

OBSERVATIONS

No Such Thing as "Waste Wood"

Get ready folks ... the next great wave of forest consumption is just getting underway in Nova Scotia. Thought we were going to see less clearcutting? Think again. It's called "biomass" and in a perversion of the term "green" our new NDP government has decided that burning our forests for electricity is a good idea and will officially count towards Nova Scotia Power's "renewable energy" targets. Big industry players are lining up to take advantage of this new market and our forests and wildlife are trembling with anticipation.

The public has been told repeatedly that large pulp mills and Nova Scotia Power will simply be burning "waste wood" to produce this wonderful new "green energy". Sounds logical, right? How could burning wood that is just going to waste be anything but good? The problem is: there is no "waste" wood that is not already being used. In the last twenty years the traditional forestry industries have adapted to tight times by investing in every possible efficiency - including finding marketable uses for the formerly discarded bark, chips and sawdust produced in the conventional milling processes. Pulp and sawmill operations have also become tightly integrated, buying, selling and using every scrap of wood refuse they produce. So there is, in fact, no wood being wasted at all.

The reality is that the government-approved plan to burn "waste wood" really means more forest cutting - a lot more - up to a million new tons a year. That's the equivalent of adding another pulp mill to the province and clearcutting a 1 km-wide strip from Yarmouth to Sydney once every 4.5 years. Of course it might not be so bad if we were reducing cutting in some other sector to make room for it - but we're not. Logging for biomass will be on TOP OF the large volumes already being cut by our existing forestry industry. This will mean about 20% more cutting per year for decades to come. Most will be in the form of additional clearcutting since the price for biomass will be so low (est. \$33/ton) that it will be the only economically feasible way to do it. And the best part is we all get to pay for it. Nova Scotians will be subsidizing forest biomass burning through higher electricity bills. \$208 million for NewPage's massive boiler project will be passed directly on to Nova Scotia Power customers. And the proposed rate to be paid for producers of biomass energy under the feed-in tariff program is 12% higher than wind energy - again, an additional expense added directly to customers' electricity bills.

Allowing the rise of this new biomass juggernaut flies in the face of common sense and the government's own Natural Resources Strategy. This tortuously long, 3-year, 3-phase process involved exhaustive public consultations (Phase 1) and an expert panel review (Phase 2). Their conclusions were clear. "Across Nova Scotia, a resounding call for change has been voiced. Current natural resource practices... are not sustainable. The status quo is not an option. Unless there is change, Nova Scotia's natural resources will continue to be destroyed."

Their number one recommendation was equally direct. "The panel strongly urges caution in any decision by government to approve use of biomass for power generation. The Steering Panel advises that the province view the current agreement between NewPage Port Hawkesbury Ltd. and Nova Scotia Power Inc. as a pilot project and carefully monitor its impact on forests over time, basing future decisions on those findings. There is ample evidence that our forests are already under considerable stress... Nova Scotia does not have the wood capacity for biomass use to make much of a difference.... It is counter-intuitive for the province to protect the environment by cutting down too many trees".

The final result of the Natural Resources Strategy process is Phase 3 - the government plan. It was due (by law) to be tabled by the end of last year. It wasn't. Instead the report has gone underground and the lead minister, John MacDonell, has been replaced. Voluntary Planning, the well-respected, arms-length agency that conducted the Phase 1 public consultation and many other landmark public processes has also been quietly shut down. Now, like the wetland policy, and several other environmental goals, the government deadline has come and gone and the Natural Resources Strategy is nowhere to be seen.

This is disappointing to the thousands of Nova Scotians who participated in good faith in a long and exhaustive public process. The public spoke loud and clear and the expert panels looked long and hard. They said, in essence, "there is too much cutting, reduce it". The government's response, not through the missing Natural Resources Strategy but through its contradictory Renewable Electricity Plan, has instead set the stage for the biggest increase in forest cutting in decades. And all this from an NDP government who used to be the environment's best friend but now seems to have lost its way.

Of course they can still step back from the abyss and restore their green cred on this issue if they want to. They have the power and clear policy direction from a credible, transparent and highly public process. The Renewable Electricity Plan also recognizes and specifically defers to the yet-to-be-released Natural Resource Strategy on the question of forest biomass. The question is will the NDP government respect the process and put the brakes on biomass before it's too far gone or will they ignore it and allow this new consumptive wave to roll over the forests of Nova Scotia?

A big part of their environmental credibility, not to mention the fate of our forests, hangs in the balance.

Raymond Plourde, Wilderness Coordinator
 Jamie Simpson, Forestry Program Coordinator
 Ecology Action Centre, Halifax

4-H Poster Contest winner



This is the winning submission in the 4-H Poster Contest, which marked 100 years of farming in Cape Breton and 4-H involvement in agriculture. The poster was created by Alura Sutherland, a member of the Baddeck Valley 4-H Club. The poster will be included in a mural to be painted, all part of helping to raise awareness of the importance of the agriculture industry. All the posters submitted will be on display at the Cape Breton Exhibition (sponsors of the contest) which also included an essay element.

RCMP community news



Baddeck Academy students on the steps of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

During the week of May 15th to 20th students from the Grade 9 class at Baddeck Academy travelled to Quebec and Ontario on a school trip. While there they visited a Sugar Shack and took in a true Quebec meal experience. They were given a tour of Old Quebec City and taken to the Saint Anne De Beupré Basilica. The class later went on to visit the Parliament buildings and the Canadian Peace Officer's Memorial in Ottawa.

The students were chaperoned by several parents, including Cst. Aaron Brown (centre) of the Victoria County RCMP Baddeck Detachment who was asked to accompany the group. Cst Brown stated the students were "very respectful during the entire trip and excellent ambassadors for Victoria County."



Students at Wagmatcookewey School in Wagmatcook First Nation had some unexpected fun with Cst. Peter Paul of the Victoria County RCMP. The officer stopped by the school and taught some students bicycle safety tips for the summer, and then put them through a bicycle obstacle course practicing their skills.

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ELLIOTT K. FRASER, LLB.
 Barrister • Solicitor • Notary Public
 8565 Highway 105, Baddeck Nova Scotia
 Tel: (902) 295-1622 • Fax: (902) 295-2847
 E-mail: elliot.fraser@ns.sympatico.ca