

October 7, 2011

# Voting for the Environment:

## *A review of party policies on environmental issues*

In late August, the Newfoundland and Labrador Environment Network sent a questionnaire to each of the parties requesting their respective policy positions on a number of issues: protected area establishment, forestry and mining practices, wetland protection, food security, and investment in environmental protection and education.

We gratefully acknowledge the effort made by each party to prepare responses to the questionnaire. The responses from each party (posted in their entirety on the NLEN website [www.nlen.ca](http://www.nlen.ca)), clearly demonstrate a level of commitment to advancement of environmental conservation goals regardless of political stripe.

There are some important differences in party positions on some issues, however, and varying approaches on the best path forward. This document compares party environmental policies through a review of the questionnaire responses and the party platforms. We hope that this information will encourage public dialogue on environmental issues and help catalyze action following election day.

This analysis has been prepared with input from several member groups of the NLEN: Canadian Boreal Initiative, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature NL, Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Educators, Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program, and Western Environment Centre. A summary table of questionnaire responses can be found at the end of this document. The NLEN is a non-partisan, non-governmental, not for profit environmental organisation.

### **Protected areas:**

There is unanimous, all-party support for the establishment of a network of protected areas spanning the province. Such a network would include areas representative of each of the province's 35 natural regions, and is the cornerstone for sustainable resource development. The NDP was the only party to specify a protection target – 12% of the landbase. The PCs have indicated that they would proceed with implementation of the plan following a public consultation process. The Liberals would tackle this issue through a land-use planning process in their first mandate. Commitments to establish a complete network of protected areas however, have appeared in the PC and other party policy platforms in past elections, and have not borne fruit.

With the recent announcement and overwhelming public support for the Mealy Mountains and Eagle River parks in Labrador, our province will reach 8% protection of our landbase. Though notable, it is still far short of recent commitments in neighbouring provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec to protect 12% of their provincial territory by 2015 and the 17% target recommended by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. So while whoever is elected on October 11<sup>th</sup> will have election promises to fulfill, the next government can take confidence in the fact that there is all-party support for creation of more protected areas, and that residents are awaiting action.

### **Sustainable Resource Development:**

*Ecosystem-based forest management:* The current government forest management strategy purports to be ecosystem-based, as pointed out in the PC response. However, past operating practice has often been contrary to those principles, particularly with respect to maintaining intact old-growth forest areas that are essential to the health of caribou and biodiversity in general. Each party responded to the question about applying ecosystem based principles to forest management practices with a different approach. The NDP has stated they will implement ecosystem based management to maintain biodiversity, a response in keeping with the Auditor General's recommendations from his 2010 report. The Liberal Party has committed to updating the 2003 Sustainable Forest Management Guidelines emphasizing old-growth forests and species at risk. The PCs on the other hand, have not promised policy development but rather have focused their commitments to developing and funding science and research towards furthering forest sustainability. The PCs rightly take credit for the establishment by government of a forest science group that is already working with stakeholders to resolve some of these issues.

While each approach is different, all should offer an opportunity for credible scientific input and public participation towards updating our current approach to forest management. Given the current vulnerability of caribou and other species at risk in our province, and the new higher standard of operating practices that customers of forest products are demanding, ecosystem based management will remain a key topic for the environmental community in Newfoundland and Labrador over the next four years.

*Mine waste management:* There are clearly different policy positions in regards to the highly controversial practice of using freshwater bodies as impoundments for mine tailings. The NDP indicate their support for a ban on this practice, while the PCs point to the fact that in the case of Sandy Pond, the project has successfully passed environmental assessment. The Sandy Pond Alliance (a coalition of environmental groups, scientists and concerned citizens) is challenging this in court and view the destruction of a freshwater body as unnecessary corporate subsidization at the expense of our shared natural heritage.

