

Forests Panel of Expertise
Bob Bancroft, Donna Crossland, and Jonathan Porter

October 30, 2009

RE: Stakeholder Submission, Natural Resources Strategy 2010

Dear Panel:

We're pleased to submit the following recommendations regarding forest management in Nova Scotia. As you may be aware, the Ecology Action Centre is a long-supporter of sustainable forestry in NS. We advocate for ecologically and socially responsible forestry and a vibrant, diversified forest industry.

We support the document published by Voluntary Planning regarding Nova Scotians' values on natural resources. Specifically, we draw your attention to Voluntary Planning's statement that the status quo is not an option: "Across Nova Scotia, a resounding call for change has been voiced. Current natural resource practices for all uses and all users are not sustainable." We also draw your attention to Voluntary Planning's statements regarding clearcutting:

"Many Nova Scotians expressed concern about clearcutting and its role in forest management, indicating that the practice should be banned or its use greatly restricted.... Clearcutting was often identified as an over-used technique and a leading cause for reduced forest diversity.... There was, however, general consensus that Nova Scotians should reduce their reliance on clear-cutting as a dominant form of forest harvest and that regulations pertaining to clear-cutting should be consistently enforced. Thus it was felt that the new forest strategy must include a transition away from clear-cutting and toward less environmentally disruptive harvesting methods."

As I'm sure you appreciate, your task is to recommend just how this transition should proceed.

The following is a response to the questions you posed in your invitation to provide a submission; we also encourage you to re-visit our original submission to Voluntary Planning during Phase I of this review process.

At your convenience, we wish to meet with you to discuss our recommendations and the rationales behind them.

Sincerely,

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1. Forest management goals and practices:

Yes, forestry should be based on emulating natural disturbance regimes. The difficulty is deciding what the natural disturbances regime is for a given area. At present, there is no comprehensive, scientifically credible description of the natural disturbance regimes of Nova Scotia. Nonetheless, the best available information on the subject shows that the Acadian Forest region is dominated by small-scale, frequent disturbances; large-scale, stand-replacing disturbance occur on the scale of centuries, perhaps from 300 to 1200 years apart. We are not aware of any science to the contrary.

An equally important aspect of sound forest management planning is an understanding of Forest Ecosystem Classification, which provides an approximate blueprint of the naturally occurring dominant tree species for a given site. Restoring species abundances and distribution to approximate natural levels is a key requirement of the FSC Maritime certification standard, and the FEC can help to provide guidance to this end.

Riparian zones are critical elements of the forest ecosystem. Ensuring functional riparian zones may require increasing the width of these zones to 50 or even 100 metres in places where even-aged harvesting is used. Partial cutting within these zones could relieve some concerns over timber loss caused by widened buffers.

Recommendations:

- a. Require Forest Ecosystem Classification goals to be incorporated into management plans as a prerequisite to receiving silviculture funding.
- b. Increase riparian buffer zones to at least 50 metres when even-aged harvesting is used.

2. Crown land management

Crown land should be managed with exemplary practices. One way to ensure a minimum level of responsible management is to require FSC certification of all Crown lands. This is the “gold standard” for forest certification, and requires higher environmental performance than other certification schemes. We anticipate that exemplary management of Crown lands would lead to a dramatic reduction in clearcutting.

Crown lands must be managed for the highest public good, given that they are held in trust for the people of Nova Scotia. Current management of Crown land should be evaluated to identify changes to improve the public benefit from Crown lands.

Recommendations:

- a. Phase in FSC certification for Crown lands.
- b. Provide training to DNR staff to enable them to assist Crown license-holders in pursuing FSC certification.
- c. Purchase lands to increase the Crown land area.
- d. Open Crown lands to community forestry pilot projects.
- e. Adopt a set of ‘genuine progress’ indicators to measure the costs and benefits of Crown land management to the public good.

3. Private land management and support

Landowners play an important role in maintaining a healthy environment; the lands they own provide ecological services upon which the rest of society depends. Given this, landowners ought to be provided with incentives to help ensure that ecologically responsible land management is not an economic burden.

Recommendations:

- a. Increase the proportion of Category 7 funding over five years to 50%, with 5% as an immediate target.
- b. Maintain or expand the education and outreach component of Category 7.
- c. Provide training workshops on quality hardwood management.
- d. Increase the rate paid for crop-tree release and selection harvests to ensure these practices are economically possible.
- e. Expand the mandate of the Association for Sustainable Forestry to administer all silvicultural funds. Increase the number of ASF offices from 1 to 3 (one for each region).
- f. Explore the possibility of enabling the ASF or woodlot owner groups to create log sort yards for high-value logs.
- g. Remove the 'credit' system from silviculture funding – i.e., directly tie work done to dollars spent.
- h. Eliminate funding for herbicides.
- i. Eliminate funding for plantations that do not meet the "natural forest" requirement as stipulated in the FSC Maritime standard.
- j. Investigate the possibility of incentives for landowners based on ecological goods and services.
- k. Create new categories of silviculture funding: one for management plans and one for FSC certification.
- l. If the silviculture credit system is not eliminated in favour of directly tying work to dollars spent, then, over a phase-in period, reduce credit value for even-age treatments, while increasing credit value for uneven-aged treatments.
- m. Create a fund to purchase working-forest conservation easements on large tracts of forest land, and provide DNR with the capacity to pursue working-forest conservation easements, especially on industrial timberlands.

