



2026-2031

STRATEGIC PLAN



AKA the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists
www.naturens.ca

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A photograph of a moose with large, velvet-covered antlers crossing a paved road. The moose is in profile, facing left, and is captured in mid-stride. The background shows a line of trees with bare branches, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The text 'EXECUTIVE SUMMARY' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters on the left side of the image.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Nature Nova Scotia (Nature NS) Board participated in a strategic retreat where it charted a change of course from our traditional natural history programming and network support role to one with greater emphasis on nature advocacy and activism. Recognizing that nature in Nova Scotia and elsewhere is in decline due to human activities, that this responsibility is often ignored by our governments, and that misinformation and political polarization are on the rise in our area, the Board decided that Nature NS should continue to offer the traditional education, research, and networking activities that have always appealed to our naturalist-dominated supporter-base, to foster learning opportunities in the next generation, and to encourage collaboration between groups, but that we should also become more proactive in who we are engaging and how, to create a stronger voice for nature.

At that time, the nature network was engaged in what would eventually become successful legal action regarding the province's failure to enforce its own Endangered Species Act. Recognizing the need and our own potential for creating this stronger voice for nature, the board discussed increased advocacy and activism as an approach for both increasing our impact and bringing new people into the nature network.

Over the next 5 years, we initiated a new mainland moose research project while actively advocating for core habitat protections, we piloted our first in-school education program, Nature School, introducing P-6 students to the proposed protected areas the province didn't seem to want the public talking about., and we co-founded Nova Scotia's first certified Bird Friendly City coalition, in Halifax, to push for improved nature stewardship and policy at the municipal level, all while experimenting with engagement organizing principles that allowed us to grow both our following and supporterbase.

In 2025, while assessing the previous years' successes and lessons, the board and a subset of our membership discussed the need for lasting cultural change and a paradigm shift in how Nova Scotians view and engage with nature. As acknowledged in our previous Strategic Plan, our knowledge holders, donors, and volunteers are aging and most of these supporters are not being replaced. The worsening cost of living crisis has created a panic amongst our representatives and the general public, resulting in the loss of environmental protections we once had and dampened support for future conservation efforts. Nature NS and other environmental organizations attempting to manage the linked biodiversity and climate crises are obligated to spend resources simply trying to overcome political indifference, antagonism, and industry misinformation while also managing the needs of the on-the-ground programs that drive our missions forward. Like many nature charities, we often operate at or beyond capacity, resulting in rushed responses to disasters like the Houston government's surprise re-opening of previously banned natural resource industries, the province's removal of protections for wetlands of special significance and failure to spend the multi-million dollar Canada-Nova Scotia Nature Agreement funding, or the Carney government's allowance of previously banned and dangerous agricultural pesticides.

We know that healthy natural environments, a sustainable economy, and human wellbeing are inextricably linked. Our supporters know it too. But what about the other 1,080,000 Nova Scotians?



THEORY OF CHANGE

To truly succeed in our aims and ensure that more of our resources become available to support nature rather than to fight vested interests in nature's destruction, we must integrate culture change goals into all areas of our work. Consequently, there is a significant focus on achieving culture change in this Strategic Plan.

Our goal for 2026-2031, as in past years, is to engage more Nova Scotians in connecting with, learning about, and acting for nature. We can achieve this through:

- Identifying and mobilizing nature champions: Nova Scotians who will use their skills and audiences to expand our reach and amplify our messaging.
- Increasing capacity and efficiency: allowing executive staff to focus on engagement organizing by maintaining project-level staff and volunteers to coordinate work on-the-ground, by prioritizing partnership, and by supporting our member groups in their work.
- Moving supporters up the engagement ladder: prioritizing the recruitment, training, and empowerment of volunteers into leadership roles.
- Improving and developing new relationships with supporters through targeted communications, events, and other initiatives.
- Taking action on issues that Nova Scotians care about: centering our advocacy work on issues likely to result in more supporters.

