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New Brunswick Still a Laggard on Protected Areas – New Crown Forest Plan Step Backwards

(Fredericton) The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, New Brunswick Chapter (CPAWS NB) says the new Crown forest management plan announced today by the Minister of Natural Resources is a step backwards for conservation.

Roberta Clowater, Executive Director of CPAWS NB, said, “The new Crown forest plan reduces the overall conservation of wildlife habitats and riverbank buffers. This is disturbing because we know that wildlife researchers believe that current conservation levels may not be enough to maintain all the kinds of native wildlife throughout the province.

The government has now approved a plan to go even further below what is needed. This is the wrong direction for conservation.”

Clowater said, “While the plan approves an increase in protected areas from 4% of Crown forest to 8% of Crown forest, this will result in only 4.5% of the province being protected. This is not even in the ballpark of what is needed to ensure conservation of our rivers, wilderness areas and sensitive wildlife. New Brunswick will still have the lowest protected areas proportion in Canada, only above PEI. As well, the new protected areas will come from the currently conserved old forest, so there is actually a net loss in area to conservation.”

“Given concerns about climate changes and uncertainty about how well we are currently conserving habitats and water, we are very concerned about the decision to go from a 5 year plan to a 10 year plan. We believe this is a risky move, one that locks us into very limited conservation objectives, and doesn’t provide the flexibility to improve conservation for another decade.”

“CPAWS NB appreciates that the Minister took the time to review the forest plan approved by the previous government, which would have severely rolled back conservation on public land. We’re pleased that the Minister consulted widely with the conservation community, and recognized the value of habitat conservation as an important factor in his considerations,” noted Clowater.

CPAWS had recommended that at least 17% of Crown land (8.5% of the province), including the largest patches of old forest, be designated by 2015 in permanent protected areas, where no logging or mining would take place. This amount would move us closer to the level in other provinces, where the average amount of land protected is nearly 9%.

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