

A Short History of NSWOOA

The Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association

Founded in 1969, NSWOOA is the oldest independent woodlot owners and operators group in the province. We have taken a firm stand in advocating for woodlot owners' rights and in promoting environmentally centered, socially responsible, and economically balanced forestry.

Thousands of small-woodlot owners hold title to half of the forests in Nova Scotia. These smaller parcels are typically found on more productive soils and are more accessible than remote industrial freehold or Crown woodlands. Prior to 1960, woodlot owners had little opportunity to benefit financially from woodlot management, as markets were characterized by an oversupply of wood. Control of prices was in the hands of the buyers. Woodlot management simply did not pay. Consequently, private woodlots were increasingly degraded by poor harvesting practices or were sold to industrial interests.

In 1960, Swedish multinational Stora Kopparburg built a pulp mill in Port Hawkesbury. Five years later, the American corporation Scott Paper built a mill in Pictou County. By the time Stora expanded its operation in 1971, consumption of pulpwood in Nova Scotia had almost quadrupled in less than a decade. Pulpwood from small private woodlots now found a market which had been historically absent, although prices paid for that wood remained abysmally low and woodlot owners had gained no power or influence in the marketplace. This industrial development largely provided the impetus for woodlot owners in central and eastern Nova Scotia to begin serious organizational efforts.

In the late 1960s, the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish sponsored a project, funded through the federal Agricultural and Rural Development Agreement, to organize woodlot owners at the county level across the province. After three years of kitchen table negotiations and town hall meetings, 12 county associations convened a general meeting in January 1969, at which the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners Association (NSWOA) was formed. The not-so-modest objectives were to lobby government and industry for the rights and interests of the small woodlot sector, to promote responsible and profitable forest management, and to represent woodlot owners in their quest for fair returns from their woodlot operations.

Throughout the 1970s, the NSWOA fought a difficult and often-disheartening battle to establish the role of the small woodlot owners as a crucial and equal partner in the forest industry in the province. It is an understatement to say that woodlot owners had few friends in the forest sector. Only the idealism, personal sacrifice, and dogged determination of woodlot leaders from rural communities throughout Nova Scotia enabled the association to prevail against repeated legal challenges and obstructionism by the industry and the Department of Lands and Forests.

The Pulpwood Marketing Act was passed in 1972, setting the stage for creation of woodlot owner-controlled bargaining agents. Pulpwood supplier divisions of the renamed Nova Scotia Woodlot Owner and Operators Association finally signed hard-fought contracts with Stora in 1980 and with Scott Paper in 1981. Woodlot owners in central and eastern Nova Scotia finally had effective economic representation.

Entering the 1980s, the parent organization NSWOOA had a Nova Scotia Forest Industries Suppliers Division and a Scott Suppliers Division. The association also continued to represent the interests of all small woodlot owners to government and to lobby for improved forest management policies and practices. In 1985, the NSFI Suppliers Division evolved into an independent association, the Nova Scotia Landowners and Forest Fibre Producers Association, based out of Port Hawkesbury. That group continues to represent pulpwood producers from the seven eastern counties who supply fibre to the mill, most recently operated by NewPage. It now includes in its bargaining mandate progressive agreements that provide silvicultural reinvestment for private woodlots and Forest Stewardship Council certification services for its members.

The Scott Suppliers Division was eventually renamed the Central Wood Suppliers Division. It concluded several successful contracts with Scott Paper. In 1995, however, the company closed its wood room at the mill and stopped buying roundwood, dramatically curtailing the activities of the Central Wood Suppliers Division. Although it launched several legal challenges over the next six years, the division was unable to resume its bargaining role. It did, however, establish precedents in law which reinforced the enabling legislation and protected the role of the division as bargaining agent for private suppliers to the mill, now owned by Northern Pulp, if circumstances change.

The 1990s were turbulent times for the NSWOOA and for woodlot owners in general. Ironically, the bargaining successes of the Central Wood Suppliers and the Landowners and Forest Fibre Producers led to a decline in support for the association as the province-wide representative of woodlot owners. The successful provincial Group Venture Program created a large number of independent voices for groups of small owners. The decline and eventual demise of federal funding of silviculture, and the subsequent failure of several group ventures, was tempered by improving prices for roundwood and stumpage, which rose steadily throughout the decade.

The Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association, never a favorite of the Department of Lands and Forests, lost its core funding from the province in 1991. Since that time, the association has been funded almost entirely on membership fees and operating proceeds. NSWOOA has remained a stalwart advocate for woodlot owners, helping to launch two independent cooperative-based business ventures which sought to create value-added markets for woodlot products. The association also participated in national and provincial forestry initiatives and was involved in the Forest Stewardship Council's Maritime Initiative from its genesis in 1996. NSWOOA supports the Maritime Initiative by promoting this globally preeminent forest certification program to

members. The association also holds a seat in the economic section of the regional steering committee.

The Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association underwent a renewal in the first years of the new millennium. Since the 1950s, there have been watershed changes in the forestry industry, in the lifestyles and aspirations of woodlot owners, and in public attitudes and expectations of our wildlands. The association reaffirmed its commitment to “Stewardship, Solidarity, and Prosperity” through truly sustainable forest use. It recognized that the well-being of woodlot owners and rural communities depends on respect for all aspects of our forest environment – ecological, social, and economic.

In September 2002, the first NSWOOA Fall Field Day was held on the Halifax County woodlot of Wilfred Creighton, then 98 years old. Dr Creighton was formerly the Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests, leading that organization through its golden years. He retired in 1969, the same year as the NSWOA was formed. The field day has become an annual event.

In 2008 and 2010, NSWOOA partnered with Picea Forestry Consulting Ltd. to deliver landowner outreach projects on behalf of the Association for Sustainable Forestry’s “Category 7” uneven-aged quality improvement silviculture program. Also in 2010, NSWOOA and several partners signed a 25-year management agreement with the province that created the first community forest in Nova Scotia. The Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest Division will develop the 500 ha parcel in Mooseland (within the Halifax Regional Municipality) as a living demonstration of a sustainable working woodlot in the Acadian Forest.

Most recently, NSWOOA was an active participant in the public process that led to development of the forestry framework in the new provincial Natural Resources Strategy, which was released in August 2011. The framework calls for no more than 50 percent of the wood cut in Nova Scotia to be harvested through clear-cutting by 2015, and prohibits the removal of whole trees from harvest sites to protect soil productivity and biodiversity.

Even more good things are planned this year, most notably a low-cost program funded by DNR and administered by NSWOOA to help 100 small landowners understand their options for sustainable management of their woodlots. Two new employees have been added to implement this year’s outreach and information campaign, which will also include a series of informational meetings and seminars across the province, a new website, further work at Otter Ponds, and many other projects.

To learn more about the association, call us at 902-817-4763 or write to NSWOOA@gmail.com.