

Woodlands for wildlife: incentivizing species at risk conservation on private woodlands in Kespukwitk

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In Nova Scotia, nearly 70% of forested lands are privately owned, approximately 50% of which are classified as small (<2000ha). Many small private woodlands in Kespukwitk are managed for supplemental income for woodland owners and cumulatively contribute to a significant portion of the rural economy. Many also provide habitat for species at risk. Developing strategies that both involve and reward private woodland owners in species at risk (SAR) conservation efforts has been identified as a priority for species recovery in Kespukwitk. The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute launched a pilot program in 2022, called *Woodlands for Wildlife (WfW)*, that utilized small financial incentives and landowner recognition to encourage the protection of 20 at-risk birds, turtles, lichens, and tree species in Kespukwitk and worked with woodland owners to establish effective buffers around significant habitat, in addition to a series of species-specific beneficial management practices (BMPs). Landowners were then rewarded for their conservation efforts through an annual incentive payment tied directly to the total operable forested area included within the established buffers. Annual incentive values were calculated at a rate of \$20/acre to reflect the average value of the buffered area over an 80-year forest rotation. A total of 19 woodland owners participated in the WfW program in 2023, equating to 307.28 acres of significant forested SAR habitat protected within the incentivized buffer areas. Woodland owner response to the WFW program was generally very positive and retention high. Avenues toward long-term sustainability will be explored as the Woodlands for Wildlife program enters its third active year.

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