



Many hands

OTTER PONDS DEMONSTRATION FOREST

2013 Annual Report



(Photos courtesy of Dan Hutt)

Introduction

In 2013, activities at Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest (OPDF) gave new life to the old saying, “Many hands make light work.” The impact of our board members, contractors and dedicated volunteers could be seen and felt everywhere in the forest – and well beyond its boundaries.

The construction of a new visitors’ shelter at OPDF was the most visible achievement, but much was happening in other areas, too. Photos taken by OPDF board member Dan Hutt (at right) and posted on our Facebook page have been viewed by people throughout North America and as far away as Myanmar (formerly Burma) in Southeast Asia.



An extension of the road system in 2013 gives OPDF the ability to expand forest management activities in coming years. New equipment, greater experience and a collaboration with Clean Nova Scotia has improved our capacity to provide meaningful and interesting programs for school groups, woodlot owners and the public.

Continued development of plans, policies and procedures gives the board better control over all aspects of our operations.

Though it sometimes seems that change comes slowly to forests (and to organizations), the work of many supporters ensured that 2013 would be a year of substantial growth at Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest.

OPDF welcomes volunteers! If you want to become involved, please contact Andy Kekacs at 1-855-NS-WOOD (1-855-679-6637) or andy.nsw00a@gmail.com.

What is Otter Ponds?

The Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest is a unique partnership that brings together the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association, Eastern Shore Forest Watch, Ecology Action Centre, and the Mooseland and Area Community Association, along with Northern Pulp Ltd. and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources.

The partners collaboratively manage a 500-hectare (1,200-acre) Crown parcel near Mooseland, Nova Scotia, within the Halifax Regional Municipality. The partnership agreement was signed June 22, 2010.

Otter Ponds produces timber for market using the best forest management practices presently known, while protecting wildlife habitat and the Tangier River watershed, respecting the ecosystem services provided by the parcel, and enhancing the social and cultural value of the forest.

The project is meant to demonstrate the full potential for sustainably managed working woodlots in the Acadian Forest. Therefore, education and public outreach are essential parts of our mission. Otter Ponds is a place for all Nova Scotians to learn about sustainable forest management and forest ecology.



Infrastructure

Roads, bridges, visitor facilities and other infrastructure are essential for the success of Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest. At the same time, however, the forest is constrained by limited financial resources and a relatively small land base over which to spread its infrastructure costs. That means each project must be carefully planned and efficiently completed. Again in 2013, OPDF demonstrated its capacity to balance competing needs and move forward with infrastructure improvements in a cost-effective way.

The construction of the new visitors' shelter began, as many projects do, with a hole in the ground. More precisely, eight holes that were filled with concrete on 27 September 2013.



It was the start of a volunteer effort that would extend over many weekends throughout the autumn until the project was overtaken by snow in early December. By then, only a few pieces of metal roofing were left to be installed.

Like the bridge over Otter Ponds Stream, which was completed in 2012, the visitors' shelter became much more than a construction project. It was a team-building exercise that brought together more than 20 board members and volunteers. For many of them, the project required the development of new skills and new ways of working. At times, the timber-frame construction called for the careful use of advanced carpentry skills. In other places, the only things needed were a hammer, nails, and a strong arm.



The shelter was designed by OPDF President Kate Campbell (at left), a carpenter, who also oversaw its construction. The shelter, which measures 20 feet by 20 feet, was built mostly from lumber harvested and sawn at Otter Ponds. In a pinch, it can keep about 40 people out of the rain. Moveable walls will eventually be added to give protection against wind and provide a place for displaying posters or other material needed during programs.



The total cost of the project was just \$..., which was covered by the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association (NSWOOA) as part of its provincially funded program to help small landowners and the public to learn more about forest management.



Earlier in the year, Otter Ponds contracted with Eastern Fence Erectors of Dartmouth to install a double-swing steel gate on the access road at the boundary of the project lands. To conform with Crown lands requirements, volunteers painted the gate bright orange and erected warning signs on each side of it.

The gate is intended to limit vehicle access for safety reasons during active harvest operations, to prevent unnecessary damage to roads during mud season, and (if necessary) to protect against vandalism.

Silviculture

OPDF planned and carried out its first harvest in the fall and winter of 2012-13. When the work wrapped up in early 2013, about **400 tonnes of wood** had been harvested and sent to several Nova Scotia sawmills, generating **approximately \$20,000** in gross revenue from timber sales.

In accordance with its operating agreement with the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (NSDNR), the Crown received a total of **\$...** in stumpage payments for the logs that were harvested. Picea Forestry Consultants conducted a post-treatment assessment of the completed harvest in early February and submitted a claim for silviculture payment to the Crown. Documents related to this harvest can be found in **Appendix ?**

In addition to our harvest during the winter of 2012-13, some timber was cut later in the year to open up rights-of-way for new roads. Though the volume was small, the impact was significant. For many forested parcels – and certainly at Otter Ponds – good forestry can't happen without a good network of roads and trails.



