

Quick Facts – Nova Scotia Wilderness Areas

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Overview

Q: What are designated wilderness areas?

A: Wilderness areas are significant natural areas designated under Nova Scotia's *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*. These areas protect the natural environment while providing opportunities for education, research, wilderness recreation, camping, sport fishing, hunting and community stewardship. Most wilderness areas are remote with limited access.

Q: How much of the province is protected in designated wilderness areas?

A: Nova Scotia currently has 40 designated wilderness areas, protecting almost 355,000 hectares or more than 6.4% of the province.

Q: Where are these areas?

A: Wilderness areas are distributed across Nova Scotia. Detailed maps showing wilderness area boundaries can be viewed at local Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or Nova Scotia Environment (NSE) offices. You can also purchase maps of individual wilderness areas through the DNR library.

Q: Who takes care of these areas?

A: Nova Scotia's wilderness areas are managed by Nova Scotia Environment while enforcement and field services are provided by Department of Natural Resources.

Specific responsibilities, like managing hiking trails, may also be carried out by trail or local

community groups through management agreements with Nova Scotia Environment.

Q: What activities are restricted in wilderness areas?

A: Commercial resource development, including forestry and road development, is not permitted. Other activities, such as mining, vehicle use, building structures or trails, and any activity that would cause damage to plants are also prohibited, except in certain circumstances as outlined in the [*Wilderness Areas Protection Act*](#).

Protection and Stewardship

Q: Why is protection of these areas important?

A: Nova Scotia's wilderness areas help our province contribute to a worldwide effort to protect wild places.

Protected natural spaces conserve biological diversity, protect important habitat, improve air quality, create and protect soils, store carbon, and provide clean water. Wilderness areas act as natural laboratories for monitoring the natural world and learning how ecosystems function and respond to stresses.

Nova Scotia's wilderness areas also provide high quality wilderness recreation opportunities, foster healthy lifestyles, and offer places for spiritual renewal and inspiration in an increasingly busy world.

Q: Is forest harvesting permitted?

A: No. Forest harvesting is not permitted within designated wilderness areas. However, protected areas are considered important elements of responsible forest management.

Q: Is mining permitted?

A: Mining is not permitted in designated wilderness areas except where pre-existing mineral rights exist. In such cases, activities associated with mineral exploration and/or development must be conducted in a way that does not degrade the wilderness area, under the terms of a licence issued by the Minister of Environment.

Q: Is scientific research permitted?

A: Yes. Scientific research is encouraged so long as research activities do not degrade the wilderness area. A licence is required from Nova Scotia Environment for all scientific research.

Q: Can I build a hiking trail or develop a site for camping?

A: Yes, but all construction and site clearing must be approved by Nova Scotia Environment.

Q: Can I take shed antlers, harvest berries, or collect other natural materials?

A: Natural materials are protected from removal. To keep human impact to a minimum, users are encouraged to leave natural items as they are. If you choose to pick berries for personal consumption, please keep your harvest modest, and limit picking to areas of abundance.

Q: Can I access my private land that is surrounded by a wilderness area?

A: When requested, the Minister of Environment must provide landowners a licence for access to

their private land inholdings. This licence may contain conditions.

Recreation

Q: How do I access a wilderness area?

A: Many wilderness areas are in remote regions. A growing number of developed hiking trails have directional signs, as do some canoe routes. Many "traditional" (non-maintained) access routes exist, and can be found on maps or by talking to local residents or users of wilderness areas.

Q: Do I need to register or get a permit to visit a wilderness area?

A: No. Registration or permission is not required to visit a wilderness area.

Q: Are there any special rules I need to know before going to a wilderness area?

A: Yes. There are standards and guidelines for recreational users. These are outlined in [Keep It Wild - A Guide For Low Impact Recreation In Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas](#), available on the department's website www.novascotia.ca/nse/protectedareas or through your local NSE or DNR office.

If you wish to explore a wilderness area, please recognize that you are on your own, and accept responsibility for your personal health and safety.

Q: Can I camp and have a campfire in a wilderness area?

A: Yes. There are no campgrounds or facilities in wilderness areas, but overnight camping is generally permitted as long as you follow low-impact standards and guidelines.

Campfires are permitted in existing campfire rings, or by using a fire box or pan.

Details on the standards for camping and campfires are outlined in an Order on Camping and Lighting of Fires issued by the Minister of Environment. Content of the Order is included in, [Keep It Wild - A Guide For Low Impact Recreation In Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas](#), available on the department's website www.novascotia.ca/nse/protectedareas or through your local NSE or DNR office.

Q: Is sport fishing, hunting and trapping permitted?

A: Yes. Hunting, trapping, and sport fishing are generally permitted under the same rules that apply on other public lands, with the exception that bear baiting for hunting is not permitted in any wilderness area, and the use of bait for deer hunting is not permitted in Tobeatic Wilderness Area.

Q: Can I use a vehicle, bicycle, snowmobile, or motorboat in a wilderness area?

To help protect the environment and wilderness experience, vehicle and bicycle use is generally prohibited in wilderness areas.

Specific snowmobile and off-highway vehicle routes that connect to the broader provincial network are designated for use by members of the Snowmobilers Association of Nova Scotia (SANS), the All-terrain Vehicle Association of Nova Scotia (ATVANS) and the Nova Scotia Off-road Riders Association (NSORRA).

Additional off-highway vehicle use may be authorized on specific, designated and managed routes in newer wilderness areas (not the original 31) or in additions to any wilderness area.

Limited vehicle access may be licensed for maintenance of campsite leases, for research, or for maintaining legal interests such as power lines.

Motorboat and aircraft access may be licensed to enable access for wilderness recreation, hunting, trapping or fishing. Currently, motorboats may be used in all wilderness areas, except Tobeatic Wilderness Area, for the purpose of sport fishing during fishing season by individuals with a valid fishing licence.