4. Forest protection

Generally, fire is not a driving natural ecological force in the Acadian Forest. The vast majority of fires in the Maritimes are human-caused, and our natural forest ecosystems are not fire dependent. Given this, there is no need to encourage fire, and every reason to suppress fires when they do occur. There may also be a need to restrict those activities with a high risk of causing forest fires.

Exotic, invasive species need to be assessed on a case by case basis for the magnitude of their potential threat and solutions for control. Any program for their control must be balanced against the potential negative consequences of the control strategy. The 'cure' should not be worse than the threat.

Natural and exotic insect pests should be managed largely through silvicultural techniques (encouraging mixed wood conditions, reduce balsam fir and other vulnerable species, promote forest bird diversity and abundance by ensuring abundant habitat). Accepting the potential of small short-term loss is necessary. Salvage harvesting can help to make up some of this loss. Attempting large-scale control of insect outbreaks through chemical or biological control means is not advisable. Such strategy has been shown to prolong insect outbreaks, such as the spruce budworm.

Herbicide application is currently subsidized with government funding. As noted above, this funding should be eliminated.

Recommendations:

- a. Not do permit prescribed burning.
- b. Continue to suppress forest fires.
- c. Establish a protocol for assessing the threat of exotic, invasive species, and creating a balanced response.
- d. Re-work criteria for funded silviculture treatments to ensure they promote the appropriate diversity of species for a given site, according to DNR's Forest Ecosystem Classification.
- e. Prohibit recreational ATV use in forests during times of open-fire bans.

5. Stewardship and Education

Recommendation:

- a. Revitalize DNR's extension service, with emphasis on assisting landowners in uneven-age management approaches.

6. Legal Framework

At times, it appears that legislation and regulation affecting forestry are not adequately enforced. There are reports of timber theft and violations of the NS Wildlife Habitat and Watercourse Protection Regulations going unpunished.

In general, the promoter of an industry should not also be the regulator. We suggest moving responsibility for regulating forestry to the Department of Environment.

There is need for new legislation addressing clearcutting in general, and liquidation cutting specifically.

Recommendations:

- a. Ensure rigorous enforcement of existing regulations.
- b. Consider a requirement for forestry contractors to post performance bonds.

- c. Move responsibility for regulating forestry to the Department of Environment.
- d. Create legislation to address clearcutting.

7. Other:

i. climate change

DNR forestry policy must be cast within the framework of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Recommendation:

- a. create a climate change strategy to address mitigation and adaptation at both landscape and stand levels, and which includes specific changes to technical requirements for silviculture treatments

ii. forest biomass harvesting

Harvesting forest biomass for fuel must not compromise forest health and productivity.

Recommendation:

- a. Create a biomass harvesting regulation that disallows whole-tree harvesting.
- b. Modify the Wildlife Habitat and Watercourse Protection Regulations to make the coarse woody debris deadwood retention requirement measurable and enforceable.

iii. clearcutting

As articulated in the Voluntary Report, the new Natural Resources Strategy must include a transition away from clearcutting. This will include a combination of regulations and incentives.

Recommendations:

- a. Pass legislation to restrict clearcutting; this may include a requirement for clearcuts to be justified on the basis of DNR's Forest Ecosystem Classification.
- b. Ensure DNR staff are well trained and versed in uneven-aged management techniques.
- c. As previously mentioned, alter silviculture funding level to make even-aged techniques less financially desirable and uneven-aged techniques more so.
- d. Promote working-forest conservation easements.
- e. Promote FSC certification.

iv. logging roads

Nova Scotia's forests are fragmented by several thousand kilometres of logging roads. Direct and indirect impacts of logging roads cause significant harm to the forest ecosystem. Much of this road network is not in use, and represents unnecessary maintenance expenses. NewPage Corp. has addressed this issue by preparing a road impact mitigation plan for its Crown lease.

Recommendations:

- a. DNR should prepare road impact mitigation plans for all remaining unprotected Crown lands.
- b. DNR should identify roads on Crown land for active and passive decommissioning.
- c. DNR should promote road decommissioning on private lands.