

New Forestry Strategy Spells End of Future Forested Protected Areas in N.B.

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In March 2014, the provincial government released a new 10-year Crown Forest Management Strategy. The Strategy will remove more than one-quarter of the amount of our public land that used to be specially managed to conserve fish, wildlife habitat and protect our rivers. Instead, the land is given over to increased logging, including clearcutting.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-NB Chapter, along with many of the province's wildlife researchers, is concerned that reducing the amount of conservation forest on public land puts our ecosystems at unnecessary risk. Allowing more logging in old forest habitats on steep slopes and other previously inoperable areas adds additional strain on forest ecosystems. It poses a threat to wildlife that depend on large patches of old forests for their survival; like Pine Marten, Flying Squirrel and Brown Creeper. Over-stressed forests are not as able to withstand the pressures that will come from climate change impacts; like new diseases, new insect outbreaks, floods or drought.

With this Strategy, government is knowingly going below the threshold of what is recommended by wildlife managers (and based on literature) to maintain viable populations of wildlife that are of conservation concern. They are going below the amounts of old forest habitats that government wildlife managers believe are needed to allow wildlife to thrive. We will be going below the amounts previously set aside for buffers along rivers and streams that allowed our rivers to flow clean, cold and with even flows.

The habitat areas that were managed to conserve larger patches of old forests were also our best options to adding to a network of protected areas over time. New Brunswick is 2nd to last in Canada in the proportion of our land designated in permanent protected areas. NB has 3.1% of the province in protected areas, while other provinces have on average 10% in protected areas. These protected areas are legally designated to be free from industrial activities, while still allowing a range of low impact recreational activities.

Canada has made international commitments, as part of the Biodiversity Convention, to protect 17% of the country by 2020. New Brunswick has a long way to go to protect our fair share of the province's natural areas. Because of the new Strategy, we will have a hard time finding natural forest ecosystems that are large enough, or undisturbed enough, to add to the protected areas network in the future.

Future governments are being locked into an industrialized forest management approach that doesn't leave room for new conservation measures or new protected areas. Government has signed a legally binding agreement with the forest industry. This appears to mean government would need to financially compensate a forest company if any protected areas are established that impact the amount of wood supplied.

Instead of squeezing the life out of our conservation zones, government should look more

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Magnolia Warbler
Photo by A. Clavette



seriously at ways to get additional wood from private woodlot owners. Woodlot owners have said they want to be more integrated into the forest economy. That way, we could support rural jobs and still protect the forest ecosystems that are so important to our province.

This Strategy is not a good plan for either our environment, or our economy. It needs to be abandoned, and replaced with a plan that will ensure survival of our wildlife, our forests and rivers, and will provide us with the flexibility of adding much needed old forest protected areas in the future.

*Forests at Kedgwick River
Photo by R. Clowater*

