

Wealth of fauna call N.S. forests home

But harvesting methods can pose risks to the province's many birds and animals

NOVA SCOTIA NATURALLY

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Nova Scotia's tall, natural forests, with their shady, damp forest floors, serve as hosts for many seasonal and resident wildlife species.

Tiny warblers and flycatchers are but a few of Nova Scotia's 65 birds that spend most of their spring and summer in mature forests before winging their way back to South and Central America.

Each forest species has particular nesting and feeding needs in order to raise their young here.

For example, ovenbirds skillfully weave a nest on the ground within large forested areas. It's important for them to locate it far away from woodland edges that attract prowling skunks, raccoons, foxes, crows, bobcats, house cats and blue jays. Barred owls, conversely, are large birds tending eggs and nestlings in old trees with trunks that offer fist-sized openings to enter a substantial hollow space. Goshawks are another sizable, fierce, forest-hunting species that prefers to nest in deep woods.

Creatures with four furry paws reside in woodlands year-round. They find shelter and food in the forest and under fallen and uprooted trees. Hiding places also include holes in the ground, tree cavities and among mosses and lichens that adorn older trees and undisturbed forest floors.

Flying squirrels may find winter accommodation in a nest hole made and subsequently abandoned by woodpeckers.

White-tailed deer frequently move in groups to winter in valley bottoms and south-facing slopes sheltered by mature softwood stands, to help escape the cold. When deep snows limit their travel, nearby access to younger forests for food becomes paramount to their survival.

Falling leaves and temperatures combined with shorter days prompt adult speckled trout to begin moving upstream to cool headwater streams that flow from forests. Spawning in these babbling brooks, they release golden orbs into clean gravel bottoms. The eggs overwinter, with young fish emerging from the gravel in the spring. Young trout remain in small streams over the summer to grow.

Yellow-spotted salamanders roam the forest floor near woodland pools, wetlands and lakes at night in search of spiders, snails, slugs and beetles. Their moist, porous skins depend on clean air and the damp environment found in healthy forests.

The Path We Share, Nova Scotia's Natural Resources Strategy, has a forests plan for 2011 to 2020. It suggests an ecosystem approach to "maintain healthy forests," in part by "reducing clearcutting to no more than 50 per cent of all harvests."

Do sanctioned clearcuts and the new "partial" cuts maintain habitats for wildlife in ecologically healthy forests?

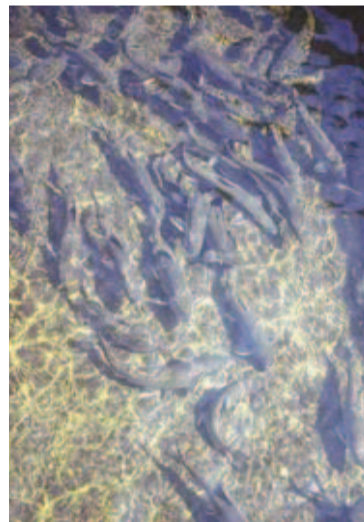
Partial cuts can mean almost anything under the new policy, from cutting one tree to harvests that leave 60 per cent of the area with scattered, chest-high trees, and the remaining 40 per cent totally bare. The policy effectively transfers the ecologically degrading clearcutting attributes of dryness, heat and wind exposure to the partial cut category.



This young sharp-shinned hawk and two other nestlings had their nest tree cut down. Rescued and reared, they eventually returned to the wild. **BOB BANCROFT**



Left: Forests provide warmth, shelter, and food for deer in winter. Right: Trout depend upon clean, cold streams flowing from healthy forests. **BOB BANCROFT**



Yellow-spotted salamanders require a moist, shaded forest floor. **BOB BANCROFT**

Trees left behind are usually low quality. The valuable, long-lived tree species that developed over thousands of years and provide excellent wildlife habitats can be completely removed during a harvest under this policy. The new clearcut definition is driving harvesters to cut just beyond the new, deceptive and complicated definition of a clearcut to render it a partial cut in-

stead. It's playing with words, not better forest policy and offers no help to forest wildlife.

The fast pace of forest harvests still has warblers, flycatchers and others returning to our province only to find previous nesting and feeding sites gone. Finding unoccupied forest elsewhere is unlikely. Many birds adapted to mature forests seek their food in higher, middle or lower portions

of tall-tree canopies. Young forests lack that critical vertical element.

Ovenbirds may return to find a forest fragmented by harvesting, with forest edges nearby. They may have to nest near an edge and lose their eggs or nestlings to a plundering predator.

The average songbird territory is roughly a hectare, or 100 metres by 100 metres. Try to fit

that breeding space into a 20-metre wide buffer strip of trees left along a watercourse.

Barred owls may return in late winter to find their large nest trees have been cut down. The adults may survive, but are no longer able to rear young.

With the goshawks' hunting forest removed, and a small buffer of trees left around the nest (that can later be partially cut), their territory becomes more suitable for red-tailed hawks. There are fewer and fewer deep woods left for them.

Flying squirrels and many other mammals need standing trees with holes or denning logs on the ground. Moving to a young forest without cavities and old logs is not an option. White-tailed deer that find their wintering area cut may move up or down the watershed searching for a suitable new site. They may be displaced entirely and move some distance to private land near and around towns. If the forest around their original wintering ground is cut and then sprayed with herbicides to favour softwood growth, the deer may face starvation. Abandoned deer yards are then harvested.

Speckled trout eggs overwintering in woodland streams are frequently sealed over with silt released from legal forest harvest operations. The eggs die for lack of oxygen.

The narrow ribbons of special management zones left along waterways are political compromises worked out between forest industries and governments. They do little to protect the natural world and these laws are rarely enforced.

When young trout hatch in the spring, massive spring runoff generated by recent clearcuts and partial cuts can cause water to flush quickly downstream, leaving the stream bed dry and young trout dead in the summer.

Yellow-spotted salamander ponds and damp forest environments are exposed to direct sunlight and forest fragmentation by harvests under the existing guidelines. Populations can be isolated by cutting patterns. As forest soils and ponds dry out, salamander populations wither and quietly collapse.

To summarize, current partial cut and clearcut harvest methods cause too drastic a change for nature and forest wildlife. The increased sunlight, heat and wind-drying effects on harvested landscapes render them inhospitable for wildlife species that live in forests with mature trees. Thirty- and 40-year cutting rotations are eliminating the older trees needed by wildlife for survival. Please share your photos of wildlife affected by such forest harvests. Send them to wildlandns@yahoo.ca.

Flattening forests to produce cheap pulp, without factoring air and water pollution into production costs, and the large-scale burning of trees (so-called biomass energy) to subsidize industry energy costs amounts to single-minded forestry. It's about profit, not healthy forests.

It is no Path We Share with wildlife.