



SAVE OUR OLD FORESTS ASSOCIATION

*Nova Scotia needs old forests.*

Friday, July 18, 2025

Dear Minister Halman,

I am writing to you about a new and alarming threat to protecting 20% of Nova Scotia's lands and waters by 2030. Your department is supposed to be working with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the public to achieve this important goal. Progress to date has been negligible, but at least we weren't going backwards. Now DNR has started taking sites from areas of Crown land proposed as Wilderness Areas and is instead assigning them to the High Production Forestry (HPR) leg of the triad. This condemns them to a cycle of perpetual clearcutting.

The commitment to protect 20% should not be taken lightly. It was an election pledge your government ran on and then wisely put into legislation in 2021. It aligns with the commitment signed in Montreal in 2022 by 196 countries, including Canada, to protect 30% of our planet by 2030. Neither biodiversity loss nor the climate crisis is going away just because we are facing other threats. In fact, it appears that global warming is happening faster than anticipated, and with more devastating consequences. We need to protect our forests more than ever.

Your government commissioned a survey in 2023 to inform the *Collaborative Protected Area Strategy: An Action Plan for Achieving 20%*, published later that year. The survey found strong public support for protecting 20% of Nova Scotia. The results specifically highlighted the need for urgency, transparency, and collaboration.

Save Our Old Forests Association and other groups of concerned citizens have done their level best to collaborate with your department and DNR, pouring countless volunteer hours into proposing areas for protection, documenting the conservation value of those areas and building public support for protecting them. At times it seemed as if our efforts might be reciprocated, though never with transparency or urgency.

Now however DNR is acting with a complete lack of respect for our efforts. Harvest plans currently open for comment on the Harvest Plan Map Viewer include plans to clearcut multiple sites within several citizen proposed Wilderness Areas, including Beals Brook, Chain Lakes and Ingram River Wilderness Areas. These harvest plans are listed as High

Production Forestry, implying that, if the plans are approved, not only will these areas be clearcut in the near future, they will also be subjected to repeated short-rotation clearcutting. They will, in other words, if DNR has its way, never be protected.

Clearcutting destroys a forest's conservation value. Common sense requires that we identify which areas should be reviewed for permanent protection before deciding which areas can be clearcut in perpetuity.

What is DNR's rush?

- In its 'High Production Forestry' Phase 2 document (2023), DNR caps the portion of Crown land available for HPF at 10% and states that they expect to proceed slowly, adding 5000 ha a year over 35 years to reach that 10%.
- In the same document, DNR claims repeatedly to be prioritizing biodiversity on 90% of Crown land.
- The deadline to protect 20% is 2030. The target date to assign 10% to HPF is 2058.
- Instead of first identifying the areas of Crown land that should be protected as part of the Conservation leg, DNR rushed to identify potential 'High Production Forestry' areas.
- Now harvest plans are being advanced to clearcut HPF areas that fall within proposed Wilderness Areas.

DNR is not 'prioritizing biodiversity', it is prioritizing clearcutting.

It is laying claim to forest land for HPF while stalling conservation.

Minister Halman, are you going to stand by and let DNR get away with this? Your signature is on the *Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy*, along with Minister Rushton's. Your department is responsible for protecting the environment and addressing climate change.

Nova Scotians strongly support protecting 20% of our province. They strongly oppose clearcutting. They want action on climate change. You have spoken very personally about the need to pass on a livable planet to the next generation. That is a moral obligation. There are also economic considerations.

The cost of climate change is becoming astronomical. Biodiversity loss is inextricably entwined with climate change. Clearcutting releases more carbon and destroys more habitat than any other form of forestry. It terminates the ecosystem services forests

provide, notably storm water management. The costs of clearcutting are born by the public. Are the profits worth it?

Protected areas, on the other hand, become more and more valuable as time passes. The older the forest, the more carbon it stores, the more biodiversity it shelters, the more storm water it soaks up, the less flammable it becomes. And the more time people want to spend in it. Protected areas are economically as well as ecologically valuable.

The identification of areas to be protected must take precedence over the identification of areas where biodiversity will be destroyed.

Please step up to your responsibilities. Citizens' groups have already submitted well-documented proposals for tens of thousands of hectares out of the 300,000 or so that we still need to protect by 2030. It is past time for the Protected Areas branch of ECC to begin formal evaluations of these citizen proposed Wilderness Areas. In all the areas identified for possible protection, activities that will degrade their conservation values must be put on hold.

Please oppose DNR's plans to establish High Production Forestry in any proposed protected area, including the Beals Brook, Chain Lakes and Ingram River Wilderness Areas. These 'final felling' – clearcutting -- harvest plans have not been approved. Not yet. Your intervention as Minister of Environment and Climate Change is crucial.

Sincerely,  
Nina Newington  
President, Save Our Old Forests Association

cc: Deputy Minister Lora MacEachern