

The Province owns more than 100,000 hectares (250,000 acres) of land in the headwater region of the Mersey and Medway rivers, in Annapolis County, also known as the Medway District. In August 2013, the government approved the Parks and Protected Areas Plan, which includes the proposed Medway Lakes Wilderness Area that encompasses 19,383 hectares (47,895 acres) of land in this area. The release of the Parks and Protected Areas plan followed a multi-year, province-wide, planning and consultation process.

Since the release of the Parks and Protected Areas Plan, government has been continuing to review and work on an integrated approach with respect to public access and gates, the forestry road network and the boundaries of the proposed Medway Lakes Wilderness Area. This newsletter provides an update on this approach and outlines key factors that are being considered. For more information on the proposed Medway Lakes Wilderness Area and to view the map, please visit [novascotia.ca/parksandprotectedareas/plan/progress](http://novascotia.ca/parksandprotectedareas/plan/progress)

Medway Lakes Wilderness Area:

# Update on Boundaries, Access and Use



## What is a Wilderness Area?

A wilderness area is a significant natural area designated under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act. Wilderness areas protect the natural environment and also provide opportunities

for wilderness recreation, camping, sport fishing, hunting, education, research, community stewardship, tourism outfitting, and other activities.

## Government's Proposed Approach

### Access

Historically, Bowater (former owner of these lands in the Medway District) restricted public vehicle use on most of its lands and gated much of its forestry road network. When the Province acquired the lands it opened most of the road network. Some roads into areas considered particularly rich in biodiversity were left closed pending further study and planning.

When Medway Lakes Wilderness Area is legally designated, government proposes to exclude the West Branch Road from the wilderness area so that it can be used by public vehicles. We plan to keep the rest of the existing road network in the new wilderness area closed to vehicle use as noted in the Parks and Protected Areas Plan. The West Branch Road is important for management of forestry activities on the Crown lands that lie to the north of the pending wilderness area. If the road is closed other roads will need to be built and trucks will have to haul timber over longer distances. Excluding this road from the wilderness area takes into consideration the impact on biodiversity associated with road construction and use. It also balances the environmental and economic costs

of new road construction against the potential impacts of allowing vehicle access on the West Branch Road. Habitat fragmentation, pressure on fish stocks, noise and disturbance can diminish the wilderness area's value for biodiversity, however new road construction is also destructive of the natural environment.

With this change, almost 90% of Bowater's former road network in Annapolis County, which is not part of the new wilderness area, would be open for public use, while most of the former forest access roads within the new wilderness area would be allowed to return to their natural state.

Additionally, the Province proposes to implement measures that will reduce the impact of open roads along the boundaries of and within the wilderness area. To this end, gates or barriers would be established and maintained at or near the beginning of all roads that are not open for vehicle use that currently extend into the wilderness area. Bridges in the wilderness area may be removed. Additional measures to manage impacts on local biodiversity will be explored.

### Boundary Revisions

Several changes (both additions and removals) are also proposed as they relate to the boundaries of the pending wilderness area. [\[see map\]](#)

These changes would improve access, make it easier to manage the area, protect additional old forest, water courses, and recreation opportunities,

better connect the eastern and western portions of the wilderness area, and support forestry operations.

As well, lands on Route 8 previously identified for protection as "Fisher Lake Provincial Park" in the Parks and Protected Areas Plan would instead become part of the wilderness area.

## Use and Access

Medway Lakes Wilderness Area will provide exceptional opportunities for recreation in a wilderness setting. Canoeing, camping, sport fishing, hunting, cross country skiing, and nature education and appreciation are some activities

the area supports. New boundaries for the wilderness area allow easy access to many of the wilderness area's attractions, while preserving the backcountry character of some remote areas.

## Highlights of the Proposed Medway Lakes Wilderness Area:

### 18 primary access points to waterways and trails, including six off of Route 8.

- **Main vehicle access** to waterways in the western portion of the wilderness area will be provided at longstanding canoe launch and small parking area at Eleven Mile Lake off of Route 8. Water access from Route 8 also available from the highway bridge at Liverpool Head Lake and the short spur road and parking area at Four Mile Stillwater. Limited access will be available from private facilities at Milford House and Mersey River Chalets.
- **Additional water access** will be available from the forestry road network at several locations on the periphery of the wilderness area, including at Lynch Mill Stream, Butler Stillwater, Long Lake, East Stoney Lake, Lake Alma, Hendry Lake, and Twin

Bridges (former Bowater base camp). Over 50 km of forestry roads about the wilderness area, providing many opportunities to explore on foot.

- **Canoe routes** [see map] will suit a broad range of skill levels and trip lengths, from short paddles on individual lakes to challenging white-water conditions or a multi-day traverse of the entire area.
- The Province will also work with interested partners to **develop and promote appropriate wilderness recreation opportunities** such as trails and canoe loops. More specific management planning will occur after the wilderness area is designated.

## What are we protecting at Medway Lakes Wilderness Area?

In addition to providing easily accessible outdoor recreation opportunities, the new wilderness area establishes a regionally significant refuge for nature conservation. It covers expansive tracts of rolling hardwood hills, conifer-dominated flats, wetlands, and numerous lakes. The wilderness area harbours many scattered pockets of old forest, now rare in Nova Scotia. It is also large enough to help sustain a wide range of wildlife species, some of which can be sensitive to disturbance as old roads continue to naturalize and larger blocks of intact habitat are restored. The location of the Medway Lakes Wilderness Area at the headwaters of the Mersey and Medway rivers helps to protect water quality for people and aquatic life in two of western Nova Scotia's largest watersheds. Its interconnected lakes, rivers, and streams support native brook trout, and on the Medway River, a remnant Atlantic salmon population.

## Medway Lakes Wilderness Area – Timing of Designation

The Province is working to legally designate Medway Lakes Wilderness Area under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act by the end of 2015.

## For more information

Outlined below are ways that you can find out more information and/or comment on government's proposed approach:

- Mail or email your comments to:
  - **Protected Areas & Ecosystems Branch, Nova Scotia Environment, 1903 Barrington Street, Suite 2085, PO Box 442, Halifax, NS B3J 2P8**
  - or
  - [medwaycomments@novascotia.ca](mailto:medwaycomments@novascotia.ca)
- Attend an information sharing session on **October 6, 2015 at Milford House, 6 pm-8 pm** to speak with staff and share your thoughts.

To ensure that all comments can be reviewed and considered, please ensure that they are provided no later than October 16, 2015.