**Wetland protection:**

The Liberals are the only party that expressly states they will produce a wetland policy that protects sensitive areas from development and degradation. The Liberal party also states willingness to work to support and promote the ongoing Municipal Wetlands Stewardship Program administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation. The NDP indicate that their proposed provincial Land-Use Plan will include protection of wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas but they do not make express mention of implementing a specific wetlands policy. The PC party does not indicate that they will produce and implement a wetlands policy rather they draw upon their 2005 Climate Change Action Plan in their response. The PC response indicates that the Water Resources Management Division will continue to monitor trends in stream flows, lake levels, precipitation, water quality, and flood frequency to identify any climate change impacts, identify vulnerabilities and to design adaptation strategies and suggests a business as-usual-approach.

In light of the rapid expansion occurring within the Northeast Avalon region, parties were asked how they would set about protecting wetlands that are crucial to the region's environmental health. The NDP purport that their proposed provincial land use plan, Northeast Avalon Regional Plan, and Protected Areas Plan will address protection of water bodies, wetlands and ecologically sensitive areas within the Northeast Avalon. The PC party makes a repeated reference to ongoing monitoring activities undertaken by the Water Resources Management Division and state that ponds, rivers and wetlands crucial to Northeast Avalon's environmental health will be monitored and protected. The PC response makes no mention of establishing more protected areas within this rapidly expanding region. The Liberals did not submit a specific response to this question.

The environmental community would like to see the next government work towards ensuring a wetlands conservation policy is drafted and implemented, as other Atlantic provinces are in process of doing.

**Food security:**

Food security and sustainability are affected by multiple policies that cut across many different departments and sectors. We therefore need a comprehensive food strategy that addresses food issues of both supply and access at the community, regional and provincial levels.

All parties have suggested a myriad of strategies to deal with different aspects of our food system, however only the Liberal Party has committed specifically to creating a Food Security Strategy in consultation with stakeholders, as well as organizing a provincial food security summit in their first year of office.

All parties have committed to growing the local agrifood industry, both with primary production and secondary processing, to better serve the needs of the local population. Unfortunately, there was hardly a mention of specific plans to promote environmentally responsible farm production practices, despite the fact that all parties want growth in the industry. Only the PCs refer to support for organic farmers, however there is very little detail on how this will be done.

The Liberals suggest a Land Use Advisory Council to address the need for better access to and preservation of farmland. The NDP get points for mentioning the need to support rural communities to grow their local agriculture industry, but more detail is needed on how this would be put into practice. The PCs note that they will support a food security network as well as promote markets for domestic produce, and they are applauded for mentioning support for smaller sectors such as goat, sheep, turkey, beekeeping and non-timber forest products. Both the Liberals and PCs also address issues related to new entrants, which is a growing problem in the farming industry.

None of the parties have a plan that addresses food issues related to the fishery. There are many suggested strategies for supporting the fishing industry, which is now mainly geared toward supplying international markets, but very little on how such a valuable food source can be best used to feed the provincial population. When referring to aquaculture specifically, the PCs states that they will support “local consumption of locally grown fish” but no explanation on how this would happen. There is no mention of supplying local markets with wild caught fish. The NDP get points for their recommendation on research into the impact of aquaculture on the wild fishery, an issue which often gets overlooked in the push to grow the aquaculture industry.

#### **Investment in environmental protection:**

The parties were asked if they would invest a portion of non-renewable resource sector revenues into an environmental trust, to fund conservation, remediation and stewardship in the province. The Liberals responded by noting that they have committed to invest 10% of oil revenues in a Legacy Fund. Their platform does not specify how exactly this fund will support environmental goals. The NDP make no commitment to establish a fund, but many of their platform objectives are to be financed through a petroleum royalty surcharge. They do pledge to direct more funds to the Waste Management Strategy, expanding energy efficiency programs, upgrading the grid to accept locally-produced electricity, and helping communities develop green energy. The PCs make no commitment to establish an environmental trust fund, but they indicate that some of the revenue generated from non-renewable resource sectors is being invested in conservation, remediation and stewardship.

