

The Chignecto Isthmus: Keeping it Connected

What is the Chignecto Isthmus?

The Chignecto Isthmus is the narrow stretch of land that joins the province of Nova Scotia to the province of New Brunswick and the North American continent. It contains extensive wetlands, woodlands, and coastal habitats, several cities and towns and major transportation routes.



Map of the Chignecto Isthmus showing the main roads and communities. (Adapted from *multimap* online, 2005 AND Data Ireland, Ltd.)

A Strategic Location

Because of its central location, the Isthmus has long been an important travel corridor. Approximately 12,000 years ago, following the retreat of the glaciers that covered the Maritimes, the Isthmus was one of two land routes to the Nova Scotia peninsula. The other is now under the waters of the Atlantic Ocean! In more recent times, the rivers and creeks of the Isthmus provided a transportation route for Mi'kmaq and later Acadians and British travelling between the Bay of Fundy and the Northumberland Strait. Today, the Trans-Canada Highway and CN rail lines criss-cross the Isthmus. In addition to the Isthmus's role as a human transportation corridor, it is also an important ecological corridor. For this reason, conservation groups like CPAWS are working to protect and restore its natural habitats.

What is the importance of the Isthmus to the Acadian Forest?

As the only terrestrial link to Nova Scotia, the Isthmus plays an important role in maintenance of "ecological connectivity" within the Acadian Forest Region. Ecological connectivity refers to the ability of plants and animals (individuals and populations) to mix and move across a landscape, in this case between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. This connectivity on the isthmus may help to maintain current wildlife populations and allow for ecosystems to adapt to changes occurring in the environment (for example, climate change).

Quick Facts about the Chignecto Isthmus

Width – At its narrowest, the Isthmus is only 21 km wide.

Length – the core Isthmus area is only 25 km long, however the area of connectivity interest is from Moncton, NB to Pictou, NS, a distance of 170 km.

Principle Ecosystems

Upland mixed forest, lowland coniferous forest, bog, freshwater marshes and small lakes, saltmarshes, dykelands

Characteristic Forest Species

Plants: Red Spruce, Black Spruce, Red Maple, White Birch, Yellow Birch, Wild Raisin, Bunchberry, Pink Lady's Slipper, Bluebeard Lily; **Mammals:** Moose, White-tailed Deer, Coyote, Fisher, Bobcat, Black bear; **Birds:** Bald Eagle, Northern Goshawk, Barred Owl, Spruce Grouse, Ruffed Grouse, Black-capped Chickadee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Blue Jay, Gray Jay, White-throated Sparrow.

Reptiles and Amphibians: Garter Snake, Wood Frog, Spring Peeper

Nearby Towns and Cities

New Brunswick: Moncton, Dieppe, Shediac, Cap Pele, Cape Tormentine, Port Elgin, Sackville

Nova Scotia: Amherst, Northport, Port Howe, Springhill and Oxford..

Population

The population from Moncton to Truro and Pictou is approximately 188,000. This includes the cities and towns of Moncton (61,000), Dieppe (15,000), Sackville (5,300) Amherst (9,400), Springhill (4,000), Truro (11,500) and Pictou (4,000). Almost twice as many people (124,000) live in towns and cities as live in rural areas (64,000).

Major Highways on the Isthmus

Highway 2 - the Trans Canada - spans the Isthmus from the northwest to southeast. Route 16 crosses the Isthmus from southwest to northeast.

Why be concerned about the Chignecto Isthmus?

There is an extensive network of **roads** on the Isthmus, from major highways to woods roads. These roads may restrict the ability of wildlife to move across the landscape. Moose, for example, have been shown to avoid areas with road densities similar to those found on much of the Isthmus.

Development in the rapidly growing communities of Greater Moncton and Shediac has the potential to pinch off natural connections to the west of the isthmus.

Though the majority of the land on the Isthmus remains forested, management of these forests has greatly altered the natural **forest composition**, resulting in much less of certain types of forest habitats that used to be on the Isthmus. Analysis by the Greater Fundy Ecosystem Research Group found that only a tiny percentage of lands in the Shinimicas and Tidnish River watersheds (NS) maintain mature tolerant hardwood and pine stands.

