



(DRAFT)

2025 - 2030

STRATEGIC PLAN



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

Draft Dated:
March 29th, 2025

Ratified:
TBD

OUR HISTORY



Nature Nova Scotia is the federation of nature groups in Nova Scotia. Together, we provide Nova Scotians with opportunities for networking, education, research, and advocacy for nature. We were created in 1990 under our registered name, the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists, as a Nova Scotian society and registered charity. Nature Nova Scotia (NatureNS, NNS) was adopted as our operating name and brand after strategic planning work in 2005.

In November 2019, the NatureNS Board participated in a strategic retreat where it charted a change of course for our then education- and networking-focused operations. At that time, the nature network was engaged in a legal action regarding the province's failure to enforce its own Endangered Species Act, and the board discussed the potential of increased activism as a tool for both increasing our impact and bringing new people into the nature network.

Recognizing that nature in Nova Scotia and elsewhere is in decline due to human activities, the Board decided that NatureNS should continue to offer the traditional “nature enjoyment” activities that have always appealed to our naturalist-dominated supporter-base, but that we should also become more proactive to create a stronger voice for nature.

To accomplish these goals, we resolved to:

1. Undertake an engagement organizing experiment where we would attempt to **grow the nature network** through strategic volunteer engagement and the use of new digital infrastructure. We implemented a refreshed website with more tools, hired a central coordinator to expand capacity, adopted new social media platforms, and hosted events designed and advertised to attract new followers.
2. **Engage the nature network** (including both organizational members and individual supporters) in action for nature; organizing petitions, mail campaigns, and other initiatives that strengthen our collective voice for nature.

When we initiated this strategic shift, the **mission statement** of Nature Nova Scotia was reviewed and accepted as:

“The purpose of the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists is to further communication and cooperation among naturalists and natural history societies in Nova Scotia; to promote public interest in nature and conservation; and to work together with others and share ideas at the provincial level to conserve and enhance the natural state of our environment.”

As part of the mission statement, the board also outlined activities that would be considered acceptable NatureNS priorities:

"The Federation may:

- 1. Promote the enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation of nature for members and the general public by
 - a. Education through such vehicles as lectures, meetings, and field trips.*
 - b. Collecting and disseminating knowledge relating to the natural history and biological diversity of Nova Scotia.*
 - c. Supporting and fostering the creation of nature centres and nature education programs.**
- 2. Carry out studies and research and present briefs related to the conservation and enhancement of nature and biological diversity.*
- 3. Take actions to restore and conserve native species and their essential habitats.*
- 4. Cooperate with like-minded people and organizations to develop and carry out projects for conserving the integrity of natural ecosystems and representative natural areas."*



In the five years since we first initiated these experimental engagement organizing techniques, both our following and supporter-base have grown and we have developed more robust measures to track success and better understand our stakeholders. The broader nature network (including followers and supporters of NatureNS but also those of our member groups) likely includes tens of thousands of residents and regular visitors to Nova Scotia, who participate in events, sign letters, make donations, or engage with us and our member groups in other ways. The nature network tracked internally (only at NatureNS), as of 2025, includes ~6,000* citizens, who engage with us in similar ways.

Most of these contacts are *followers* (people who subscribe to our emails, attend an educational event, follow us on social media, etc) and some are *supporters* (people who donate, sign a petition, volunteer as part of a citizen science program, or take other actions that improve our capacity to deliver on our mission). Our *supporter* base has grown over the last few years, but few *followers* make the transition to *supporter* and we have not managed to expand our engagement ladder as quickly or substantially as we have gained new followers. Donations are down across the charity sector and our tracking mirrors this broader trend, where our following grows much faster than our supporter-base. Donations are vital for increasing capacity as they allow for leveraging against these other revenue streams and show potential funders that we have the support of our community, so this trend is concerning.

Some new supporters are volunteers. We've experienced particularly strong growth among women and young Nova Scotians

*a conservative estimate that attempts to avoid double-counting supporters or followers who engage with us in multiple ways or through multiple occasions, based on tracked metrics like event attendees, volunteers, email subscribers, donors, etc.

and especially for casual help with events. However, these volunteers are unlikely to take on leadership roles that would allow for hierarchical divisions of project activities, where lead volunteers coordinate subordinate volunteers, or in regular administrative roles like membership coordination, auditing, etc. Volunteerism is also down across the charity sector and this trend is likely to continue as young Nova Scotians face reduced opportunities and delayed economic growth.

