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## Forest groups team up to protect land areas

By JEFFREY SIMPSON Provincial Reporter  
Wed, Dec 23 - 5:26 AM

Unlikely bedfellows have come up with ways to help the province meet its goal of protecting 12 per cent of its land by 2015, calling for a halt on the development of areas seen as a priority.

Environmental groups and for-estry companies unveiled a re-port on Tuesday that resulted from five years of collaboration.

Created as a result of the Colin Stewart Forest Forum, the report identifies Crown and private land where industrial work such as forest harvesting, mining and road building should be restrict-ed.

The report identified about 269,000 hectares of private and public land worth conserving, while the province needs only 190,000 to hit its target. The forum recommended that 175 sites, cov-ering 58,000 hectares of Crown land, should be protected imme-diately.

Environment Minister Sterling Belliveau said the forum's work gave the province a good starting point for achieving its goal, hav-ing already announced \$75 mil-lion to acquire land to conserve.

"We'll be using this as a guide," Mr. Belliveau said in an inter-view.

"It gives the option of a lot of flexibility, of picking and choos-ing the sites that are important. So I'm pleased they went beyond the initial amount of land which we need."

The province will now draw up a plan while consulting with af-fected groups and Mi'kmaq bands, he said.

The areas identified as neces-sary for protecting include a wide range of the province's natural environment from broad swaths of forests equalling 10,000 hec-tares to small islands on the East-ern Shore.

Raymond Plourde of the Ecolo-gy Action Centre in Halifax said he is confident the province will honour its commitment in follow-ing up on the recommendations.

"Prior to this, the government had no plan," said Mr. Plourde, who helped establish the

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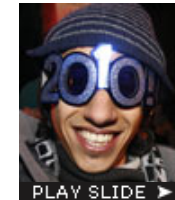
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forum with the late Mr. Stewart, an ecologist and environmental activist. He said the unusual partnering of the province's four largest forestry companies and environmentalists was unprecedented, acknowledging their views sometimes clashed. But the collaboration was a necessary step, he said. Chris Miller, a national manager with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, said the report was a monumental step in preserving the natural beauty of Nova Scotia.

"There was a conscious decision for environmentalists and industry to put aside our differences and try to work together to identify areas for protection," he said.

"In the past, certainly, there's been lots of conflict between environmentalists and the forest industry."

Mike McLarty, the timberlands manager for the Northern Pulp mill in Abercrombie Point, said his company manages some of the land identified for protection in the report and will now work on ways to preserve it, although he didn't know how that would happen.

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