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## This land is our land

**NDP adds \$70m to fund to buy up privately owned property for conservation, recreation**

By CLARE MELLOR Business Reporter

Fri. Sep 25 - 4:46 AM



Premier Darrell Dexter receives copies of the provincial budget from a legislative page at Province House on Thursday. (Tim Krochak / Staff)

The province will spend \$75 million by the end of this fiscal year to buy up privately owned land in Nova Scotia for conservation and recreation.

The money is about \$70 million more than was allocated in the budget that was tabled May 4 by the Conservative government.

The new money in Thursday's budget will help the province move closer to the target set out in the Environmental Goals and Sustainability Prosperity Act of protecting 12 per cent of the land in Nova Scotia

"We think this gives us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve our environment," said Finance Minister Graham Steele.

Currently, 8.7 per cent of land is protected by the province. Although it will depend on land prices, the \$75 million will mean the province will have about

9.46 per cent of land under its protection by the end of the year, said Don Davis, a spokesman for the Natural Resources Department.

The province was negotiating earlier this year with J.D. Irving, which had 170,000 acres of woodland on the market in western Nova Scotia.

Mr. Steele would not say whether the money will be used to purchase that specific land, but he didn't discount the possibility.

"I wouldn't say there are particular deals in the works," he told reporters.

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Last year, the Conservative government allocated \$2.2 million in its budget for similar land acquisitions.

Many large companies like the Irvings have put privately owned land in Nova Scotia on the market over the past couple of years.

During the summer, the company rebuffed the province's offer to buy 21,000 acres of Irving woodland. The amount of the province's offer was not disclosed.

Natural Resources Minister John MacDonell told reporters in July that the New Brunswick company sent the province a letter indicating the proposed purchase price was not good enough.

The province has been harshly criticized by wilderness groups for failing to conserve many of its natural areas.

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'We think this gives us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve our environment.'

GRAHAM STEELE Finance minister



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