Overarching Themes

Climate Change

Though Nature NS does not work in direct climate change education, research, activism, or mitigation efforts, achieving our mission requires consideration of any and all phenomenon affecting the health of the natural world and our interactions with it. Climate change must therefore sit as a planning and practical layer on top of all our projects and activities. As non-exhaustive examples, this could take the form of strategic species choices when conducting urban naturalization projects, advocating for provincial or federal support for nature-based climate solutions, or sharing the more direct work of others.

Social Justice, Diversity, & Inclusion

As with climate change, conservation action cannot be unlinked from current trends, events, and movements concerned with the preservation of democracy, equality, and human wellbeing. Nature NS must maintain and show its commitment to social justice in ways that are meaningful to the communities we hope to engage. This could include formal adoption of social justice related ethics in policy, mission-connected participation in movements like Pride, calls for economic justice like the living wage, and ensuring accessibility in all activities.

Science-Based Decision Making

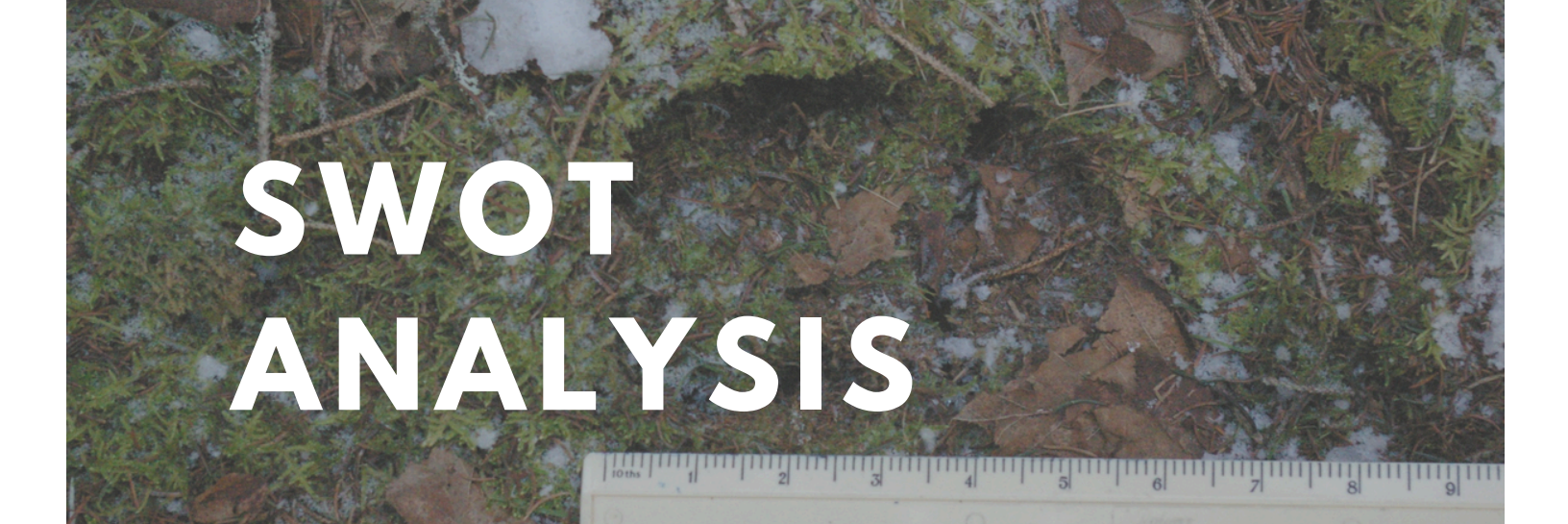
Natural history is not necessarily synonymous with experimental science and science is not the only lens through which naturalists see the world, but decision making around nature topics and that the natural history community cares about should be informed by data and consensus where possible. Nature NS advocates for evidence-based decision making and transparency from our governments and must follow these best practices in our own work. This could take the form of a practice or policy of regularly citing sources in our communications, establishing topical committees to guide planning and decision making, conducting risk and benefit analyses for our approaches to conservation action, and regular monitoring and assessment of our goals and methods.