**Investment in environmental education:**

It is encouraging to note that all of the parties recognise the importance of investing in environmental education and fostering a sense of stewardship in our young people. The PCs have committed to consult with young people on the development of a new approach to engaging youth in green activism. The NDP platform commits to placing more teaching resources in schools and they express openness to ideas aimed at enhancing environmental education. The Liberals state that “today’s students are tomorrow’s environmental stewards”. Increased investment in *outdoor* education programs will offer a host of psychological, emotional and physiological benefits. Environmental education begins with simple appreciation and respect, and this can only be fostered if children have the opportunity to *be* outdoors and experience the natural world. Such experiences will get young adults interested in the environment, and in turn foster a new generation of environmental stewards.

	Progressive Conservative Party	New Democratic Party	Liberal Party
Protected Areas			
1. What is your party's protected areas target, and when will you achieve it?  How will your party accelerate the establishment of protected areas in NL?	No protected area target provided.  No timelines provided.  Commitment to proceed with implementation of the Natural Areas System Plan following public consultation.	NDP goal is 12% protection representing each of the province's 35 natural regions. .  No timelines provided.  Commitment to enact legislation to protect shorelands from development.	No protected area target provided.  Commitment to initiate a province-wide Land Use Planning process that identifies areas of the province requiring protected status in their first mandate.
2. Will your party initiate a province-wide land use planning process?	No direct response.	Yes.	Yes.
3. Will your party commit to full establishment of the Little Grand Lake Ecological Reserve within one year of the 2011 election?	No commitment.	Yes.	Yes.
In 2011, the federal government allocated \$5.5M to establish the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve over the next 5 years. Will your party make an equivalent budget allocation to establish the Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park in Labrador, as a companion investment?	No commitment on funding, but support for park establishment is confirmed.	No commitment on funding, but support for park establishment is confirmed.	No commitment on funding, but support for park establishment is confirmed.

Sustainable Resource Development			
<p>5. Will your party take measures to insure that ecosystem-based forestry management becomes a reality throughout the Province and the adequate habitat is maintained for all caribou populations?</p>	<p>Regarding forests, state they will continue to require timber resource analyses and forestry development;</p> <p>Commitment to complete establishment of the Centre for Forest Science and Innovation to draw together the expertise and research activities of the provincial and federal governments, Memorial University, College of the North Atlantic and other entities;</p> <p>Continued commitment to invest in developing our province's expertise in forest management and research.</p> <p>Regarding caribou, continued commitment that hunting quota decisions will be guided by the application of sustainable development principles. Hunting will be closed if scientists recommend that populations cannot support hunting.</p>	<p>Commitment to adopt forest ecosystem management regulations for harvesting and silviculture to maintain biodiversity.</p>	<p>Regarding forests, commit to update and implement the Provincial Sustainable Forest Management Strategy (2003) with particular emphasis on old growth forests and species at risks.</p> <p>Regarding caribou, will collaborate with outfitters, Aboriginal groups, and the general public to implement a comprehensive study of the caribou populations in the province and will initiate regulations and controls that will protect the sustainability of the herds.</p>
<p>6. Will your party oppose concessions to the mining industry that allows the destruction of freshwater ecosystems?</p>	<p>No commitment to do so. Indicated that a thorough environmental assessment of the proposed mineral</p>	<p>Yes. Commitment to ban the dumping of mine and industrial waste in natural water bodies and environmentally</p>	<p>No response.</p>

	processing operation on the southern Avalon determined that using a freshwater pond to reduce the impact of byproducts on the environment was a responsible course of action.	sensitive areas.	
<b>Wetland Protection</b>			
7. If your party forms the next government will it produce and implement a wetlands policy that protects these sensitive areas from development and degradation?	Commitment to keep a close watch on trends in stream flows, lake levels, rainfall, snowfall, water quality and flood frequency to identify any climate change impacts, identify vulnerabilities and to design adaptation strategies through activities of the Waters Resources Management Division.	The proposed NDP Land-Use Plan will include protection of wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas.	Yes. Commit to produce and implement a wetlands policy that protects sensitive areas from development and degradation.  As well as develop a wetlands protection strategy to ensure that ponds, rivers and wetlands that are crucial to the area's environmental health are preserved.
8. The Northeast Avalon is experiencing unprecedented economic growth and development. If your party forms the next government how will it set about protecting the ponds, rivers and wetlands that are crucial to the area's environmental health? Will this include establishment of more protected areas within the region?	No additional measures proposed beyond what is outlined in response to question 7.	Will rely on the Land Use Policy, the Northeast Avalon Regional Plan and the Protected Areas Plan to provide protection of wetlands.	No response.



