

1. BACKGROUND:

The study area (Figure 1) consists of the Blue Mountain Crown Land Block, the Birch Cove Lakes area, plus other adjacent undeveloped private lands. The area lies about 10 km west of downtown Halifax, behind the Bayers Lake Industrial Park. It is bounded roughly by Highway

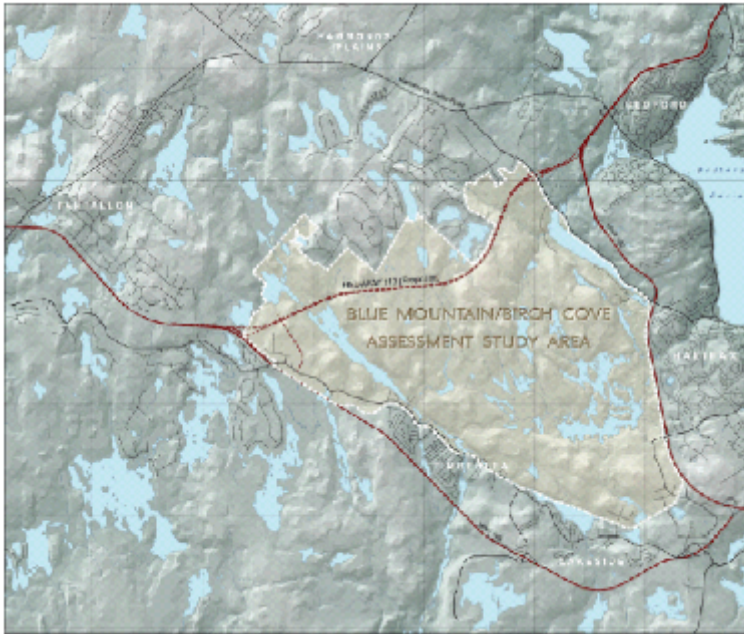


Figure 1: Assessment Study Area

102, Trunk 3, and the Kingswood subdivision.

Provincial Crown land is under the administration and control of the NS Department of Natural Resources, and the Department manages this land under its integrated resource management (IRM) planning process. The Blue Mountain block is a popular destination for outdoor recreation activities and also provides a variety of wildlife habitat, and contains valuable forest resources.

Overall the area is valued for the following notable features: scenery/viewscape, unofficial recreation/trails, potential old

forest, significant wetlands and landscape connectivity. The Birch Cove Lakes are also the headwaters of a 22 lake watershed that drains to Bedford Basin. The Blue Mountain Crown Land Block has also been identified since 1989 as an “area of interest” by the Parks and Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The NS Department of Transportation and Public Works (TPW) has proposed the corridor preservation for a future 100 series highway (Highway 113) to connect Highway 102 and Highway 103. The proposed Highway 113 will cross the Crown block. In 2001, TPW submitted an Environmental Assessment (EA) to the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labour (NSEL). Further information prior to making the EA decision was requested, including a focus report to address concerns on how the highway works within the context of HRM’s Regional Plan, including but not limited to consideration of parks and natural areas, recreational land use, transportation corridors and private development.

HRM's Draft Regional MPS has proposed the entire Crown block plus adjoining private lands as the Blue Mountain/Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park. The Plan also contains supporting policies concerning cooperative park development and management efforts between HRM and the Province. Policies associated with wildlife habitat protection and maintaining a natural corridor between the Cox Lake Crown land Park Reserve and the proposed Blue Mountain/Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park are also contained within the Draft Plan.

2. INTENT:

The Halifax Regional Municipality, in cooperation with the TPW and DNR, contracted EDM Ltd. for consulting services for the assessment of the wilderness, recreational and other values of the Blue Mountain Crown land block, the Birch Cove area, and adjacent undeveloped areas in Halifax Regional Municipality; to assess the co-existence of the proposed Highway 113 with the proposed Regional Park objectives. A budget of \$30,000 was allocated to this study and cost shared with TPW. DNR provided staff support for the study.

3. SCOPE OF THE WORK:

This project was envisioned as a multi-faceted study that included GIS-based analyses of resource capability for the Blue Mountain Crown land block, the Birch Cove area, plus adjacent undeveloped land. The inventory and analysis of values included the following: scenery/viewscape, outdoor recreation/trails, old forest potential, significant wetlands habitat, rare and representative flora; wildlife values, forest product potential, landforms, and landscape connectivity. The study also addressed landscape connectivity for people and the environment to adjacent undeveloped areas.

Specific project tasks included:

- a. (i) Inventory and map the area's trails and water routes
- a. (ii) Inventory and map the area's existing natural "values"
- b. Identify zones of current recreational activities in the area, their intensity and potential environmental impacts.
- c. Define future buildout potential of adjacent private properties within the boundary of the Study .
- d. Identify the elements and spatial extent necessary to maintain connectivity between the Blue Mountain/Birch Cove Lakes area and adjacent undeveloped land that may be incorporated into the proposed park.
- e. Define an ideal configuration for the preservation of the area's "values".

- f. Identify a hierarchy of gateways to the area including suitable vehicle and pedestrian access points and potential road access routes to minimize negative impact on the area's "values".
- g. Investigate ownership, required easements and agreements for construction of proposed access points.
- h. Identify the mitigation measures required in response to the presence of Highway 113 and the area's values.
- i. Review safety and design issues based upon Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles and how they will be applied to the assessment.
- j. Identify zones within the area to be retained solely for conservation or preservation and why.
- k. Propose a strategy to move ahead with the development and management of a proposed Regional Park including: transportation, land assembly strategy for the Crown and Private lands, phasing and proposal for associated costs of land acquisition and future joint park planning efforts required between HRM and the Province.