

Quick Facts – Nova Scotia Nature Reserves

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Q: What is a nature reserve?

A: A nature reserve is an area of land which is legally protected, or designated, under the Special Places Protection Act. These areas are protected to safeguard the species, ecosystems, and other natural features, while providing opportunities for scientific research, education, and nature appreciation.

Q: Why do we have nature reserves?

A: Establishing a nature reserve is a way to protect rare, outstanding, or representative natural features or phenomena, such as old-growth forests or the habitats of rare or endangered plants or animals. These features can easily be damaged or destroyed by certain types of human activities, including forestry, mining, road construction, all-terrain vehicle use, and some forms of recreation. A nature reserve designation legally restricts the types of uses and activities that can occur within the designated boundaries.

Q: How large are nature reserves & how many are there?

A: Currently Nova Scotia has 22 nature reserves, comprising about 5,000 hectares (ha), or just under 0.1% of the province. The largest is Bornish Hill Nature Reserve, Inverness County (969 ha) and the smallest is Sporting Lake Nature Reserve, Digby County (23 ha). The size of a nature reserve depends on the features needing protection, as well as land ownership.

Q: Can I visit nature reserves?

A: Yes. Most nature reserves are open to public visitation, while others can be visited with the permission of the owner and/or Nova Scotia Environment. Some nature reserves contain habitats, ecosystems, or species that are so vulnerable to disturbance or damage that public visitation must be restricted.

Q: What can I do in a nature reserve?

A: Nature reserves are established to protect natural features and phenomena, and preserve opportunities for scientific research. Therefore, any activities that can cause damage or disturbance to natural features are restricted or prohibited. Such restricted activities generally include forestry, mining, road-building, motorized vehicle use, hunting, trapping and camping.

Birding, canoeing, hiking, nature photography, and other types of non-consumptive, low-impact activities are generally permitted as long as natural features and species are not disturbed.

Did you know?

The Province is proposing to update legislation for nature reserves to maintain high-level nature protection while clarifying the treatment of existing legal interests and certain low-impact recreational uses.