We've also witnessed growing overlap in the activities coordinated by NatureNS and our member groups. Some of our current projects emerged during or as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, filling gaps left by the reduced activities of many natural history societies. As our communities recover, we gain new member groups, and some member groups have expanded their own capacities, we have less need to be everything to everyone.

Relying on a small staff and limited number of volunteers, facing dwindling donors and increasing economic uncertainty, we risk stalling the growth our network has achieved to date and limiting our ability to achieve the impact we want to have. Delivering on our mission over the next five years will require continued growth, but also necessitates working more efficiently and careful project prioritization.

Over 2025-2030, we want to expand organizational capacity further by:

1. exploring new revenue streams and expanding donor relationship management activities.
2. adopting new engagement organizing structures that more meaningfully engage supporters, focusing more on partnership and improving the capacity of our member groups.

WHO WE ARE TODAY



2022-2024 FOCUS AREAS & ASSOCIATED PROJECTS

Project predominantly:
Networking & Education
Advocacy
Research
Stewardship

Protected Areas

- Make Room For Nature 20%/30% campaign (provincial and federal)
- Designate Remaining Protected Areas campaign (petitions, letters to government)
- Update the Provincial Parks Act campaign (petitions, letters to government)

Species At Risk

- Monitoring progress on SAR recovery action post Ban. vs Lands & For. Judicial Review
- Piping Plover Critical Habitat Judicial Review
- Designate Core Habitat for the Mainland Moose (petitions, letters to government)
- Mainland Moose Conservation Initiative. events, camera network. & public survey

Sustainable Forestry

- Monitoring progress on implementation of the Lahey review
- Ecological Forestry campaign (petitions, letters to government, and lawn signs)
- Comment on the 2022 Old Forest Policy update

Urban Nature

- Bird Friendly Halifax coalition participation, Bird Week event coordination
- Operation Window Strike (anti-window-strike kits for HRM residences)
- Ports of Halifax and Sydney Waterbirds Monitoring project

Wildlife

- Hemlock Conservation Legacy project (woolly adelgid treatments on private lands)
- Gaps in Wetland Protections Professional & Public Workshop series
- Comment on the 2024 Spring Bear Hunt proposal

Cross-Focus Area Projects

- Annual Celebration of Nature symposium
- Annual Conservation Award
- Educational and activism events for young Nova Scotians, BIPOC, and new Canadian families (across NS)
- NatureTalks webinar series
- Fun Fact Friday and Wildlife Wednesday social media series

OUR NATURE NETWORK

15 Organizational Members, 13 Associate Members, 35-300 Individual Members*

20 Regular Volunteers. 50-375 Donors**. Thousands of Other Action-Takers (ex. petition signers, postering posses, etc)

1,814 Email Subscribers. ~5,000 Social Media Followers

*Total members (paid and unpaid to date) includes over 300 contacts

** From 2020-2025, we engaged 375 unique donors, total. Not all of these donors donate every year.

FEEDBACK FROM THE 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 2 years.

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:

From board discussions in Winter 2025:

- How can climate change be better integrated into these 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?

From Member Meet-Ups held in Winter 2025:

- Supporters across meet-up events agreed that all current 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 accessibly 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.

From Member Meet-Ups held in Spring 2025:

- TBD...



SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Nova Scotians care about nature, as demonstrated by their support in our campaigns over the years (most notably the 38,000 signature-strong petition to halt forest harvests in moose habitat in the Napier River-Fourth Lake area.)

We gained several new organizational members over the last 2 years, which each bring a new audience for us to reach and people-power and skills for us to access through collaboration on projects and participation in the board or committees.

Granting bodies and private citizens believe in us enough to offer us financial support, allowing us to maintain a small staff. Staff and provide us with expertise and direct people power and dramatically 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 unfamiliar and inexperienced with.

OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

New digital organizing tools expand our reach and ability to track participation and engagement in our activities.

Nova Scotians will donate to see action taken on a nature issue they care about.