FOCUS AREAS



We organize our work under several strategic Focus Areas which, together, present a holistic view of nature and nature conservation priorities in Nova Scotia. In 2026-2031, these include:

Focus Area	Associated Projects
Protected Areas	“Keep It Wild” Campaign: Pushing for 20% Protected Areas by 2030 “Update The Provincial Parks Act” Campaign: Preventing the Next Owl’s Head or West Mabou Beach Controversy
Species At Risk	“Monitoring Recovery Planning & Progress for Nova Scotian Species At Risk” “Save Nova Scotia’s Disappearing Mainland Moose Habitat” Advocating for Core Habitat Protections & Improved Land Management “Mainland Moose Volunteer Trail Camera Network”
Forests	“Monitoring the Transition to Ecological Forestry” “Save Our Hemlocks”: Triaging Private Lands for Woolly Adelgid
Water & Wetlands	“No Net Pens” Campaign: Transitioning Away From Marine Finfish Aquaculture to Sustainable Coastal Economies “Closing The Gaps In Wetland Protections”: Pushing For Legislative & Policy Improvements
Urban Nature	“Bird Friendly Halifax” “Ports of Halifax & Sydney Waterbirds Survey” “Operation Window Strike”: Mitigating Bird Deaths with Window Solutions
Cross-Focus Area Projects:	“Celebration Of Nature”: Our AGM & Annual Symposium for Naturalists “Nature School”: Curriculum-Aligned Nature Education For P-6 Students



SWOT ANALYSIS

Nova Scotians care about nature, as demonstrated by their support in our campaigns over the years. We have gained new donors, volunteers, individual members, and member organizations, each bringing new audiences for us to reach and people-power and skills for us to access through collaboration and partnership. Granting bodies and private citizens believe in Nature NS enough to offer us financial support, allowing us to maintain a small staff who provide us with expertise and direct people power to expand our capacity.

However, our veteran supporters, their organizations, and their supporters are aging and moving on from action and volunteerism in nature, forcing us to engage new audiences we are less familiar and experienced with. Funding sources are unstable and limit our ability to grow. Securing regular donations requires relationship building and strategic campaigning that we often lack the capacity to coordinate. Aging volunteers are not being replaced and new volunteers are not effectively moving up the engagement and leadership ladders. Political extremism is on the rise in Canada and elsewhere, risking the stability of grant streams, our ability to disseminate factual information, and putting our young, LGBTQIA2S, and women community members in danger. There are many nature issues requiring attention in Nova Scotia and we risk losing sense of our mission and over-extending staff and volunteer capacity by becoming involved in too many activities. We detail these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats below and present approaches for leveraging this assessment to our advantage.

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
1. Nova Scotians appear to recognise Nature NS as a leader in campaigns to protect nature. 2. Nature NS is perceived as a reliable and evidence-based source of information and is regularly called upon by our community and the media to comment on nature issues. 3. Relatively stable funding from recognized granting bodies and public donations reflect competency of our programs, staff, and volunteers. 4. So far being able to maintain a consistent small staff ensures continuity of expertise and relationship management. 5. Nature NS boasts a small but growing volunteer community who expand our capacity.	1. Leadership tasks fall to few staff or volunteers and too few volunteers are being effectively moved up the engagement ladder. 2. Limited leadership capacity results in less than ideal engagement with member groups, limiting our ability to benefit from each others approaches, audiences, and tools, and creates the risk of overlap in activities. 3. Current staff can be over-extended responding to misinformation from industry or political attacks, reducing our capacity for nature education, research, and community networking projects. 4. Existing volunteers are aging out of the community and are not usually replaced.



