

## **Directors' Report (2019–20) – Nature Nova Scotia Annual General Meeting – May 31, 2020**

Since our last report on May 26, 2019, the board of Nature Nova Scotia (NNS) has been dealing with new as well as ongoing issues.

### **Memberships**

Memberships are increasing in many clubs, others remain steady, and new volunteers are coming forward. A general public interest in nature and several pressing provincial environmental issues have NNS and many of our participating member organizations attracting new people interested in learning about and dealing with environmental challenges.

Nature Nova Scotia currently has nine active organizational members and about 100 federate and individual members. This year the Friends of Nature, based in Chester, and the Tusket River Environmental Protection Association (TREPA), based in Tusket, have joined us. Welcome!

### **Website**

Nature Nova Scotia's website continues to undergo steady improvements – thanks to Larry Bogan and with input from other board members – including more information and links. The “Big Tree Project” is in a new site. Larry is looking for a successor to take over his position as webmaster. Board meeting minutes are posted once they have been approved. A blog site is open for member contributions. Larry has also established a Facebook page, which has been adopted by some NNS e-mail list members as a site for posting photos.

### **Nature Canada**

The Canadian Nature Network is active through Slack, a virtual connection. Your president represents our interests and forwards relevant information from Graham Saul and other staff of Nature Canada to NNS board members. We continue to participate with Nature Canada on a federal-provincial initiative to increase protected areas in Canada to 17 percent in 2020, 25 percent by 2025. Last year's federal budget contained funds directed to protect more land in Nova Scotia. Your president attended Nature Day in Ottawa on February 4, 2020, lobbying members of Parliament and Senators to acknowledge the day, the need for more protected areas, and the importance of nature to Canadians.

### **Forests: Public Land as Habitats**

Nature Nova Scotia is a member of the Healthy Forest Coalition (HFC), which was formed in 2016. Physical meetings transmogrified into virtual Zoom meetings when Covid 19 social isolating began. Forest industry plundering of Crown (public) lands continues unabated, even after Northern Pulp, a major pulp player and forest consumer, was shut down on January 31, 2020, by the government's Boat Harbour Act. Nature Nova Scotia wrote to Premier McNeil supporting this action.

Long-term management responsibilities for 1.4 million acres of public forest land in central and western Nova Scotia remain in the hands of 13 forest companies, represented by an entity called Westfor. Heavy clearcut harvests are scheduled on public lands, with no restraints during the breeding bird season.

### **Forests: Lahey Report: A Lack of Action on the Ground**

Nature Nova Scotia wrote to Premier Stephen McNeil and Lands and Forestry Minister Iain Rankin urging the government to enact the recommendations of the Lahey Independent Review of Forest Practices. Released in August 2018, it addressed many forest issues, calling for ecologically based forestry and immediate change. Although the government accepted the recommendations, change simply has not happened on Crown harvest sites.

Lahey suggested a triad approach, wherein a portion of public land was to be used for high-production commercial forestry, with monocultures and herbicides; another portion was to be protected areas, and a majority of the land, called the matrix, to be managed using ecological forestry principles.

Stakeholder invitations by government to meetings about formulating implementation guidelines have favored forest industry interests. Nature Nova Scotia and groups like the NS Federation of Anglers and Hunters received no invitation. The targeted stakeholders were asked to comment on the high-production paper proposed by government as well as the ecological matrix paper. These discussion papers focus on forest harvesting methods, without any adequate, science-based, or sensible wildlife considerations.

To summarize, in March your president wrote and submitted unsolicited wildlife/nature comments regarding the government's Draft Silviculture Guide for Ecological Matrix and commentary on their High Production Forestry paper. With the board's approval, these were accepted as NNS documents.

Your president and vice president Donna Crossland spent considerable amounts of field time over the past year visiting and documenting harvests on Crown harvest sites. We provided a dismal written assessment to Shelburne Municipal Council at their request. News 95.7 radio with Rick Howe and CBC Information Morning radio have been very active and helpful on this topic. Covid 19 stifled more field investigations this spring.

### **Forests: Biomass Plundering of Forests**

The board generated a biomass policy in 2016 as a response to Nova Scotia Power's announcement that it was increasing biomass content in its energy "renewables" – from 2.8 percent to 7 percent over four years (2016–2020). The biomass plant at Point Tupper continues to consume forests being clearcut and burned to produce electricity at an efficiency rate of less than 21.5 percent. Another biomass electrical plant at Brooklyn is seasonally operated. Burning biomass is more polluting than burning coal. The government persists in labeling it "green" energy.

