forest Region, a unique transition zone between the hardwood forests of the south and the boreal forests of the north. This region is home to over 30 native tree species and diverse wildlife habitats. However, with over 300 years of logging and agricultural activity, much of Nova Scotia's current forests are young and lack the distinct features of old-growth ecosystems. Preserving old-growth forests is crucial to maintaining the biodiversity and ecological functions they sustain.

Recognizing the importance of these forests, Nova Scotia introduced a progressive Old-Growth Forest Policy. This policy ensures the conservation of all old-growth forests on Crown land, whether currently identified or discovered in the future. The definition of old-growth has shifted from a tree-species-based approach to one that focuses on entire forest ecosystems, with unique age thresholds tailored to each ecosystem type.

Field assessments are used to identify potential old-growth forest areas when development proposals require government approval. Forest areas qualify as old-growth if they are late-successional stands where at least 20% of the basal area consists of trees aged 100 to 140 years or older, depending on the vegetation type, and show no recent signs of human disturbance.

Funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has played a crucial role in supporting the province's efforts to recognize many areas under the Old-Growth Forest Policy, granting them a level of protection. Although Old-Growth forests offer multiple benefits to the environment, society, and wildlife, the primary objective of the old growth forest policy is to preserve the biodiversity and function of these important ecosystems- leading them to be recognized as protected areas, rather than OECMs. This funding has also enabled extensive field assessments to identify and conserve more of these irreplaceable ecosystems across Nova Scotia. Since the program's inception in 2023, ECCC has contributed to the discovery and protection of over 800 hectares of new old-growth forests, ensuring their preservation for future generations.

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THE NOVA SCOTIA OLD GROWTH FOREST POLICY LANDS ARE PROTECTED AREAS?



Does the property have a defined geographical space?

Yes! The boundaries of Nova Scotia's Old Growth Forest Policy lands are well identified and can be accurately placed on a map.



Is there an effective way of ensuring that biodiversity will continue to be conserved into the future?

Yes! Crown land is managed by the government of Nova Scotia. Once an area has been confirmed to be old growth, it is protected into the future under the Old Growth Forest Policy for Nova Scotia, and incompatible activities are prohibited.



Is there an expectation that the biodiversity on the site will be conserved for the long term?

Yes! The purpose of Nova Scotia's Old Growth Forest Policy is to conserve the diverse values that old growth forest areas provide, including biodiversity. All Crown land identified under the policy will remain protected unless rare and exceptional circumstances arise.



Is biodiversity conservation the primary objective of the area?

Yes! The purpose of Nova Scotia's Old Growth Forest Policy is to conserve the ecological and social values of these rare forests.

Quick tip

If the answer to this question was "no!" the area would likely be assessed as an OECM (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure) instead of a Protected Area. Both types of areas are important, and both achieve biodiversity conservation.



Is biodiversity on the site conserved?

Yes! You can check out some of the work on old-growth forests in Nova Scotia here: [Old-Growth Forests of Nova Scotia \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).