Opportunities:	Threats:
1. Nature already enjoys a place in the Canadian and Nova Scotian sense of identity and our values, meaning we can affect behaviour by making strategic connections and tailoring approaches to the audience. 2. Nova Scotians are beginning to see the effects of the linked climate and biodiversity crises first hand, giving credence to our science based messaging and validity to our calls to action 3. The Nature NS community already contains a large number of individuals and member organizations each offering valuable skills, perspectives, and connections 4. Many important industries in Nova Scotia are already aligned with nature conservation or could become more so with effective relationship building, like tourism, fishing, forestry, and agriculture.	1. Law and policy are only as good as the government in power and political extremism is on the rise in Nova Scotia. One bad government can undo decades of good nature conservation work and seriously damage current efforts. 2. Industry lobby groups are well funded, powerful, and seem emboldened to adopt disinformation tactics in recent years. 3. The rise of misinformation and political extremism in recent years has made conservation work dangerous. The voices, whether human or foreign-operated bot, encouraging environmental protection rollbacks are often the same voices undermining women's, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA2S rights in our area, putting these groups at heightened risk when they advocate on our behalf. 4. Charitable giving is declining across Canada as donors age out and other donors become unable to give, resulting in fewer large donors for charities to compete for. 5. The cost of living crisis makes false or overly simplistic "jobs-first" messaging easier to sell to Nova Scotians, putting industries like mining/petroleum and fishing or tourism in conflict and allowing developers and politicians to call these Nova Scotians environmentalists, and to claim that scientists and other environmentalists are elitist or out of touch. 6. The cost of living crisis affects Nature NS staff and volunteers as much as other Nova Scotians, putting pressure on the organization to compete with other employers and increasing the risk of sudden volunteer turnover.

We believe we can mitigate the risk of both our own weaknesses and external threats by:

1. Maintaining the integrity and reputation of our communication approaches - respectful, accessible, and science-based.
2. Leaning into engagement organizing by prioritizing the new Nature Champions supportship model and leveraging these Nova Scotians to expand our reach.
3. Diversifying revenue streams by expanding on previous years lessons in planned giving, sales and fee for service fundraising, and other new fundraising activities.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Achieving cultural change in a society is an ambitious goal that is likely difficult to assess by common success measures. While we aim to reach more Nova Scotians with our messaging and engage them in different kinds of action for nature, and we may track progress in these areas with quantitative and qualitative measures, really knowing whether we are affecting public perceptions, values, and behaviours around nature will likely require market research approaches that extend beyond the timeline of this Strategic Plan. For the time being, we will track our progress by comparing the following metrics:

Qualitative	Quantitative
Achievement of project level goals (ex. 20% of lands and waters are protected by 2030) Supporters report satisfaction with organization methods and impact Market research shows improved awareness, changing values, or increased nature-first behaviours among Nova Scotians	Trends in Followers (subscribers, social media followers, event attendees, etc) Trends in Supporters (donors, members, action takers, etc) Number of new Nature Champions recruited and mobilized into action Number of students, teachers, and schools engaged Area stewarded (ex. Sq ft of windows covered with bird-safe solutions, ha of hemlock forest treated for woolly adelgid, etc) Trends in communications reach and engagement Number of reports, papers, guides, or other documents created Trends in Member Organization metrics resulting from collaboration with Nature NS



APPENDIX: FEEDBACK FROM OUR COMMUNITY

We held in-person and virtual meetings with members, volunteers, and other supporters in early 2025 to gather feedback on our direction and projects over the last few years. We also surveyed member groups for their feedback on these topics, as representatives of the broader natural history community.

We asked these supporters if our 2022-2024 Focus Areas adequately represented the nature topics and issues they cared about, if our projects meaningfully contributed to fulfilling our mission, and what else we might do to deliver on this mission and our goals of continued growth and engagement. This is what we heard:

Questions arising from board discussions in Winter 2025:

- How can climate change be better integrated into and across Focus Areas?
- Is “Forests” a suitable focus area rather than “Forestry,” given the variety of projects we coordinate and issues we will comment on?
- Is Wildlife just a catch-all or a meaningful focus area?
- We’ve gained member groups and taken on projects recently that are marine or freshwater in nature. Do we need an aquatic Focus Area?
- Some of our current projects came about during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many of our member groups operated at reduced capacity. Now that many are back to their usual programming, is there overlap between activities like our NatureTalks or other projects and activities they are coordinating, where there could be partnership?
- What does being a member organization in the Nature Nova Scotia network really mean? Our member groups support our mission and

many have come to us recently out of interest in activism, not having the capacity or infrastructure to coordinate their own action, but this is not true for all. Are there potential benefits to membership that we aren't delivering?

