

NSWOOA's vision for sustainable forestry in Nova Scotia

The Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association is the oldest independent organization of woodlot owners and operators (small contractors) in the province. Our mission is to support woodlot owners and operators in sustainable forestry through education, demonstration, marketing, and cooperation. Truly sustainable forestry requires that all the values of our woodlands – ecological, social, cultural, and economic – be preserved for future generations.



In our opinion, NSWOOA can be differentiated from other forestry organizations in Nova Scotia by our firm belief that sustainable forest use can be realised only through maintenance of ecological health and integrity. Ecological integrity (completeness) is the foundation which will yield social, cultural, and economic benefits for human communities. Compromising ecological integrity for short-term considerations will likely have a negative impact on forest use by future generations. Therefore, NSWOOA vigorously promotes ecological education and awareness amongst its members and all woodlot owners and operators in Nova Scotia.

Why must there be an ecological foundation for sustainable forest use?

The unique and geographically limited Acadian Forest evolved over 12,000 years under a specific set of climatic, biological, and geological conditions. Adaptation and natural selection produced a forest type that is very productive, adapted to the natural disturbance regime, and extremely resilient and stable over long periods of time. (This is a useful concept of "forest health" that contrasts, for example, with the perception of health as a forest where everything is pretty as a park, with tall trees and no dead wood standing or on the ground.) The overlapping and interconnected definitions of "stability," "integrity," "health," and "productivity" are underestimated by most forest practitioners in Nova Scotia.

Forest policy and practice must accept the premise that a forest must reinvest a portion of the annual (or periodic) net primary productivity of the ecosystem (from the parent material of the soil to the tallest tree tops) in order to maintain the natural level of health, stability, and production of that forest ecosystem. We can (and do) intervene silviculturally to influence forest production in a way that increases the benefits to society. However, if the intensity or method of those interventions act negatively on the web of life that underpins ecosystem productivity, we begin to lose the integrity of our forest. It may or may not be a long time before impaired forest production is obvious. A particularly difficult problem is the short span of human lives compared to the long natural cycles of the Acadian Forest.

Exploitation of the forests of Nova Scotia over the past 500 years has dramatically changed our forested landscapes. Forest stability and health have declined. Forest practice is moving ever faster to higher levels of fibre utilization, expansive operations, and shorter rotations. Expensive (in terms of capital and energy) silvicultural interventions are being used to mitigate natural productivity rates, which are falling fast. Ecosystem alteration and simplification compound the issue through ever-greater disruption of the webs of life which give the forest its vitality. The evidence to support this can

be found throughout our forests – we simply have difficulty interpreting the evidence that is available. As for modern science, there is a notable lack of peer-reviewed, reputable research that investigates whether short-rotation, high-utilization, even-aged forestry is ecologically or economically appropriate for maintaining health and productivity in the Acadian Forest.

What forest practices are appropriate for Nova Scotia?

Forest practices should emulate the natural disturbance regime under which the Acadian Forest evolved. This will ensure that we affordably maintain, for ourselves and future generations, forest stability, health, and a continuous yield of timber, ecosystem services, and other forest values. Uneven-aged management over long rotations, with emphasis on growing high-quality stems of our longest-lived, most valuable species, offers the best opportunity to realize timber value while restoring forest conditions to a more natural (and desirable) level. Uneven-aged management should be mandated on the Crown lands of the province (because they should serve as models), and should be vigorously promoted on small private woodlots (because they are usually the most accessible and have the highest potential for productivity). Industrial landholdings subjected to economic constraints due to size and accessibility should be managed, if not truly as uneven-aged, on long rotations with allowance for adequate retention and reinvestment of biomass into the ecosystem (coarse woody debris, abundant legacy trees and appropriate clumps, corridors, and wide riparian strips).

The prescription given above is very general, and it is intended to be. Within the concept of maintaining ecological integrity, a wide range of activities are possible, and indeed necessary, given the vast array of forest conditions found throughout the province. NSWOOA supports the right of landowners to make decisions regarding the management and use of their land. However, we also emphasize the social responsibilities that accompany private ownership of forest resources.

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