Food Security			
<p>9. We currently do not produce enough food to feed our population and we are losing important knowledge and skills related to food. Our province also has some of the highest obesity rates, as well as food bank usage across the country. Considering these challenges, how would your party work to support community-based solutions to food security?</p>	<p>Will support the “slow food” movement, which aims to promote increased supply of local food demand with locally-grown food products.</p> <p>Further commitment to work with farmers to ensure Newfoundland and Labrador is able to supply increasingly more of the foods we consume.</p> <p>Also to work to encourage Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to purchase and consume more locally-produced food products.</p> <p>Will promote the purchase and use of Newfoundland and Labrador-produced foods by Newfoundland and Labrador schools, hospitals and other public institutions.</p> <p>And will promote the growth of a local food security network, develop domestic produce markets and assist growers.</p>	<p>NDP platform includes measures to protect farmland, encourage the expansion agrifoods for local markets, help communities develop local agriculture, protect our fishery with more marine ecosystem research, and establish a seafood marketing council focused on local markets as well as exports.</p>	<p>Commit to enhancing food security through investments in local producers; and implementation of a Food Security Strategy that sets benchmarks which must be achieved within identified time frames.</p> <p>Will host a provincial food security summit during the first year of their mandate.</p>
Investment in environmental protection			

<p>10. This year, Newfoundland and Labrador is projected to reap a windfall profit from oil production that could boost provincial revenue by \$600 Million. The royalties from oil and gas and mineral development will mean windfall profits for the province for years to come. Will you invest a portion of windfall profits into an environmental trust, to fund conservation, remediation and stewardship in the province?</p>	<p>No commitment to establish an environmental trust fund.</p> <p>Indicate that some of the revenue generated from non-renewable resource sectors is being invested in conservation, remediation and stewardship.</p>	<p>No commitment to establish an environmental trust fund. However, the NDP proposes to introduce a “petroleum royalty surcharge” to pay for its various new initiatives.</p> <p>Commit to directing more funds to the Waste Management Strategy, expanding energy efficiency programs and creating a new program for non-residential buildings, upgrading the grid to accept locally-produced electricity, and helping communities develop green energy.</p>	<p>Commit to invest 10% of oil revenues in a Legacy Fund. It is not specified how that money could support environmental goals.</p>
<p>11. If your party forms the government how will it respond to the cuts in research and environmental protection being implemented by Environment Canada in this province?</p>	<p>General commitment to increasing the spending on research. No specific targets for environmental research. Reference is made to new fisheries scientific research initiatives.</p>	<p>Commit to work collaboratively with the other Atlantic provinces to oppose these cuts and examine what else can be done collectively to safeguard these functions.</p>	<p>Commit to aggressively oppose the cuts.</p> <p>May review and make adjustments to the current provincial environmental strategy to mitigate the effects of the cuts.</p>
<p>To</p>			
<p>Investment in environmental education</p>			
<p>12. How do you think the school system can teach students to better appreciate the need for sustaining a healthy environment in Newfoundland and Labrador?</p>	<p>Indicate they have placed significant emphasis on science and innovation, beginning in K-12.</p> <p>They reference the 2011 Coastal and Ocean</p>	<p>Platform includes placing more teaching resources in schools. They stress the importance of education to ensure future sustainability and openness to ideas</p>	<p>No concrete actions proposed.</p> <p>But state that today’s students are tomorrow’s environmental stewards. Allowing</p>