In late 2013, OPDF contracted with Marshall Bateman, owner of ABL Timber Ltd. of New Glasgow, to build 850 metres of roads to reach timber stands on Hawboldt's Farm Hill and also eastward toward Powder Horn Hill (pictured at left). The roads were built entirely with material found on-site, which reduced the cost of the project to just **\$...** This work also was

funded by NSWOOA. The new roads create opportunities for stand improvement work and selection harvesting in a part of the forest that was previously inaccessible. Marshall is expected to return in 2014 to construct a high-speed extraction trail that would offer additional opportunities for forest management activities and educational tours.

Good timber utilization is another, critically important aspect of silviculture. At Otter Ponds, that means substantial time and effort is spent to ensure that harvested wood goes to its highest and best use. Sometimes, that means selling exceptional logs at high prices to specialty

mills like Windhorse Farms. Capturing value at the other end of the spectrum is also important, however.

Our harvest during the winter of 2012-13 produced a small amount of rough pine for which there was no good market. OPDF hired Rob Risser of Middle Musquodoboit (at right) to turn the logs into building material for use in the visitors' shelter and other projects.



In late August, Risser came to Otter Ponds with his Wood-Mizer portable sawmill. With the help of many OPDF volunteers, he milled about 2.5 cords of white pine logs into timbers and boards to be used in the visitors' shelter and other projects at OPDF, substantially reducing our costs for purchased lumber.



Education and Public Outreach

Education and public outreach are integral parts of the mission at OPDF, which is meant to demonstrate the potential of well-managed forests to provide economic and ecological benefits to human and natural communities.

To that end, the demonstration forest is working to increase its capacity to provide meaningful and interesting programs for school groups, woodlot owners, government officials and members of the public.

Early in the year, OPDF President Kate Campbell purchased dip nets, hand lenses, a safety kit and other equipment to be used during school tours. On April 26, members of the OPDF Education Committee spent a day in the woods discussing what the demonstration forest can offer to visitors. The following week, OPDF held a professional development day to give new directors a chance to tour the recent harvest and discuss forest management on the project lands.

Also in May, OPDF and Clean Nova Scotia hosted a visit by science teacher Carl Glawson and 25 students from Duncan MacMillan High School in Sheet Harbour. It was the first of several visits by school groups during 2013. The program included a discussion of forestry, natural history and water quality, and a dip-net survey of aquatic species in Otter Ponds Stream.

The partnership with Clean Nova Scotia has been tremendously beneficial, allowing OPDF to offer an expanded school program that includes information about water quality and its relationship to forest practices. Carl reported that students enjoyed the tour tremendously, and he planned to bring another group to OPDF in 2014.

In mid-September, members of the Community Conservation Research Network (pictured at right) visited Otter Ponds. CCRN is a network of academic researchers and community, aboriginal and governmental leaders at 11 study sites around the world. The tour of OPDF was part of a weeklong conference at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. OPDF



board members Matt Miller and Wade Prest spoke to the group, which included participants from as far away as Thailand, South Africa and Chile.



Not long afterward, Otter Ponds held a workshop on Erosion Control with Native Plants, featuring horticulturalist Jim Turner (second from left).

Jim showed participants how to collect and use native ferns, sedges, shrubs and other plants to stabilize soil at stream sides, along roads and paths, and on slopes. He also discussed ways to propagate them.

Participants planted several species around and beneath the new bridge over Otter Ponds Stream.

On October 1, a group of about 40 graduate students from the School for Resource and Environmental Studies at Dalhousie University toured OPDF with their professor, Peter Duinker. They engaged in a lively discussion of forest policy and management with board member Matt Miller and staff person Andy Kekacs.

Two weeks later, Matt Miller and Wade Prest collaborated with Clean Nova Scotia to host another well-received school trip, this time from the Musquodoboit Valley Education Centre in Middle Musquodoboit.

In an effort to increase public awareness of OPDF and its programs, the demonstration forest substantially increased its presence on the Internet in 2013. Board member Dan Hutt launched a Facebook page for the demonstration forest in August. The page can be viewed at www.facebook.com/OtterPondsDemoForest. More information about the project is available at www.opdf.ca, and the NSWOOA website offers an Otter Ponds page at www.nswooa.ca/otter-ponds.

Policies, Procedures and Plans

Sometimes, good planning involves mapping out a complex strategy for large-scale operations well into the future. Other times, it is simply the application of old-fashioned common sense to an issue close at hand. OPDF addressed both of those situations in 2013.



