

Provincial Forest Program Putting Management Plans On-line

Prince Edward Island has some 33,000 hectares of public forest land and much of it is managed through the Provincial Forest program. This program was established in the mid 1990s to encourage sustainable management on publicly-owned lands and increase the range of benefits these lands provide to their owners - the people of Prince Edward Island.

Unlike the other Canadian provinces, there was very little public land on PEI until the 1950s and 60s. At that time a number of government programs began to purchase abandoned farms and other properties across the Island. Throughout the 20th Century, the Island experienced a steady decline in population as people left for other opportunities. For the people who remained, their land was often their only asset, so governments purchased lands to provide a return on their investment.

The original intent of those programs was to return lands to the private sector when economic conditions turned around but over time, the province began to use these lands for many different reasons. Some were used to demonstrate forest management concepts to land owners or provide an outdoor education experience to school children. Forest products for traditional and non-traditional uses were produced to benefit local economies and support the efforts for forest-based businesses that needed access to high quality forest products. Others were used for long term forest research, planting trials, wildlife habitat enhancement, special natural areas, recreational trails and facilities and much more. Today, support for public lands is at an all time high as more and more Islanders come to realize the benefits these lands provide to everyone.

However, it is important to understand that these forests still reflect the Island's history of land clearance and abandonment and centuries of poor harvest practices. Therefore, they are not untouched, pristine forests but rather they are forests in the process of recovering, a factor that guides most management decisions for these lands. The Provincial Forest management plans state how individual properties and forest stands will be managed and the reasoning behind those decisions. Some areas will be thinned or planted, while others will be harvested or set aside for other uses.

All management and harvest activities on Provincial Forests are subject to public scrutiny and comment and therefore, Provincial Forest staff are updating the forest management plans for each property and posting them on-line at www.gov.pe.ca/go/PFplans. The site is set up by county and lists properties by community and property number. Over the next few years, the program will update the management plans for all of its properties in order to provide Islanders with information on the intent and management strategies being used in their public forests. You can also locate them by visiting the on-line version of the Public Land Atlas at www.gov.pe.ca/gis

These public lands are open to everyone for a wide variety of uses and the Provincial forest program is eager to have people visit and learn more about these unique public properties.