

Use of Carbon Credits to Incentivize Ecological Forestry on Private Woodlots

Issue

Over 70% of Nova Scotia's forested land base is privately owned. Intact forests bring many benefits including (but not limited to) support for biodiversity and mitigation of global warming through capture and processing of carbon. However, woodlot owners have no incentive to manage their woodlots in support of these objectives. To the contrary, the only economic incentive is to cut their forest – with consequent negative effects on biodiversity and the fight against global warming.

Background

Private wood lots range in size from small family holdings to vast tracts held by big mills. For small wood lot owners, capitalizing on these holdings in ecologically sensitive ways is problematical. While the Lahey report on Forestry Practices emphasizes the need for ecological forestry on the Matrix (Crown) land, Lahey stopped short of dictating such policies for privately owned lands. The report expresses the hope that private land-owners would follow the lead given by government and practice ecologically sound forestry. In the Silvicultural Guide for the Ecological Matrix (December 2020), the pretreatment assessment system (PTA) is mandated for Crown lands and “encouraged on private lands”.

How can wood lot owners obtain value for their property? The economics of logging are harsh. By many accounts, stumpage fees have remained low for decades. Using the PTA system can be cumbersome. Finding contractors willing to harvest with a light touch is complicated when holdings are small and isolated. When owners need funds, the simplest option is often to clear cut, with all the accompanying ecological damage. Nova Scotia currently provides no financial benefits for maintaining forests despite their crucial ecosystem services.

In New Brunswick, small wood lot owners can obtain carbon credits for maintaining healthy forests on their woodlots using the process established by Community Forests International. Carbon credits allowed Nature Conservancy Canada to acquire the vast Darkwoods Area in British Columbia. Carbon credits could provide benefits to Nova Scotian wood lot owners seeking to maintain forests for the future.

For several years, a carbon market operated between Ontario, Quebec and California (until Ontario PCs took power and left the market). It provided opportunities for small wood lot owners to obtain carbon credits for maintaining healthy forests on their woodlots. Unfortunately, Nova Scotia did not join this carbon market and instead established a provincial carbon market restricted to

the largest emitters. This was equivalent to Mississauga setting up its own carbon market.

Forests are our best natural means of capturing carbon to avert global warming. Private woodlot owners should receive financial incentives for maintaining healthy forests on their lands.

Recommendation

Facilitate and promote the use of carbon credits by private woodlot owners, as specified in Recommendations 32 and 33 of the Lahey report. In particular, mechanisms should be developed to allow small woodlot owners to access the carbon market.

Helga Guderley Healthy Forest Coalition