In mid-December, Wade Prest (at left) led a small group in felling a few big spruce that posed a risk of falling on the visitors' shelter during a storm. Wade, who lives in Mooseland, is a founding director and staunch supporter of the demonstration forest.

Wade was also the main proponent of a survey that was designed to give OPDF directors a better understanding of the perceived challenges that local contractors face when bidding on work at the demonstration forest.

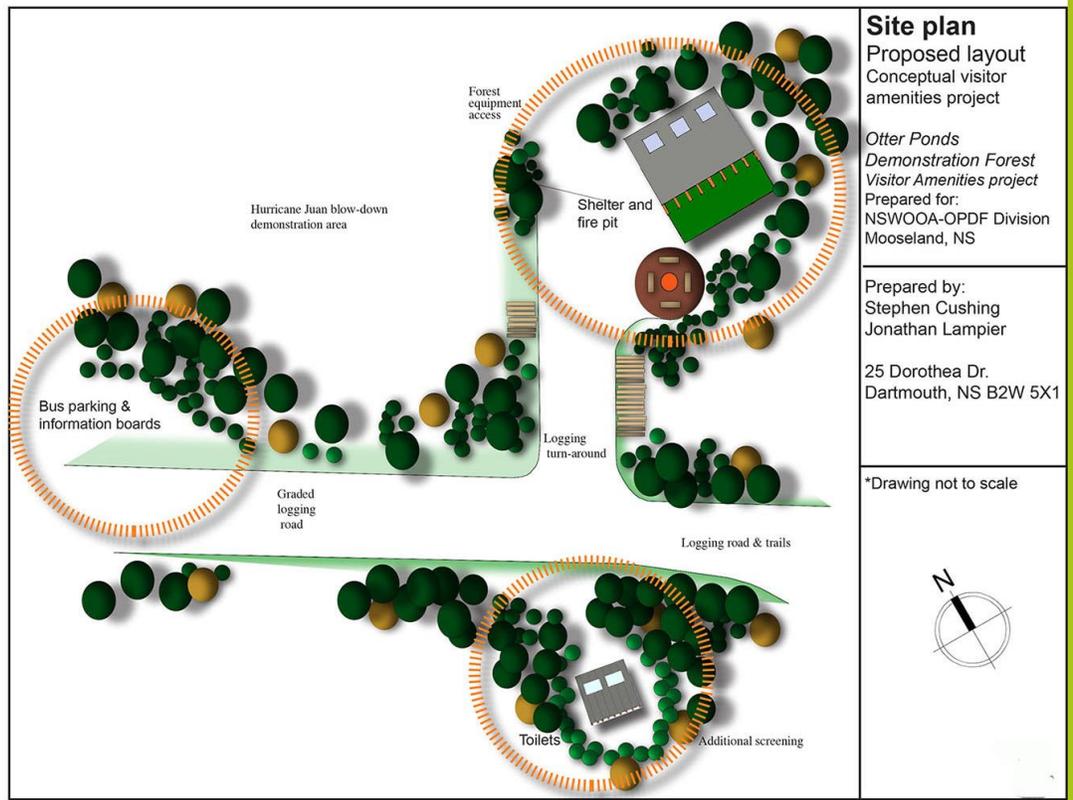
The survey had its genesis in October 2012, when Picea Forestry Consultants invited 23 logging contractors to bid on a harvest in the winter of 2012-13.

Picea also held a one-day site visit for contractors who were interested. In the end, however, only three bids were received.

Directors asked OPDF staff to survey the contractors and learn more about why they chose not to bid. Ultimately, 20 of the 23 were contacted. The most significant challenges reported were: Distance (12 contractors); low harvest volume (9 contractors); a short timeframe for completion (8 contractors), and Crown requirements (4 contractors). A complete copy of the report is included in [Appendix ?](#) The information will be used when writing future tenders for work to be done at Otter Ponds.

Directors also commissioned a landscape plan (see excerpt below) to guide the development of public amenities at OPDF. The plan was received in early 2013 and forwarded to Dan Eidt, the director of Crown lands at NSDNR, who approved the concept. The full document is included in

[Appendix ?](#)



