

# The Changing Role of Enforcement

By Emily Gratton

The term “conservation officers” used to conjure up images of men in chilly wooded stake-outs looking to catch poachers or deer-jackers. Today there’s a lot more to the job. Conservation Officers (COs) are just as apt to be found visiting schools and forestry operations, patrolling provincial parks, or ensuring the protection of habitat of an endangered species such as the piping plover.

## Want to become a partner in community policing ?

- Talk to your neighbours and local CO about possible problems
- Share your suggestions on problem solving
- Work with COs to implement strategies to address problems

Remember, enforcement agencies can deal with individual offenders, but cannot solve underlying community problems without the participation of the citizens.

While sometimes dismissed as “the Bambi police,” nothing could be further from the truth. Conservation Officers have the authority to enforce a number of laws. For example, COs can lay charges under the Off-Highway Vehicle Act if they encounter an underage operator, an unregistered vehicle, an operator with no helmet, or someone operating while impaired. Under the Parks Act, a CO patrolling in a provincial park can charge an individual who may be breaking laws pertaining to domestic violence or the use of alcohol or controlled substances. Or, under the Beaches Protection Act, COs enforce laws relating to wharf construction, infilling, operation of motor vehicles on beaches, impairment, or environmental and habitat protection.

Besides diversifying their areas of involvement, COs have also changed the way they approach the job. They’ve moved away from traditional reactive methods to a more proactive approach. While the traditional consisted of the three R’s—random patrols, rapid response, and reactive investigation, the focus is now on the three P’s—prevention, problem solving, and partnership with the community.

The concept of community isn’t new. It dates back to the 1820s in Britain when Robert Peel, father of England’s renown police force known as “bobbies,” espoused the idea. Peel promoted the philosophy that a police force should function as a reflection of the needs and interests of the community. He believed the citizens of the community needed to play a key role in the development and delivery of policing services, and that both the enforcement agency and the community must consider the underlying problems causing crime before illegal behavior could be eliminated.

The success of this type of program hinges on having an effective partnership between the enforcement agency and the community. This allows the emphasis to be placed on crime prevention and attempting to eliminate the societal problems that result in criminal activity. This community focus empowers citizens to assume a substantive role in identifying problems and working to find solutions. It also considers the profile of the community, factors like size and socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual attitudes. In short, it is citizen-oriented, knowledgeable about and interested in the community, proactive, visible, and accountable.





An example of the program's effectiveness is a marsh in Cape Breton which for years had been burned each spring. Traditional patrol and surveillance methods, tracking dogs, and helicopter searches had failed to find or stop the perpetrators. The local CO decided to visit the school and homes surrounding the marsh. He explained how burning the marsh served no biological purpose, destroyed wildlife habitat, and posed a risk of burning homes and property, or even injuring someone. This open and informative outreach increased awareness and achieved cooperation. The marsh has not been burned since the visits.

While less time may be spent in traditional surveillance activity to catch wildlife infringements, considerable time is dedicated to wildlife protection, although now the emphasis is often away from protection of a specific species to the protection of significant habitats. This became a larger share of COs' duties with the role of monitoring compliance to the new statutes and amendments to the Forests Act, such as the Forest Sustainability Regulations and the Wildlife Habitat and Watercourses Protection Regulations.

So look around. You're apt to see DNR's conservation officers in many places, helping to ensure the protection of our natural resources.

## **Mission Statement:** **In cooperation with the community, improve the quality of life in Nova Scotia by protecting, conserving, and enhancing our natural resources.**

Conservation officers have been on the job since the Department of Lands and Forests was established in 1926. Today, DNR's Enforcement Division has about 33 full-time and 30 part-time officers and includes female and Aboriginal officers. DNR has the highest entrance standards of any enforcement agency in the province, requiring grade 12 graduation, post-secondary study in natural resources, and successful completion of a 16-week program at the Atlantic Police Academy.

The Enforcement Division is part of DNR's Regional Services Branch. In each of the province's three regions, an enforcement coordinator administers the enforcement program in that region and liaises with outside agencies and groups on enforcement matters.

## **Statutes and regulations enforced:**

Angling Act	Beaches Act
Crown Lands Act	Forests Act
Wilderness Areas Protection Act	Wildlife Act
Boating Restriction Regulations	Trails Act
Small Vessel Regulations	Provincial Parks Act
Off-Highway Vehicles Act	Federal Fisheries Act
Migratory Bird Convention Act	Canada Shipping Act
Endangered Species Act	

Regulations pertaining to Federal and Provincial Sanctuaries, Wildlife Parks, Wildlife Management, and Protected Areas

By their oath/affirmation of office as Special Constables, conservation officers also have the authority to enforce laws pertaining to the Liquor Control Act, the Criminal Code of Canada, the Controlled Drug and Substance Act as well as a variety of laws related to the possession and use of firearms.