

Chronicle Herald – October 2005

Forestry for Thought

In 2000, the Nova Scotia Government introduced the Forest Sustainability Regulations. The main intent of these regulations is to ensure that the current level of forest harvesting on privately owned woodlands remains sustainable. The introduction of these new regulations has generated a considerable amount of debate within the woodlands community. There are those who believe that the regulations are achieving exactly what they were intended to. Others strongly feel that the regulations compromise the health and sustainability of our Acadian forest type. It is very likely that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of these two arguments.

For someone who has little involvement with forest management, these regulations can be confusing at best. For this reason, it is important that any information provided to a woodland owner is as accurate and unbiased as possible. It is our belief that people should be given a chance to formulate their own opinion based on the whole truth.

The Ecology Action Center's October 18th article in the Chronicle Herald would have you believe that the Forest Sustainability Regulations are failing and at the expense of Nova Scotia's tax payers. Like any new system, there is room for improvement; which is why the regulations are reviewed every five years. However, the picture that is painted by Minga O'Brien and Joanne Cook is incomplete.

In response to the question "Why would the government promote the Millers as model woodlot owners but not grant them financial support?", according to the Association for Sustainable Forestry, the organization responsible for administering the sustainable forestry fund, the Millers have never applied for funding. It is also interesting to note that Mr. Miller is the President of the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association. Perhaps another question to ponder is why would the president of an organization that appears to have some serious issues with the decisions made by Natural Resources accept an award from them?

The comment "the Millers have been toiling away for a decade with no government support, while others are receiving handsome subsidies from the province for clear-cutting their woodlots and turning them into softwood tree farms" is inaccurate. In addition, the statement that "Nova Scotian Taxpayers contribute \$3 million dollars a year to this program" is misleading.

The majority of the money used to implement silviculture practices in Nova Scotia comes directly from landowners involved in forestry and those who purchase the wood. The Government contributes one third of the funding available for silviculture treatments on small-private woodlands. The remainder of the cost is covered by industry and woodland owners. Taxpayer's money is not used to carry out silviculture on industry owned lands.

To put it in perspective, close to \$11 million worth of silviculture was completed on small-private woodlands in 2004. \$3.6 million was contributed by taxpayers. The remaining \$7.4 million was covered by landowners and industry. Previous to the new Forest Sustainability Regulations, taxpayers contributed \$12 million annually to small-private woodland management.

The EAC's article leads the reader to believe that the Forest Sustainability Regulations were created by industry and enforced by government. What is not mentioned is that the recommendations were approved by a well rounded forestry technical advisory committee. A wide variety of interests including small-private woodland owners, industry, NGO's, government officials and environmentalists are represented on this committee. The committee reviewed recommendations from over 60 different organizations representing all interests in Nova Scotia. The Forest Sustainability Regulations are a direct result of the committee's recommendations to the Minister of Natural Resources. Any recommendations made by the committee must be agreed upon by all members. Whether or not the regulations promote balanced forest management is another issue. The fact remains that they were democratically decided upon by a diverse group of people with a diverse range of interests.

The Forestry Technical Advisory Committee and Forest Sustainability Regulations are a positive step towards the balanced management of our woodlands. Since the program was first introduced, there has been a significant increase in the amount of silviculture work being carried out on small private woodlands. Most of the work that is being carried out is on areas that have been neglected due to lack of funding and poor management practices. It's no secret that the forest industry has made some mistakes in the past and much needs to be done to secure our forest's future but we shouldn't be so quick to dismiss any current successes.

The Federation of Nova Scotia Woodland Owners believes that people should be given the opportunity to make their own decisions regarding the state of our forests. For this reason, part of our mandate is to ensure that complete, accurate and unbiased information is available for woodland owners. If you are interested in discussing the facts outlined in this article or would like to find out about the various issues affecting Nova Scotia woodland owners, please contact us @ (902)-639-2041. You may also send email messages to afedora@fnswoodland.ca. If you are interested in direct consultation, we will be hosting our Annual General Meeting in Truro on Saturday, October 22nd at the Glengarry Hotel. The meeting will begin at 10:00am.