

Atlantic Forestry Review - January 2008

Our industry has been on the “down turn” for a few years now, leaving woodlot owners, contractors, sawyers, truckers, equipment sales outlets etc. feeling very curious and uneasy about what will become of the forest industry in Nova Scotia. As always, the successful will adapt as the rest close shop. In the big picture there are forces at work that the industry has not had to deal with in earlier years, such as: global production and marketing competition, changing weather patterns that induce a great many new pest problems, shortage of skilled laborers in the Atlantic provinces, shortage of quality saw-timber, soaring fuel prices, and a strong movement toward environmentally improved harvesting practices. Add to that the short –term market influences, such as: the strong dollar here at home, slack housing start-up rates in the U.S. and the glut of extra lumber flooding the market from Mountain Pine Beetle salvage operations out west.

I believe the crunch has come and many are wondering what adaptations they can possibly make to survive. Those who are willing to admit that this is more than a cyclical down turn in the market, - and more realistically, a culmination of forces that are truly challenging the existence of forestry as we know it in Nova Scotia- may be the only ones who can guide the industry through the “transition” to its new form.

The transition that we face is adaptation from short –rotation, quantity based forest production to long-rotation, quality based forest production. Government, industry and private sectors need to work together to view the big picture. How can the forests of Nova Scotia be managed and utilized to their greatest potential? An effort needs to be made by woodlot owners and groups, contractors, sawmills, brokers and wood products facilities to develop marketing networks. Lower availability of quality timber, and higher production costs due to factors previously mentioned, means that harvested wood must end up in its highest value market in order to remain globally competitive. Decreasing raw wood product exports, and developing more value-added initiatives can replace jobs being lost elsewhere in the industry, while also increasing the per unit value of harvested wood.

With major changes come new opportunities. Woodlot owners, woods workers and sawyers are a resourceful and savvy bunch, usually keen to try new ideas. If government and industry players embrace the transition and work together with those on the ground level by providing support and encouragement of new ventures, I believe the industry can be redeveloped to succeed in being profitable and sustainable.

Hopefully, the transitional adjustment funds received throughout the industry from the provincial government will be put to good use in preparing for the new challenges we face. A new program being delivered through the Association for Sustainable Forestry, and funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources promoting uneven-aged forest management, is an excellent opportunity for woodlot owners and harvesting/ silviculture contractors to learn more about crop tree management and selection harvesting techniques, and to secure funding to get the work done. Programs of this

nature are a step in the right direction in promoting education and awareness of necessary changes to ensure sustainability of Nova Scotia's forests.

FNSWO coordinator, Andrew Fedora will be off on sick leave for the next few weeks recovering from scheduled surgery. Federation members and woodlot owners who have general inquiries regarding woodland owner issues may leave a message at the office at 902-639-2041. Board members will return your calls as soon as possible. To find out about becoming a member of the FNSWO, contact us at info@fnswoc.ca. Have a safe and happy holiday!

Mike Hutchinson, interim board member for Western NS