While agriculture on the Isthmus is focused around the dykelands, upland areas are being converted from forest to fields for potato and “wild” blueberry cultivation. Such land use changes contribute to the fragmentation of the Isthmus.

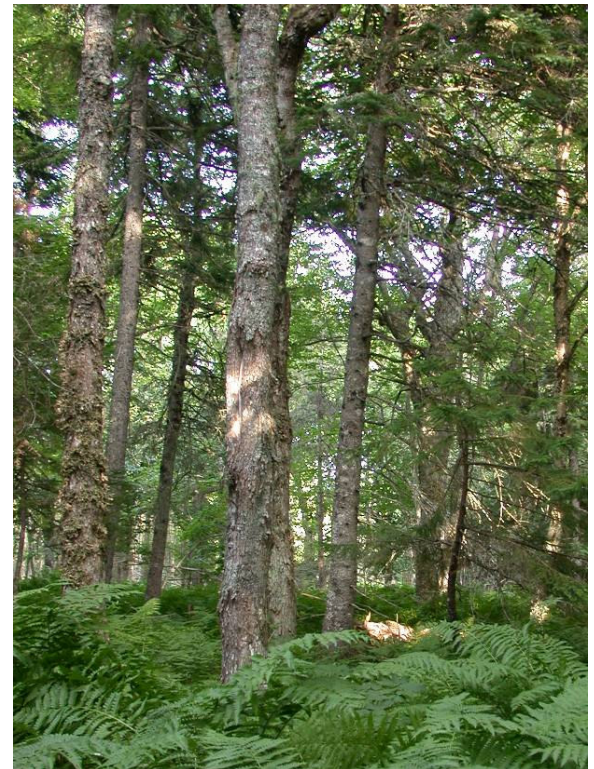
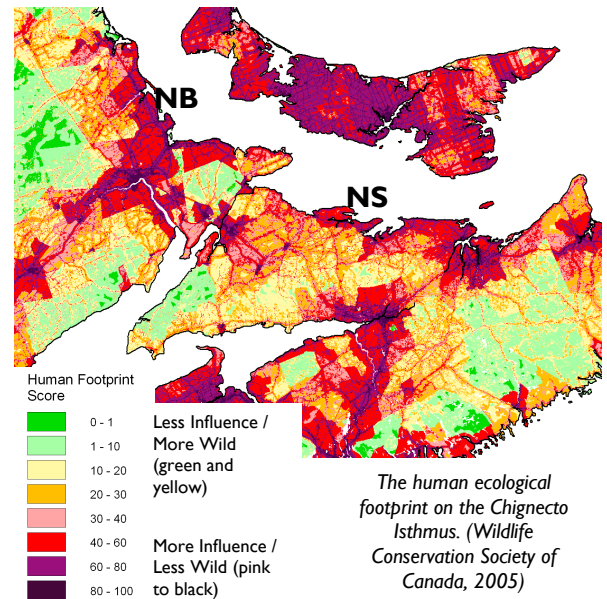
What can be done to keep the Isthmus connected?

Several areas on and beside the Isthmus are under special management. As natural area anchors for connectivity, the Canaan Bog Protected Natural Area is located to the north-west and the Chignecto Game Sanctuary to the south-west. On the Isthmus, the Amherst Wellfield Protected Area and Tintamarre National Wildlife Area are important **core areas** for conserving natural linkages.

Promotion of **forest management** that conserves the full diversity of natural forest types and maintains appropriate habitat for wildlife movement would help to conserve connections between the anchor areas and core protected areas on the Isthmus. Promotion of management plan development and forest certification are two tools that could help to shift harvesting towards more wildlife-friendly practices.

Regional planning commissions have the ability to influence development patterns and to designate green spaces and important environmental areas. The Town of Amherst and the Cumberland, Tantramar, Beaubassin and Greater Moncton Planning Commissions could play a positive role in conserving natural corridors on the Isthmus.

Protecting natural habitat and reducing forest fragmentation may also be of interest to other organisations working in the area. For example, natural corridors would not only benefit wildlife but could also serve as headwater protection for the many rivers that drain the Isthmus, making watershed conservation organisations logical **partners** in the effort to improve habitat conservation.



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