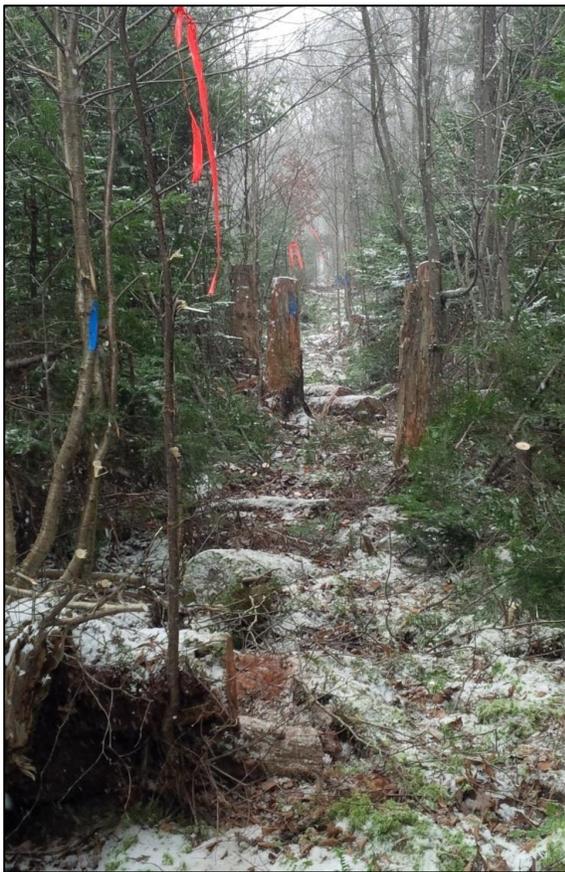


Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest Boundary Line Maintenance Guidebook



Prepared by Christie Verstraten for the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association:
Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest Division
October 2015



Introduction

Boundary lines may not be something that many woodlot owners consider when they think about responsible management planning, but clear, well-marked lines are very important for any landowner. The purpose of this resource guide is to offer general advice to private woodlot owners in Nova Scotia who are unsure about how to approach properly maintaining their boundaries. Please note that while the information in this document was put together through consultations with a few Nova Scotia Land Surveyors, this guide is meant only as a summary of and introduction to the complexities of boundary line maintenance and should not be used as a substitute for contacting a certified Nova Scotia Land Surveyor.



Photo credit: John Delorey



Photo credit: John Delorey

Why are clear boundary lines important?

There are many different reasons why it is important for private woodlot owners to keep their boundary lines properly and regularly maintained. Here are some of the most common:

- The Crown isn't currently reblazing many of its forest boundary lines
 - Since the Crown isn't reblazing many of its lines at the moment, any woodlot owner with land bordering Crown land should make sure that they keep their lines clear. It is important to avoid the lines being lost or confusing the contractors doing silviculture or harvesting work on neighbouring Crown land.



- Property line disputes
 - Though unpleasant, property line disputes are not uncommon in Nova Scotia. The best way to avoid the wasted time, resources and expenses involved in one of these disputes is to make sure the lines and corners of your property are clearly visible, properly marked and are supported by your deed or land survey.
- When buying or selling land
 - Buying or selling a piece of land without knowing where the boundaries and corners are is very dangerous, as the property could be significantly larger or smaller than you think. The more information you have about a property, the better you are able to negotiate a fair price.
- Helps prevent timber trespass and theft
 - Timber trespass and theft is unfortunately not uncommon in Nova Scotia. Having clearly marked boundary lines decreases your likelihood of falling victim to timber trespass or theft, and if it does happen, will help you prove in court that your rights were violated and compensation is necessary.
- When passing the property along to an heir
 - Intergenerational transfer is becoming a popular topic in Nova Scotia, as an aging population of woodlot owners seek to pass their land on to their heirs. While many woodlot owners have an intimate relationship with their land and may know where all their corner posts are, the information is lost over time if not written down or passed to descendants. The easiest way to make sure your heirs are familiar with where your boundary lines are is to keep them regularly maintained and clearly marked.

Getting the Information You Need

There is a lot of useful information out there for landowners who want to know more about where their lines are and how to find them. This kind of information can come from many different places, including these three excellent sources:

- Valuable written documents
 - Maps
 - Both recent and historic maps can be useful when trying to determine where to look for overgrown boundary lines. Often, maps are included with the deed when you purchase woodland. Property maps can be obtained from Land Registry Offices, and some map and data services are now available online from Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations through their Geographic Information Services.



Aerial photograph. Image credit: John Delorey



- Deeds
 - Your deed will have information describing the location of the lines and corner of your lot. Often, you can figure out where to start looking on the ground by following these descriptions and using a compass or GPS receiver.
- Original land grants
 - It is sometimes helpful to trace your property back to one of the original land grants in your area. Descriptions of the historic boundary lines can often point you in the right direction for finding evidence of old boundary lines and corner posts on your lot.
- Talk to your neighbours
 - Sometimes, the best way to tap into boundary line information is to simply ask your neighbours. Do they know where the lines and corner posts are? If so, can they show you?
 - If your property borders your neighbours and you are unsure of the lines, it is also worth asking them if they have had their land surveyed recently. If they have, this can save you a lot of effort and money.
 - Do they know any interesting history about the woodlot? Neighbours often know historical information about your woodlot that you can't find in the deed or from Service Nova Scotia.
- Go look for evidence
 - Use what you have learned from the maps and deed and any valuable information you learned from your neighbours and go look for evidence on the ground.
 - The blazes may be very visible and easy to follow, or the line may be lost or hard to follow. Either way, you won't know the condition of the boundary lines until you go out and walk them.
 - Evidence can include blazes (painted or not), survey stakes, cairns, old walls or fence lines, and even termination of a logging road at the line.
 - If the line is easy to follow, you can clean it up yourself; if not, it's time to hire a surveyor.