Hardwoods from soil-robbing clearcuts on public land continue to be chipped and shipped overseas to Europe and as far away as China. This amounts to a low-end use of a valuable commodity that holds much habitat value for nature.

### **Legal: Species at Risk**

The fall of 2018 saw the Blomidon Naturalists Society, the Halifax Field Naturalists and Nature Nova Scotia hire lawyer Jamie Simpson to take the Nova Scotia Minister of Lands and Forestry and the Attorney General of Nova Scotia to court for their failure to comply with the province's own laws regarding species at risk. With half of wild species across Canada in decline, concerned conservationists felt forced to take serious action. After court appearances on September 23 and October 1, 2019, with Ecojustice lawyers James Gunvaldsen Klassen and Sarah McDonald attending and assisting as intervenors, this matter is still in the hands of Judge Christa Brothers. A decision is overdue.

### **Legal: Owls Head Park**

In January 2020, Jamie Simpson brought another matter to NNS attention, the secret delisting of the 660 acre Owls Head Park on the Eastern Shore by the provincial government. This public coastal property was offered to an American developer wanting to build houses and golf courses. The reaction time period was tight, so your president and the Eastern Shore Forest Watch Association quickly agreed to challenge this action in court. Nature Nova Scotia and the Blomidon Naturalists Society subsequently supported this action.

### **Strait of Canso Overhead Transmission Lines Intercepting Traditional Migratory Bird Flyway**

Joshua Mailhot, Canadian Wildlife Service, responded to a letter your president wrote last year describing a high mortality situation in spring and fall with migratory birds as they funneled through the Strait of Canso at night and

in fog and were intercepted by four sets of transmission lines positioned at varying heights. The latest set of lines was erected for Muskrat Falls power. NS Power and Emera laid an undersea cable from NL to NS, but built lines over, not under, the strait. Mailhot's response indicated that CWS was aware of the matter, but offered no action under the Migratory Bird Act or otherwise.

### **Nova Scotia Working Woodlands Trust**

The board wrote a letter of support for the Medway Community Forest Coop's endeavour to create a Nova Scotia Working Woodlands Trust. This trust would enable much-needed conservation efforts on private lands that may not be pristine or of interest to the NS Nature Trust, but that have considerable habitat value for nature. Nova Scotia sorely needs a cultural shift to a land ethic.

### **Funding**

Although Nature Nova Scotia remains a low-budget organization with no employees, it should be pointed out that the species at risk legal action was publically fund-raised to the tune of more than \$20,000. Fund raising by the Eastern Shore Forest Watch Association for the Owls Head legal action was terminated in just six days, after more than \$15,000 was raised to pay those legal fees. Nature Nova Scotia has many supporters outside its membership.

On the other hand, attempts to procure funding to hire a NNS employee with some infrastructure support on a part-time basis have been underway over the past year. This has proven to be a challenge. No government taxpayer money has been solicited, for obvious reasons. Nature Canada is offering us some hope.

### **Young Naturalists Club**

Nature Nova Scotia has maintained a close working relationship with the Young Naturalists Club (YNC), and has provided some financial support for YNC programs, such as the student art contest. Becky Parker assumed the role of YNC coordinator, and the board is grateful that she is spending a significant portion of her time assisting NNS endeavours.

### **NNS Board**

The board normally meets face-to-face three times a year in addition to the AGM. The next meeting will be held in September 2020. Members of NNS are welcome to attend, but it will likely be a virtual meeting. Board meetings provide an opportunity for club representatives to give updates on the activities of their respective clubs. We will continue to use the Internet to virtually link board members as long as Covid-19 issues dominate.

After many years of acting on our behalf, Jim Wolford stepped down as board member at large and the NNS representative on the Nova Scotia Wildlife Habitat Conservation Fund. Joanne Cook has taken over that role. Thank you, Jim and Joanne!

Between face-to-face or virtual meetings, the board continues to function online on an active e-mail forum. We generally keep each other up to date on environmental happenings in Nova Scotia. We also maintain an awareness of environmental issues across Canada.

Board members who attend or monitor various meetings – either through their own clubs, or jobs, or directly for Nature Nova Scotia – report on activities. This 2020 AGM on May 31 is our first virtual one. Thanks to all the NNS directors for their enthusiasm and participation. And to Doug Linzey for editorial help with this report.

Reporting on behalf of the board,

Bob Bancroft, president, Nature Nova Scotia