

AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF FOREST PRACTICES – A LETTER TO PREMIER MCNEIL

Prior to the election Premier McNeil announced that he would set up an independent review. He reiterated his commitment during the leaders' debate. No further details have been made available.

Since the election the new Minister of DNR, Margaret Miller, referred to the review during a scrum with press, but nothing further has been said publicly about its terms reference, who will conduct it, or how the public will make views known to it. On June 13 HFC sent a letter to Premier McNeil suggesting a number of issues that should be investigated by the review. The letter follows:

Dear Premier McNeil,

At the leaders' debate during the election you were asked 'what is your party's position on the level of clearcutting going on in our forests? Will it change if you take office?' You, Mr. Baillie and Mr. Burrill acknowledged that clearcutting is a problem and you reminded us of your pledge to set up an independent review of forest practices.

The Healthy Forest Coalition and other groups made clearcutting an issue because it destroys biodiversity, undermines efforts to mitigate climate change and spells long-term difficulties for the future of rural communities dependent on wood products enterprises, tourism, maple syrup production and other non-timber goods. These concerns made clearcutting an issue in the recent election, and it will continue to be an issue until we find a better way to manage our working forests.

Consequently we hope that the review will address the following questions:

1. What harvesting practices will best maintain, or restore, biodiversity in our working forests? Is selection management most likely to achieve that? If so, what policies are needed to encourage NS forestry and logging enterprises to convert from clearcutting to selection management? Should small-scale biomass facilities (providing heat only) be encouraged in order to provide financial support for early thinning?
2. How can we maintain a distribution of age classes across our working forests? What policies are needed to establish what that distribution should be? What measures would ensure that older age classes are allowed to develop?
3. How can government foster both the restoration of our Acadian forest and rural enterprises dependent on that forest?
4. Direct and indirect employment in our forest economy has declined steadily in recent decades. Assuming that the people of Nova Scotia want fewer trees harvested and more people employed, what can government do to foster employment in woods work and in enterprises that add value to forest products?

5. Given the uncertainties created by the United States' resistance to Canadian exports of softwood lumber, would restoration of the Acadian forest present our forest industries with alternative opportunities? How can Nova Scotia make the best use of the federal government's package intended to ease the impact of U.S. tariffs?
6. A system of carbon credits has been proposed as a means of sequestering carbon. Would such a system also address the issues raised by some of the questions we are raising? Could carbon credits accrued in a cap-and-trade system facilitate the restoration of our Acadian forest and at the same time provide much needed financial support for small woodlot owners? What policies would best develop such a system?
7. Is the Department of Natural Resources, as currently constituted, providing your government and the people of Nova Scotia with the competent advice and management skills needed to help our forest economy to adapt to the realities imposed by the decline of the pulp and paper industry, changing international trade patterns and global warming?
8. Does the Department of Natural Resources provide your government, our forest enterprises, including non-timber enterprises, and the public in general with accurate, accessible information concerning the state of our forests? If it does not, how can these information services be improved?
9. Is the Department of Natural Resources using science competently in its justification of clearcutting?

These questions, and many more, have cropped up in our contacts with members of the public and with individuals who work in the forest economy. Answering them will constitute a formidable assignment for a single individual. We therefore urge you to consider appointing more than one person to this review and also to look for expertise beyond the conventional Canadian approach to forestry. The Acadian forest, for example, is confined to the Maritime region and the US Northeast. Assuming that you are looking for panel members independent of this region, you are most likely to find a panel member familiar with this forest class in New England.

We maintain that the thorough public consultation prior to the 2011 adoption of a Natural Resource Strategy effectively reviewed the state of our forests. Its central message that 'the status quo is not an option', remains a strong guide for the current review, particularly regarding biodiversity. We hope that the coming review will help our forest industries to mitigate climate change, adjust their harvesting practices to environmental needs and adapt to new economic realities.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Pross

Co-ordinator, Healthy Forest Coalition