Photo credit: John Delorey

What do surveyors do?

- They find the record boundaries of the lot. If asked, a surveyor can also show the occupation boundaries if they differ from the record ones, which can then be taken to a lawyer if you wish to enter into a boundary line dispute.
- Once they have located the boundaries, they can flag and cut them out for you.
- If you are unclear where the boundary is, you should hire a surveyor (especially before you purchase a piece of land).



Surveyors are expensive. How can I save money?

- You can cut costs by asking the surveyor to find and mark the boundaries for you and then cutting them out yourself. It costs \$1.00-1.50 per foot to have a surveyor cut out your line for you.
- Taking GPS coordinates of the corner points before the surveyor arrives will save the surveyor time when trying to find them. Even a commercial GPS receiver should be accurate enough to give the surveyor an idea of where to start looking.

Cutting Out Lines Yourself

If the lines are still clear enough to follow without too much difficulty, you can clean them up on your own. When following a line, be careful of hills. We naturally want to walk up or down hills perpendicular to the contours, but the actual line can often go off at an angle down the hill.

- Helpful tools/equipment for reblazing your lines:
 - Compass
 - Map of property
 - GPS receiver
 - Axe
 - Flagging tape
 - Paint
 - Semi-gloss enamel (CTC)- A gallon is normally enough for at least 1 kilometer of line and 2 corner posts
 - Spray can (Wet Coat or Tree Marker)- one can will do about 200 metres of line



Painted blazes. Photo credit: John Delorey

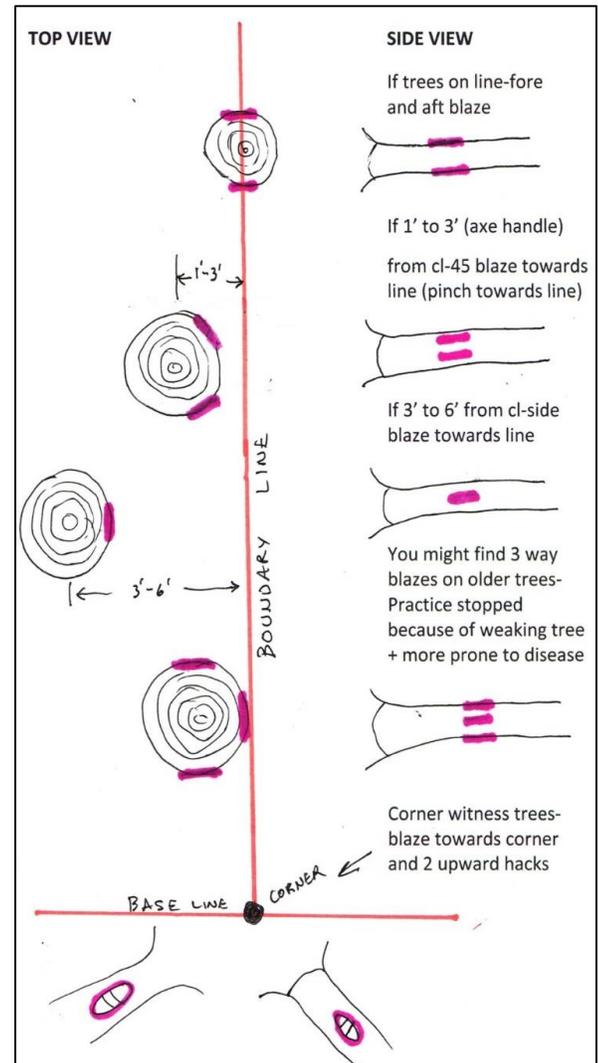


Painted blazes. Photo credit: John Delorey

- Helpful tools/equipment for cutting out your lines:
 - Clearing saw
 - Safety gear (hard hat, boots, eye protection, ear protection, gloves)

- Proper Blazing and Clearing Techniques
 - There is no height standard for blazes, but most people do it at shoulder-height.
 - Blazing approximately every 30 to 50 feet along your boundary is the most cost effective.
 - DO NOT destroy old blazes; if you wish to blaze the same tree, cut a new blaze either above or below the old one.
 - You can re-paint old blazes.
 - Which trees to blaze?
 - Surveyors are required to blaze any suitable tree within two axe lengths of the line.
 - Don't cut boundary lines too wide; narrow, tunnel-like lines keep the regeneration from growing up too quickly.
 - It is illegal to remove a survey post, but you can replace it as long as you leave the old one laying down beside it.
 - Boundary lines should be maintained every five to ten years to keep them clear and visible.

- What can I cut along boundary lines?
 - You cannot cut trees that are directly on the line. Use common sense for those on your side of the line. Talk with your neighbour about it.
 - If you must cut a blazed tree, make sure to cut it above the blaze and at an angle so it will stay standing longer.
 - If it is a young stand with few larger trees, leave some small trees around the line to be blazed when they are an appropriate size.



Types of blazes depending on distance from line.
Image credit: John Delorey

- Plan for long-term boundaries.

Boundary Line Disputes

- Common and expensive. If possible, avoid them.
- If you get into a boundary line dispute, you must hire a surveyor.
- The surveyor's field evidence and evidence from talking with neighbours (parole evidence) hold the most weight in court. They are more important than other official documents, such as provincial property mapping.