

## COORDINATOR'S REPORT: MARCH 2016-JUNE 2017

Although we dealt with significant challenges during our first year, in this, my final report, I am not going to discuss them at length. Rather, I will concentrate on the challenges of the future, looking back at the first year only where our experience then helps us to understand and deal with the issues that are emerging.

### ***The first year: Setting up, finding a voice and making a mark***

Helga got us going. Her biomass petition crystallized concern and brought us together. We had difficulty deciding on how we would operate, eventually deciding against formal organization. We opted instead to rely on social media to activate strategies decided on by a core group. This group has been larger than one usually finds in formal organizations, and it made decisions with very few meetings but a great many emails.

We found a voice in identifying and articulating an issue that deeply concerns the people of this province. We have the privilege of living in a beautiful place. Our awareness of this sometimes makes Nova Scotians smug, but it also imposes on us a sense that we must be responsible for maintaining the treasures we have inherited. It induces a conservatism that abhors the waste that is endemic in modern forest harvesting practices.

HFC gave voice to this. Public meetings articulated the sense of stewardship that comes with our conservatism. We put these views on line. We wrote letters and op eds that carried the message to the reading public. We made numerous visits to MLAs, in their offices and on the hustings. I cannot name all of you. It was a group effort. Together we helped to make clearcutting an issue in the recent election.

### ***The hard part***

We made a mark. A large public agrees with us. Politicians are aware of what we are saying. Some sense opportunity; others are apprehensive. A good many, torn between the influence of mills owners and the cries of rage, frustration and despair from rural Nova Scotians, have not decided which way to jump.

The election is over. The government will soon recover from the minor scare it got in its rural power base. It will succumb to the flattery of the mill owners, whom it considers the real 'stakeholders' in our forest economy. Those stakeholders will use the media to reassure the public. The forest bureaucracy in DNR will be more obdurate than ever. All of this will abet the forces of inertia and cynicism that are the bane of modern democracy.

How can we fight it?

The hardest part will be to keep going. We hear a lot today about 'the lobbies' and their ability to influence, even control, democratic governments. Too often, the public, represented by groups like ours, is beaten back simply by the capacity of business lobbies to outlast us. Business can overwhelm us with TV ads, spin doctors, carefully chosen 'good works' and cynical exercises in public consultation because businesses are organized to persist. Business leaders come and go, there is always someone to

replace those who leave. The costs of lobbying can be written off as 'business expenses', which means that we taxpayers help to pay to be fooled.

We can beat this. We are on the right side of this issue. Public opinion is shifting in our direction. Elsewhere groups like ours have helped to bring about changes like the ones we propose. We can too.

Our greatest strength, and our greatest weakness, lies in the way we carry out our work. We have chosen to avoid formal organization. This has given us the flexibility needed to seize opportunities as they emerge and has forced us to engage our supporters in designing and carrying our campaign. This sense of empowerment is vital and we must make sure that it continues. At the same time it is difficult to be effective if our leadership is scattered and variable and if the members in our project teams don't carry through on the projects that they have committed to.

Over the last year I have thought a lot about this tension in our organizational design. I hope that the following suggestions will help HFC to keep going, to keep on pressing government and forest companies to reform.

#### Have a leadership team:

In a social media group, the job of coordination is too big to be managed by one person. It needs a small team. Small enough to work well together.

#### Ensure accountability:

When team members, whether of the leadership team or of project teams, undertake a task they should know that they will be expected to complete it, or to see that someone else completes it, within an agreed upon time. The commitment would be made to other members of the team and, through our regular update reports, to the group as a whole.

#### Allow team roles to vary:

Traditional organizations have clearly, usually rigidly, defined roles. Part of HFC's flexibility stems from the fact that we don't have precisely defined roles. Instead we have tended to encourage members to vary their activities according to their talents, interests and the nature of specific tasks. This has been useful and should be encouraged. It recognizes that everything that pertains to one aspect of our work, also pertains to everything else. It grows out of the fundamental holistic perception of the world that pervades ecological thinking. However, when undertakings are agreed to it is important to be clear about who is going to do what and what is expected of the undertaking.