Feedback from Member Meet-Ups held in Winter 2025:

- Supporters across two meet-up events agreed that all 2024 focus areas are important and interconnected, but they placed special emphasis on Protected Areas for having the most potential to positively impact all other areas. Meeting 20% provincial and 30% federal Protected Areas goals may reduce the urgency of our need to steward and advocate for ecological forestry practices or better species at risk management. It was suggested that better story-telling around protected areas, particularly through the use of maps, could help engage more people in action-taking.
- Members and other supporters commonly requested more in-person events that allow for socializing while learning and/or taking action, such as lunch-time talks, tailgate meetings, letter writing/phone cafes, and art-making activities.
- Our community values expertise and thoughtful compilation of nature information. Maintaining science-based decision making and respectful communication should be priorities in everything we do.
- Positivity can be as effective as alarmism at mobilizing people into action. Members wondered if there is a way to more strategically use positive vs negative messages to improve reach and impact.
- It can be difficult to know how to take action for nature or how to follow-up on actions taken. Some topics, particularly how protected areas are chosen or designated and how harvest plans come to be or how to comment on them, are difficult to understand or inaccessible to the average citizen. It was suggested that NatureNS could produce or make accessible How-To resources for nature activism, that could exist in print form as well as online, and that this information could be shared again through guided in-person events.
- Accessibility matters. Effort should be made at all events and initiatives to include diverse voices and participation. Meetings intended for adult naturalists should be welcoming of children and be family-friendly. Event details should include notes of what to expect around accessibility.

- Youth engagement is essential for the sustainability of both the organization and broader conservation movement. Nova Scotia's school curriculum lacks meaningful connection to nature-based climate change solutions, natural history, or biodiversity and many young Nova Scotians face barriers at home that prevent them from experiencing and learning about nature. NatureNS, as a network with foundations in the natural history society community, has a responsibility to foster educational opportunities for school-aged children, families, and young adults.
- Supporters value partnership and like knowing NatureNS is working with other organizations they support.

Feedback from Member Meet-Up held in Spring 2025*:

- Supporters at the Spring member meet up echoed the thoughts and feelings recorded at previous events regarding the importance of Protected Areas as a strategic Focus Area, for its synergistic benefits to other nature conservation efforts and for potential legal mechanisms (EGSPA, federal 30% commitment, etc) allowing for more likely or more attainable successes.
- Our supporters recognize that there is a disconnect between conservation related law, policy, and practice on the ground. Discussing the success of some groups in protecting old forests through citizen-coordinated tree, lichen, and species at risk surveys, it was agreed that this time- and knowledge-intensive model of citizen action is difficult to reproduce, opening the question of how NatureNS could support groups taking those actions and help share lessons with concerned citizens in other areas of the province.
- *An online member meetup was planned for April 2025 but cancelled for low registration, so the Spring period held only one member meetup.

Feedback from Members at the May 2025 Celebration of Nature:

- Species At Risk, Protected Areas, and Forests/Forestry were the highest ranked Focus Areas by importance and deserving the most attention.
- Many members supported the adoption of an aquatic and/or water and wetlands Focus Area.

- When asked to identify their most pressing concern for nature at the moment, many members listed clearcutting, lacking protections for species at risk, and the industry ban/moratorium reversals recently initiated by the Houston government.
- Many members suggested that strategic use of social and traditional media could allow NatureNS to reach a larger audience with calls to action and encouraged continued public fact-checking of government claims, public comment on poor policy decisions, and general education. NatureNS is perceived as a reliable and evidence-based source of information and we should maintain this standard while expanding our reach.
- Members requested regular and effective communication and collaboration with member groups and other partners, but did not provide suggestions for what might improve existing communication and collaboration approaches. One member suggested temporary and topic-specific coalitions and working groups as a potential collaboration format.

We thank our supporters for their feedback on our 2026-2031 Strategic Plan and for all the beliefs, values, and thoughts they continue to share with us.

