

PRESENTATION TO SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATURE

by
Richard Walker
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and Honorable members of the Select Committee on Wood Supply. I am Richard Walker, a graduate of the U.N.B. forestry program. I have been retired now approaching four years. I was employed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for thirty-two and a half years in Fredericton, Campbellton and Miramichi as a forester, silviculture forester and for the last twenty years as Regional Forester in Region 2, Miramichi. As Regional Forester, I was responsible for all forest management activities on Crown land in Region 2. The size of the Miramichi region prior to my retirement was in excess of one million hectares or between 2.5 and 3 million acres of all land ownership – Crown, private freehold and industrial freehold. Crown land alone was in the vicinity of 2 million acres. An interesting fact about New Brunswick forests is that approximately 65% of all Crown land in the province is concentrated in the Northeast regions of Bathurst and Miramichi.

I will begin with a brief background of forest management in the province. Forest management in New Brunswick is a new phenomenon. The *Forest Resources Report* by Tweedale in 1974 outlined the need for more effective forest management on Crown land in the province. Under the *Crown Lands and Forest Act* (CLFA) a new model was implemented in 1982 with the first 25-year Management Plans on 10 Crown licenses. The licensees were made responsible for the management process and the Crown, or owner, responsible to ensure that this process was completed according to the guidelines and standards under the CLFA. The Forest Management Manual (FMM) describes how it will be done.

Prior to 1982, there were no structured forest management principles for Crown land in New Brunswick. In the Miramichi region alone there were 17 licensees, both large and small, harvesting wood on Crown land. Harvest blocks were applied for haphazardly on any given license, generally where the best (most valuable) wood was growing. Most did not bother applying for predominately fir areas, even though the Province was spraying insecticides to protect fir stands, but rather applied for the purer stands of spruce and /or the best hardwood ridges.

In today's world of technology and high fiber demand our entire forest would be in chaos and would not even remotely be considered as sustainable over the long-term if we had continued with the *no-management strategy* prior to 1982. One can argue that the present system does not function properly. There is much room for improvement through effective government, relating to public values, and limiting the intimidation by forest industry.

A recommendation in the *Jaakko Pöyry Report* states that “the public should participate in reviewing the objectives of management for New Brunswick's Crown lands to provide a mandate for the direction and magnitude of change in forest management.” A *Vision for New Brunswick's Forests* states that “the mission of the Department of Natural Resources is to manage the natural resources of the province in the best interest of its citizens.” In the past, the public has been invited to participate with input and recommendations for the 25-year Management Plan and 5-Year Operating Plans that I was involved with, in 1987, 1992, and

1997. This was termed public participation and committees were struck by industry with selected participants for further input. Did committee recommendations reflect the wishes of the general population? Is this the reason that the public today appear apathetic toward forest management principles approved by the government? Has government and industry gone the extra mile to educate and enlighten the public or has input been superficial to the point where decisions are finalized with minimal concern for public feedback? I believe the average citizen of New Brunswick simply does not trust either government or industry decisions for most forestry practices today.

The *Jaakko Pöyry Report* proposes a 20% increase in plantation establishment on Crown land and a reduction in present levels of thinning to increase and maximize the growth in New Brunswick's Crown forests. Plantations would then cover 40% of Crown land and the thinning of natural stands would be reduced from 24% to 18%. This recommendation is directly contrary to the *Vision* strategy "to use harvest practices that favor natural regeneration to ensure that the full range of naturally occurring forest types and successional stages will be maintained on Crown land" and reflects concern that New Brunswick Crown forests will be gradually transformed into tree farms or "monocultures".

Monoculture is defined as the "cultivation of one kind of crop exclusively." Of course, we understand that different species may be planted in close proximity to each other but individual areas planted with one species will be monocultures within the total forest structure. The genetically improved stock being planted is said to have a 10-20% increase in growth capabilities. However, soon after planting, natural regeneration most often begins to take over a site, particularly the shade intolerant pioneer species of poplar and white birch. Again, in most cases, these plantations are then recommended for herbicide treatment to eradicate the hardwood and shrub ingrowth. A second herbicide treatment, within 7 years, is usually required to allow the planted stock to remain in a free-to-grow state thus protecting the initial investment. All is not complete after herbiciding as there is also an ingrowth of natural softwood regeneration to contend with (spruce, fir, etc.). Thinning crews are sent in to remove this natural ingrowth before the plantation can be placed on a yield curve and included in the future wood supply.

Another major drawback to increasing plantation establishment is that this proposal will actually reduce the hardwood supply in New Brunswick for all hardwood users. Application of herbicides to eradicate hardwood for softwood to flourish does exactly that. There will be no hardwood growing on 40% of the Crown land base. The other 18% in thinning will not contribute much to increased hardwood supply because the first species favoured are softwood when selecting trees to be thinned on an area. It stands to reason, that over 50% of future Crown land forests **will not** contribute to the desired increase in hardwood supply, putting biodiversity concerns at the bottom of the list.

Furthermore, the cost of maintaining these plantations is high compared to thinning **natural** stands. Planting costs range in the vicinity of \$700-\$800 per hectare. This cost **does not** include required herbicide applications, which are paid for by DNR, or the cost of removing the ingrowth of natural softwood regeneration. Thinning costs, on the other hand, in naturally regenerated stands, are in the vicinity of \$600 per hectare.

The present system can be improved through silviculture by increasing the total area of thinning on both Crown and freehold land. Training additional silviculture crews to do the job effectively would be a priority. In New Brunswick most cut-over forested land naturally

regenerates to many thousands of stems per hectare. These areas will develop into natural stands that are cheaper to tend and also provide longer term work for many forest workers while maintaining a more naturally diverse forest.

