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## PROTECTING NOVA SCOTIA LAND FOREVER

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**To preserve and protect  
Land conservation plan takes province ‘hundreds of years’  
into the future**

By VINCENZO RAVINA

*Thu. Dec 31, 2009 - The Chronicle Herald*

Protected lands are forever.

“Land protection is about as permanent as anything gets in government these days,” said Peter Labor, the acting manager in the protected areas branch of the provincial Environment Department.

“We’re planning hundreds of years and generations out into the

future.”

Mr. Labor’s branch identifies and protects pieces of land in Nova Scotia with natural elements like rare plant life or a stand of old-growth forest that are unique to a particular landscape or area of the province.

Nova Scotia is committed to legally protecting 12 per cent — 6,630 square kilometres — of the province’s landmass by 2015, as set out by the Environmental Goals and Sustainability Prosperity Act. Right now, 8.5 per cent — 4,710 square kilometres — is being protected. Kermit deGooyer, with the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax, said protecting Nova Scotia land is important.

“We clearcut roughly, on average, 500 square kilometres of land every year in Nova Scotia,” said Mr. deGooyer. “Species that depend on those habitats have fewer and fewer places to go.”

Three months ago, The Chronicle Herald reported that the Natural Resources Department had been allocated \$75 million this fiscal year to acquire land for conservation and recreation.

“We think this gives us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve our environment,” Finance Minister Graham Steele said in September. Mr. Labor said the money has been a big boon.

“The \$75 million is an exceptional circumstance. It’s not typical to have an amount of money like that set aside in one block, so that’s certainly going to take us a long way toward our acquisition goals.”

Mr. Labor’s protected areas branch works closely with the Natural Resources Department in matters of land acquisition.

“The province is negotiating right now on land purchases with several of the large land owners in the forest industry,” said Dan Davis, a Natural Resources Department spokesman.

In May, the province had put in a bid for 85 square kilometres of J.D. Irving-owned land in western Nova Scotia. The undisclosed amount offered was turned down by Irving.

Mr. Davis confirmed that the province is still in negotiations with J.D. Irving, but he couldn’t speak specifically about those negotiations or offer details about other talks, except to say, “The negotiations are going well and we expect over the next few months we will have announcements to make.”

Mr. Labor said his department is committed to protecting an 82-square-kilometre piece of land known as the Five Bridge Lakes

wilderness area on the Chebucto Peninsula, and is also looking into protecting parts of the Chignecto Crown lands in Cumberland County. The process, from identifying a parcel of land worth protecting and designating the land as protected, can take a long time. Mr. Labor said it usually takes about a year. The Five Bridge Lakes area will most likely be designated in the fall, he said.

The Chignecto Crown lands, on the other hand, are in the initial consultation phase. Mr. Labor said he doesn't know how much of the 350 square kilometres his branch will protect, but it is talking to businesses and concerned parties in the area.

After the initial consultation, the branch can decide how much land to protect and make a proposal. Then there are public consultations, when Nova Scotians have their say.

"People are very connected to land and they're connected to the use of land in Nova Scotia," Mr. Labor said.

"We want to understand those connections and concerns that people have, and ensure that when we're establishing a boundary or that when we're protecting an area, we have all the information in front of us, so there are no surprises."

Mr. deGooyer said Chignecto is ideal because there are no big protected areas in that part of the province. Also, the land is home to endangered mainland moose, wood turtles and an Atlantic salmon population.

"There's potential there to create a protected area on the scale of several thousand acres, which is a really big opportunity for the province of Nova Scotia."

In addition to the ongoing negotiations, Mr. Labor said they have plenty of leads for land acquisition.

The Colin Stewart Forest Forum is a group made up of environmental groups like the Ecology Action Centre, as well as representatives from the forestry industry like J.D. Irving. Over the past five years, the group has worked to propose areas in Nova Scotia worth protecting that also wouldn't cramp the forestry industry's style.

The proposal, made public on Dec. 22, identifies about 269,000 hectares of private and public land worth conserving and recommends that 175 sites, covering 58,000 hectares of Crown land, be protected immediately.

Mr. Labor said his branch will be looking at the suggested areas this

winter.

With 8.5 per cent of Nova Scotia protected, Mr. Labor said he anticipates having 9.5 per cent protected by March. As for the remaining 3.5 per cent, “our goal would be by 2012, 2013 to have identified the rest of the lands to reach the 12 per cent goal... . Then that will leave us two years to actually complete the designations.”

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