

BACKGROUND

HRM Regional Plan takes a balanced approach toward environmental protection and development. The Plan's Map 4 (Attachment 1) proposed six new Regional Parks and 14 conceptual natural corridors important for the movement of wildlife, environmental and cultural integrity of the Region.

Staff has been working collaboratively with Nova Scotia Environment staff for several years to delineate and create strategic connections in the open space network. Since the adoption of the Regional Plan in 2006, three new Wilderness Areas have been created in HRM by the Province of Nova Scotia, totalling nearly 25,000 ha¹. The Province's leadership in designating over half of the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park as a Wilderness Area must be noted.

The Province of Nova Scotia is currently consulting on the *Our Parks and Protected Areas: A Proposed Plan for Nova Scotia*². The goal of the Plan is to ensure that provincial parks and natural areas continue to thrive. The Plan delivers on two important government commitments:

1. Update Nova Scotia's park system to secure and strengthen its long-term success.
2. Increase Nova Scotia's legally protected landmass to at least 12% by 2015.

This report summarizes the importance of the Plan to the implementation of HRM's Regional Plan, including environmental protection, open space network, culture and heritage, economic development and tourism. The Plan is also consistent with the proposed Greenbelting and Public Spaces Priorities Plan³ being advanced through RP+5. The Nova Scotia Protected Areas Branch requested that a submission be made by May 8, 2013.

DISCUSSION

The provincial Parks and Protected Areas Plan advances Nova Scotia's efforts to protect and conserve the natural landscape, potentially adding 224 properties and more than 245,000 hectares (ha) across the province – a combined landmass equal to nearly one-quarter the size of Cape Breton Island. While many forests, wetlands, lakes, rivers, beaches and coastal areas will achieve greater protection, the Plan also proposes to transfer 2,150 ha of provincial parklands to protected areas and 1,000 ha of parklands to Crown land (still available for public use).

1 The new wilderness areas include Ship Harbour Long Lake WA, Five Bridges WA, and Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes WA.

2 The Plan can be viewed at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/parksandprotectedareas/>: interactive map
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/parksandprotectedareas/plan/interactive-map/>

3 The 2006 Regional Plan called for an Open Space Functional Plan. Some aspects of the functional plan were undertaken. The GPS will effectively replace the Open Space Functional Plan.

In HRM, the Plan proposes to add, expand, and reassign over 60 areas. If the Province's Plan is adopted, over 22,000 ha of Crown lands in HRM will be protected for the future. Overall, in HRM the Plan will affect the future protection and management of:

- 22,600 ha in Proposed Protected Areas (Wilderness Areas and Nature Reserves)
- 68,800 ha in Current Protected Areas (Wilderness Areas and Nature Reserves)
- 9,600 ha in Provincial Parks existing and new (a number of provincial parks located in HRM will be designated as “core parks” and may therefore see future enhancements).

The Regional Plan identifies 14 natural corridors important for the protection of wilderness, cultural and cultural values of the Region. The provincial strategy helps to address 11 of the 14 corridors, including some of the following areas identified in the table below:

Corridor	Parks and Protected Areas Plan Proposals for HRM	Area
2	West Dover Provincial Park Blind Bay Provincial Park	980 ha expansion 155 ha expansion
3	New Rogues Roost Wilderness Area	842 ha
4	Crystal Crescent Beach Provincial Park designated as Core Park	540 ha
5	Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area wildlife corridor to Cox Lake Lake	465 ha addition
6	New Little Soldier Lake Nature Reserve New Rawdon River Nature Reserve	88 ha 132 ha
7	Addition to the Waverly-Salmon River-Long Lake Wilderness Area	3,228 ha
8	Dollar Lake Provincial Park designated as core park New Lake Egmont Nature Reserve	1,156 ha no change 88 ha
9	Ship Harbour Long Lake Wilderness Area expansion Eastern Shore Islands Wilderness Area New Lower East Chezzetcook Provincial Park New Twelve Mile Stream Wilderness Area	626 ha addition 1,749 ha addition 131 ha 1,242 ha
10	Taylor Hear Provincial park designated as Core Park	856 ha (no change in ha)
12	New Toadfish Lake Wilderness Area Lake Charlotte Provincial Park expansion	6,697 ha 180 ha addition
14	New Sackville River Nature Reserve	600 ha

The provincial Plan, if approved, has the potential to immensely expedite and provide momentum to the completion of HRM’s open space network. The Plan addresses most of the natural corridors identified by HRM’s Regional Plan. For example, expansion of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes aligns with Corridor 5 and the Second Lake/Sackville River Nature Reserve will largely address Corridor 14. The establishment of the Eastern Shore Islands and the Rogues Roost Wilderness Areas has the potential to contribute to rural economic development.

During the RP+5 community engagement process, compact development and protection of open space emerged as priority issues. The current Draft Regional Plan places a priority on the completion of the *Greenbelting and Public Spaces Priorities Plan (GPS)*, which will complete

detailed delineation of natural corridors to inform community design and strategic acquisitions. While the current proposal will greatly benefit HRM, there may be an opportunity to add and increase protection of the following three provincial Crown land areas:

- **Ingram River Watershed:** this ecologically significant watershed terminates in St. Margaret's Bay, is situated in the former Bowater Mersey Lands and aligned with RMPS Corridor 1;
- **Herring Cove Backlands:** one of the three "green fingers" of the Chebucto Peninsula, greater protection could contribute to the realization of RMPS Corridor 4;
- **Sackville River Valley:** would provide connectivity to HRM parkland holdings around Jacks Lake (proposed RMPS Regional Park) and provide greater protection to the Sackville River landscape.

HRM should recognize and support provincial efforts to protect HRM's key ecological areas and indicate HRM's desire to further engage with the province in on-going dialogue and future collaboration, through the implementation of the Regional Plan and the Greenbelting and Public Spaces Priorities Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement is required as the recommendation is based on an approved HRM's policy position to work collaboratively with other levels of government to create a complete open space network as identified in the RMPS.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The provincial strategy, if approved, has the potential to significantly contribute to the HRM Regional Plan's goals of achieving a connected network of diverse open space.

ALTERNATIVES

The Committee may choose not to make submission on the provincial Plan to the Minister of Environment.

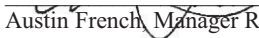
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – RMPS Map 4 Parks and Natural Corridors

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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Attachment 1 – 2006 Regional Municipal Planning Strategy 2006 Map 4 - Parks and Natural Corridors

(http://www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning/documents/Map4_ParksAndNaturalCorridors.pdf)