There are many other conservation- and environment-focused organizations in Nova Scotia and many experts we can rely on for context and consultation.

Funding opportunities for temporary/student staff increase our project capacity while permanent staff focus on organizing work.

However,

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 partner with different groups, 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.



THEORY OF CHANGE

Through our previous strategic plan, we invested in organizational infrastructure. We know that Nova Scotians want to learn more about nature and that they will take action on the nature issues we share with them, but we lacked the capacity to reach, track, and engage them in activities that have the most impact. Now that we have improved our reach and ability to assess our network, we need to invest in relationship building.

Our goal for 2025-2030, as in past years, is to engage more Nova Scotians in connecting, learning about, and acting for nature. We can achieve this through:

Increasing staff capacity and efficiency: allowing executive staff to focus on engagement organizing by maintaining project-level staff and volunteers to coordinate work on-the-ground.

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.



LOOKING AHEAD

2025-2030 OBJECTIVES

- **Improve public knowledge of nature issues and foster opportunities for action taking:** partner with member groups and others to coordinate events, research projects, advocacy campaigns, and other activities in line with our mission
- **Expand capacity:** maintain staff for engagement organizing and complete project-level work through tiered staffing and volunteerism, with an emphasis on partnership, reducing redundancy and improving efficiency
- **Grow following and supporter base:** continue to secure new contacts but prioritize transforming existing followers into supporters through strategic relationship management



FOCUS AREAS & ACTIVITIES

Project predominantly: Networking & Education, Advocacy, Research, Stewardship *New in 2025

Protected Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update the Provincial Parks Act Campaign• Make Room for Nature Campaign (pushing for 20% & 30% Protected Areas by 2030)
Species At Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued monitoring on SAR recovery actions post Ban. vs Lands \$ For. Judicial Review• Designate Core Habitat for the Mainland Moose Campaign• Piping Plover Critical Habitat Judicial Review• Mainland Moose Conservation Initiative. events, camera network. & public survey
Forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued monitoring on implementation of the Lahey review• Hemlock Conservation Legacy project (woolly adelgid treatments on private lands)
Urban Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued participation in Bird Friendly Halifax Coalition• Expand Bird Friendly Cities program to other municipalities*• Operation Window Strike (anti-strike kits for HRM residences, other municip.)• Ports of Halifax and Sydney Waterbirds Monitoring project
Water & Wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gaps in Wetland Protections Legislation and Policy Review• No Net Pens Campaign
Cross-Focus Area Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual Celebration of Nature symposium• Annual Conservation Award• NatureTalks webinar and workshop series• Fun Fact Friday and Wildlife Wednesday social media series• NatureKids education program (more curriculum aligned activities in addition to existing family-focused engagement, across NS)*

Improving Efficiency, Relationship-Building, & Reducing Redundancy

- Where possible, we will prioritize project coordination through collaboration with member groups and other partners.
 - The Bird Friendly Cities program by design is a collaboration of conservation organizations, researchers, citizens, and municipal representations, and benefits from a national network and community of practice we can draw support from.
 - We have already piloted successful partnerships, within and outside our network, to coordinate youth education events, steward trail cameras as part of our mainland moose research project, co-host wetland professional and public learning workshops, and launched shared project-specific fundraising drives. We will draw on lessons learned from these successes in forming new partnerships.
- We will distribute engagement organizing by strategically structuring staff and volunteer hierarchies, using a network approach to accomplishing tiered tasks.
- We will check in regularly with our membership and supporter-base to assess our progress and adapt our methods as needed.

MEASURING SUCCESS

METRIC

INTERIM GOALS

END OF: 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029

Engaged Supporters
(members, donors,
action-takers)

1,000 1,250 1,500 2,000 2,250

Followers (subscribers,
event participants)

6,000 7,200 8,500 10,000 12,000

Member Organizations*

28 28 28 28 28

Events

22 24 26 28 30

Youth Engaged in
Educational Activities

400 500 600 700 800

Qualitative and Other
Soft Metrics:

Positive responses to event surveys,
progress on campaign objectives, etc

*Member groups are not recruited but arrive to the network organically. Therefore, a reasonable goal may be to simply maintain that formal relationship with every member organization that chooses to join us, as indication that the relationship is meaningful.