	<p>Management Strategy And Policy Framework which commits to “promote local initiatives and educational programs aimed at enhancing marine education and increasing youth involvement in coastal and ocean stewardship activities across the province.”</p> <p>Commit to consult with young people on the development of a new approach to engaging youth in green activism.</p> <p>Recognizing the opportunities available to graduates with a firm grounding in the sciences, the PCs commit to work with school boards and teachers to encourage students to choose science courses.</p> <p>Will provide funding to update science laboratories and equipment. Will also augment high school curriculum in ways that will showcase the work of scientists and innovators.</p>	<p>aimed at enhancing environmental education.</p>	<p>students the opportunity to learn about the environment will make them more aware of the environment, the importance of it and afford them the opportunity to make better choices. We are a province surrounded by water and therefore have a right, responsibility and an incredible opportunity to teach students the value of the land and the sea as well as the organisms associated with each.</p>
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# 2011 PROVINCIAL ELECTION - NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY QUESTIONNAIRE

## Protected Areas

1. In 2011, the provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia unveiled their plans to protect 12% of their provincial landmass by the year 2015. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity recommends 17% protection as a target for terrestrial protected areas coverage. What is your party's protected areas target, and when will you achieve it? How will your party accelerate the establishment of protected areas in NL?

Question from: Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Newfoundland and Labrador *and* Protected Areas Association of Newfoundland and Labrador

2. Will your party initiate a province-wide land use planning process?

Question from: Nature Newfoundland and Labrador

3. Establishment of the Little Grand Lake Ecological Reserve has been stalled at the "provisional" stage for many years. Will your party commit to full establishment of the Little Grand Lake Ecological Reserve within one year of the 2011 election?

4. In 2011, the federal government allocated \$5.5M to establish the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve over the next 5 years. Will your party make an equivalent budget allocation to establish the Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park in Labrador, as a companion investment?

Questions from: Protected Areas Association of Newfoundland and Labrador

## Sustainable Resource Development

5. Will your party take measures to insure that ecosystem-based forestry management becomes a reality throughout the Province and the adequate habitat is maintained for all caribou populations?

6. Will your party oppose concessions to the mining industry that allows the destruction of freshwater ecosystems?

Questions from: Nature Newfoundland and Labrador

## **Wetland protection**

7. Wetlands are crucial to flood control, clean water and healthy habitats, and are also a major source of stored soil carbon. The carbon storage in the soils and peatlands of Newfoundland and Labrador is equal to 118 years of all of Canada's emissions at 2006 levels. If your party forms the next government will it produce and implement a wetlands policy that protects these sensitive areas from development and degradation?

Question from:

Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program *and* Ducks Unlimited Canada

8. The Northeast Avalon is experiencing unprecedented economic growth and development. If your party forms the next government how will it set about protecting the ponds, rivers and wetlands that are crucial to the area's environmental health? Will this include establishment of more protected areas within the region?

Question from: Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program

## **Food Security**

9. Food security is a challenge in Newfoundland and Labrador. We currently do not produce enough food to feed our population and we are losing important knowledge and skills related to food. Our province also has some of the highest obesity rates, as well as food bank usage across the country. Considering these challenges, how would your party work to support community-based solutions to food security?

Question from: Western Environment Centre

## **Investment in environmental protection**

10. This year, Newfoundland and Labrador is projected to reap a windfall profit from oil production that could boost provincial revenue by \$600 Million. The royalties from oil and gas and mineral development will mean windfall profits for the province for years to come. Will you invest a portion of windfall profits into an environmental trust, to fund conservation, remediation and stewardship in the province? (Note: In 2008, Nova Scotia invested \$25 Million in such a fund).

11. If your party forms the government how will it respond to the cuts in research and environmental protection being implemented by Environment Canada in this province?

Questions from: Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program

## **Investment in environmental education**

12. How do you think the school system can teach students to better appreciate the need for sustaining a healthy environment in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Question from: Whale Release and Strandings

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