#### Keep in touch:

I spent a lot of time corresponding with HFC members and supporters. Some of you felt that it took too much of my time, and that 'coordination' could be done far more efficiently. You may be right. However, there isn't much holding social media organizations together, beyond a common interest and social interaction. In our case we have a common interest in restoring biodiversity to our forests. It is an

interest that flares intensely at times, but can easily be smothered by public indifference and the government inertia that resists change. Correspondence allows supporters to be engaged and shapes a common understanding of the issues that the group is dealing with. It also provides the social interaction that holds the group together. For that reason, I hope that however the group develops at the centre, there will always be someone there whose main task will be to keep in touch with as many supporters as possible.

Agree on the message:

The evolution of policy has many stages. Each stage compels participants to adapt to changes in roles and discourse. We have been going through a disruptive stage in the development of forest policy. As an opposition group we have focussed on problems, to the point where public pressure is beginning to force government to change. At some time in the future, government will say to all of us who have been critical: 'Alright, we admit that there is a problem. What do we do about it?' When that happens, advocacy groups must be ready to offer solutions and to search for compromise. This will be difficult for us, as it always is for groups that seek reform. We will have to identify and defend core values, and be prepared to compromise on others that seem less important. In opposition we have been able to ignore differences between us concerning some core values. As we approach the negotiation stage of policy development, those differences will cause conflict. We want to go into that stage united behind a well thought-out position and with strategies that make the most of our resources. Consequently, the sooner we start thinking about solutions and compromises the better.

***A glimpse of the big picture:***

Nova Scotia's forests have experienced three great periods of growth, development and decline. The Mi'kmaq lived here for centuries as a climax forest developed. Europeans began settlement at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and by the end of the nineteenth had burned or otherwise reduced the climax forest to a point where, in 1912, Bernard Fernow made one of the first calls for reform and restoration. Over the following century the forestry profession, in government and the pulp and paper industry, responded to that call by transforming our Acadian forest into one that resembled the boreal forest predominant in most of Canada. Today, the industry that spawned it has declined, and we must decide what to do with – and for - the forest that remains. The Healthy Forest Coalition has urged a return to biodiversity and, to the extent possible, restoration of the Acadian forest. In order to achieve that we must understand our common cause. We must continue to speak up, and refuse to be discouraged. We must adapt as we push forward the processes of negotiation. We must persist.

Paul Pross,

HFC Coordinator, March-April, September 2016-June, 2017.

## Appendix: Some housekeeping matters

Website: Through Weebly I have renewed our domain registration. It will expire in May, 2018. I have also renewed our Weebly website subscription until June, 2018.

Finance and funding: Syd Dumaresq and Friends of Nature have helped us to manage our very limited financial resources, with John Himmelman being, in effect, our treasurer. Unfortunately, despite numerous suggestions for raising money, no one has answered pleas for assistance in investigating and setting up a fund-raising program. Perhaps, now that we have made a mark and there is a slight lull in policy debate, members of HFC will decide to tackle this need.

Independent review: If, and when, the government goes ahead with its promised review, we will need to prepare and present a brief. A team should be set up as soon as the government's intentions become clear.

Coalition: A growing number of organizations are siding with us. We do send new coalition members a warm welcome, but we haven't set up an effective system for communicating with them. That, too, is much needed.

Lists: Mike Lancaster has set up the lists that bring our update, alerts, etc. to our active members and supporters. He also makes sure that we connect with Facebook and has set up a Slack program for use by the core group in day-to-day management of the coalition. We need to become familiar with it and to use it regularly. Our first major list was put together through GoogleGroups. We have spoken of closing that list down, but it still seems to serve a purpose, in that it is used by some members for discussion purposes.

Teams: Although we set up teams to explore a number of issues or to carry out various functions, most are not working effectively.