The *Jaakko Pöyry Report* refers to the added growth and production in Finland and other Scandinavian countries, but at what cost from degradation of ecosystems and the natural forest. Their forests will never return to anything approaching “natural” and those countries are now spending millions of dollars in an attempt to repair the damage that has been done. We must remember that forest management has been practiced in Scandinavia for over 100 years and perhaps closer to 200 years. They obviously did not address non-timber values.

The proposed changes in the *Jaakko Pöyry Report* certainly appear premature until we determine the full impact of the *Vision* in New Brunswick’s forests. Again, we have only been practicing forest management for the past 22 years in New Brunswick.

The wildlife habitat strategy in the *Vision* document is to ensure forest management activities provide the amount, quality and distribution of identified habitats to meet population’s objectives for all vertebrate species. Can we maintain this objective under the present forest management process let alone with the increased tree farm mentality as proposed in the *Jaakko Pöyry Report*? Harvest scheduling on each Crown license dictates that harvest blocks will be no larger than 100 hectares and that harvest cannot occur on adjacent blocks prior to waiting two 5-year periods or until natural regeneration or planted trees reach a specific height. Harvest scheduling has created a quilt-like cutting pattern over the Crown land of New Brunswick that has fragmented and degraded many ecosystems and wildlife habitats. Forest roads accessing most of the Crown forest are clearly evident.

I would like to express this view by presenting the committee with maps of sections of the Miramichi region which show access roads, cuts, silviculture treatment areas, deer wintering habitat and blocks to be harvested in the current planning period. When you take a hard look at these maps considering the above features, you will immediately wonder – where are we going to harvest while preserving our non-timber values over the **next** 20 or 25 years? Depletion and fragmentation are easily recognized. I believe that conditions on these maps covering an excess of 80,000 acres, to be representative of all New Brunswick Crown land.

The proposal in the *Jaakko Pöyry Report* further exacerbates depletion and fragmentation through increased road construction and harvesting in Special Management Areas (SMA’s) while we have yet to meet the objectives under the *Vision* statement for long term management. Having sat in on two previous days of presentations, there seems to be some confusion as to the description of Protected Areas and Special Management Areas which are referred to in the *Jaakko Pöyry Report* as a total of 32% of New Brunswick Crown land. SMA’s where harvesting is allowed on a limited basis, providing licensees maintain the integrity of each area, include buffers, deer wintering areas (DWA’s) and other mature habitat (OSFH). Portions of these habitats often overlap. These three habitats would total 29%. Protected areas where harvesting is very limited or non-existent makes up the other 3%. Since harvesting is already allowed in these areas over the long term, it is directly contrary to Mr. Irving’s statement in the local media that “the Province has “locked up” an enormous amount of land”.

The *Jaakko Pöyry Report* also claims that New Brunswick has relatively high staffing levels versus equivalent regions like Ontario and Quebec. How can these comparisons be made

when in reality these huge provinces have northern lands so remote that access roads are limited or non-existent and forest fires are left to burn themselves out above specified latitudes? New Brunswick on the other hand, is a small province, completely accessed by road and under extensive forest management.

In New Brunswick, a 5-year licensee performance review is conducted by DNR to ensure conformance to management guidelines. The *Forest Management Agreement* is not extended for an additional 5 years if a licensee fails to meet requirements. DNR staff do part of this review by monitoring performance throughout the 5-year period. The last review in 2002 indicated that some licensees are not doing an adequate job. Out of 10 Crown licenses: 4 met or exceeded all requirements, 3 didn't meet all criteria, 3 did not have their *Forest Management Agreement* extended. Those licenses who also failed in 1997 are feeling the insecurity of now having an FMA of only 15 years. Our current Forest Management Manual is 9 years old and is outdated. A new draft was made in 2001 but was not agreed to by the Licensees so DNR is still using the old manual of 1994. The Licensees have not yet renewed their FMA's which should have been signed off in 2002. They appear to be stalling in the hopes of initiating a new strategy. Meanwhile, DNR staff works with an outdated manual and has to settle for substandard guidelines. In my opinion the FMM should be written by DNR without licensee input if licensees cannot hold respect for the process and come to a consensual agreement.

DNR staff discovers many infractions associated with harvesting operations in the course of their daily activities. Less DNR staffing would mean more licensee self-monitoring and getting away from the present checks and balances in the system. To date, licensees have not earned this respect. Third-party certification cannot be expected to change this situation. An example of disregard for the rules regarding Crown wood occurs in some licensee wood-yards. Wood is brought into the wood-yards from both freehold and Crown land. A certain allocation of the Crown wood is to go to the sub-licensees. However, some licensees take advantage of having Crown wood in their yards and select out the poorest quality for the sub-licensees. They can mix in wood from freehold land and there is no check or balance to prove otherwise. Where wood-yards are utilized there should be a process to ensure Crown wood is kept separate and distributed to sub-licensees appropriately.

The recommended timber supply objective in the *Jaakko Pöyry Report*, which would guarantee a wood supply above all non-timber values is perhaps the most ludicrous. All natural resources are in a state of flux at any given time for one reason or another. Where would the federal government be today if our learned representatives had guaranteed cod quotas over an extended period of time?

In conclusion, the *Jaakko Pöyry Report* recommendations do not adequately address today's problems faced in forest management in New Brunswick. We have not yet achieved strategies outlined in the *Vision* document and we are being intimidated by industry to accept a new forest management strategy that will take the Province into uncharted water. Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation.

Yours truly,
Richard Walker