

Old-Growth Forests



Description

Old-growth forests have grown undisturbed by humans for long periods of time. They are late-successional stands with gaps that were created by small natural disturbances, providing open canopy space amongst the large old trees for multiple cohorts of younger trees. Old growth is a multi-age forest that senesces and dies, leaving large dead snags and downed woody material. The pits and mounds in the forest floor created by long ago fallen trees are often covered by thick carpets of moss.

Interesting points

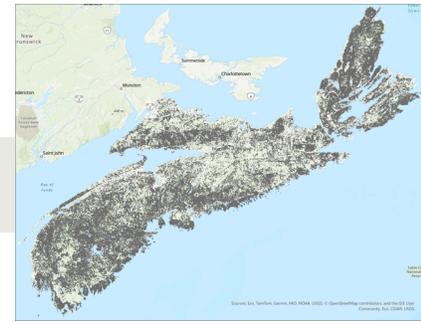
- In Nova Scotia (NS) old-growth age is associated with vegetation types as defined in the Forest Ecosystem Classification guide (Neily et al., 2021). Late-successional tolerant hardwoods and hemlock dominant spruce-hemlock sites are a minimum age of 140 years. Wet and coastal forests are minimum 100 years old. Other late-successional veg types may be between these two ages at 115 -125 years.
- Old-growth forests in NS are home to some of our species at risk, such as chimney swifts, pine marten, and all three at-risk bat species.

Similar habitats

Older forests- Forests that do not qualify as old growth but could be considered as restoration sites-stands that have enough old growth characteristics, that if left undisturbed by humans can return to old growth in a relatively short time frame.

Note- Some wet or coastal old-growth forests may be quite difficult to identify because the trees are not very large.

Potential Old-Growth sites in Nova Scotia, Mi'kma'ki.
From NSDNR inventory data, 2026.



Habitat

Old-growth habitats are whole ecosystems that are very high in biodiversity. They have multi-age cohorts of trees which give layers to the canopy, developing a microclimate habitat which supports many species of mosses, lichens, plants, and animals. Old trees that have died become large snags and downed woody material which cavity nesting animals inhabit. As well as old yellow birch that can commonly be hollow providing another hot spot for many animals to live.



Threats to Survival

- Wood harvesting or cutting
- Road building
- Soil damage from off-highway vehicle use through stands
- Invasive species
- Fire



How you can help

- Have old-growth stands verified
- Leave your old growth untouched.
- Let any possible restoration sites return to old growth by leaving them undisturbed.
- If selling your land consider selling it to someone with similar stewardship values or a land protection organization.



Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports, and Stewardship Opportunities

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