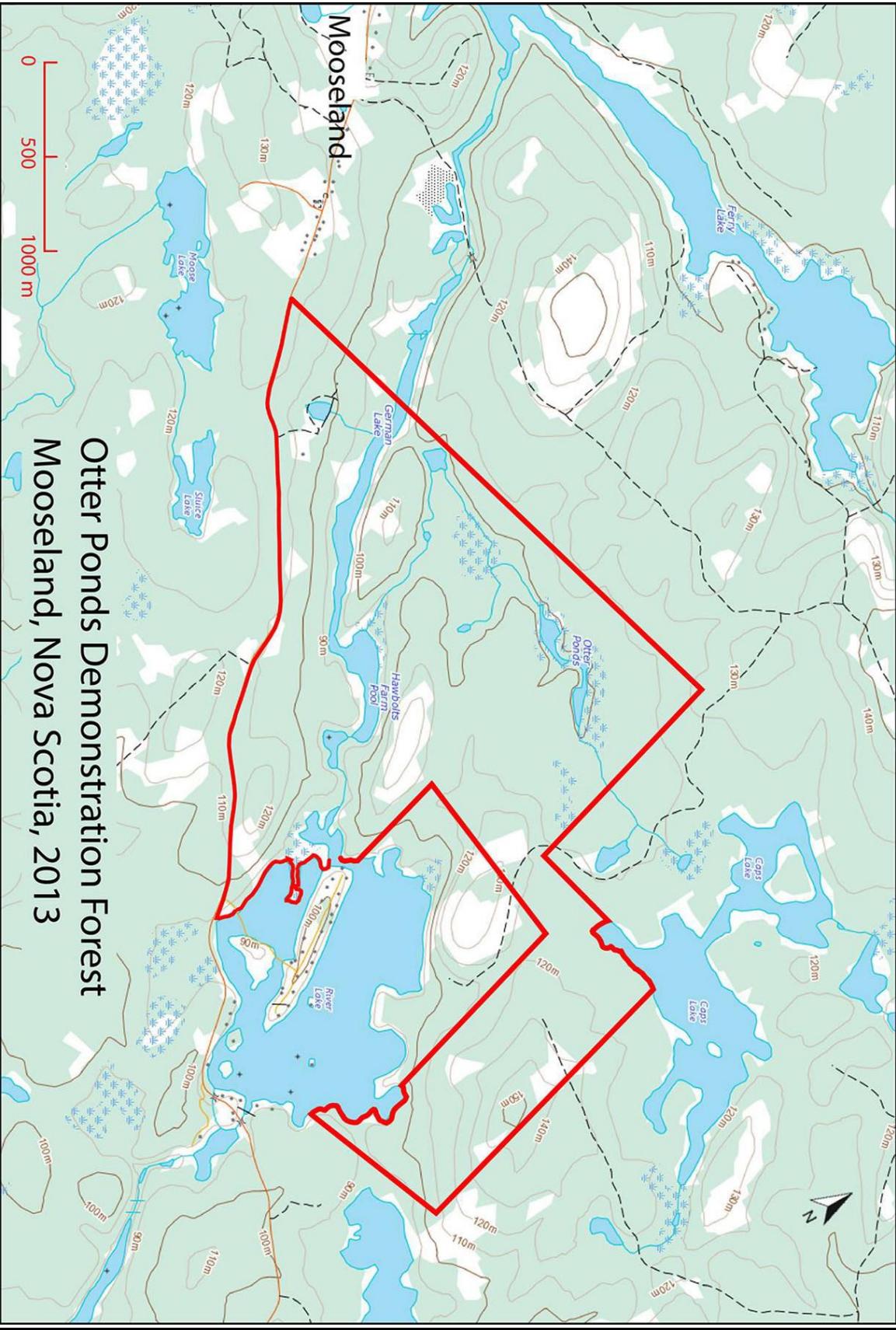
Also during 2013, Picea Forestry Consultants prepared road and silviculture plans that will help to guide future harvesting and roadwork at OPDF. Picea also completed an assessment of the role of standing dead trees and downed woody material in protecting forest health and productivity. All of the plans can be viewed in [Appendix ?](#) After reviewing the Picea report on coarse woody debris, directors established a policy for maintaining deadwood in the demonstration forest.

Directors Mike Murray and Adrian Sampson collaborated on the development of a policy statement on health and safety issues at OPDF, along with a pre- and post-visit safety checklist and hazard action sheet, which were later approved by the board. Mike also prepared a policy statement on access to the OPDF lands. Those documents are in [Appendix ?](#)

On another safety-related issue, the Mineral Resources Branch of NSDNR was again unable to commit resources to the remediation of geological hazards at OPDF. These are shallow pits and shafts left over from previous gold mining activities in the project area. The demonstration forest has been working to address the matter for the past two years and will continue its attempts to secure funding for the work in 2014.

Financial

To be completed.



Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest
Mooseland, Nova Scotia, 2013

From the minutes of 12 July 2013: “There was discussion on the definition and value of OPDF assets. A Chart of Accounts was drawn up which gave numbers for the value of land and timber as of 1 January 2011. ... It was suggested that the value of the time of volunteers be used in the value calculation somehow. Also, how will the appreciation of timber value due to growth be taken into account?”

Appendices

A. Financial Statements

B. Minutes

C. Harvesting

D. Insurance

E. Policies

F. Maps

G. Pictures?