

**New Brunswick Crown Forests: Assessment of
Stewardship and Management: The Jaako Poyry Report: a comment
Submitted by the Restigouche Naturalists' Club**

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In recent weeks, there has been a spate of advertising on television and in the print media extolling the virtues of New Brunswick's forest management policies and practices. In essence, we are assured, New Brunswick's forests are among the best managed in North America.

If this is so, why should we be considering what amounts to radical changes in those practices?

In the document entitled **A Vision for New Brunswick Forests: Goals and Objectives for Crown Land management**, which was produced by the **New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources and Energy (DNRE)** in December of 1999, we find the following objective:

After meeting identified non-timber objectives, the economic benefits from the sustainable hardwood and softwood supplies will be maximized. (Page 15)

The report **New Brunswick Crown Forests: Assessment of Stewardship and Management** – the so-called **Jaakko Poyry** report – which was commissioned by the **New Brunswick Forest Products Association**, and by the **Department of Natural Resources and Energy**, observes that:

It is our opinion, based on our knowledge of conservation-related strategies used in other jurisdictions, that the approach used in New Brunswick is a sophisticated and complex solution to the problem of allocating land use across a managed and unmanaged landscape. The system combines state-of-the-art tools, and the latest science, bringing these together in a way that will generate spatial and temporal patterns of areas available for protected areas, special management areas, and subsequently harvesting to meet the long-term goals in the Vision document. (Page 32, and again on page 57)

Despite its sophistication and complexity, however, **Jaakko Poyry** challenges the fundamental objective of this approach on at least twelve occasions in its own report. On page 7, which is the first page of text in the report, we find the statement:

Firstly, the Province must elevate timber supply for commercial use to a primary objective in the management of Crown Lands as it is in other major softwood jurisdictions. (See also pages 9, 11, 21, 24, 32, 33, 36, 39, 40, 42, & 58)

It would seem then, that despite the advertisements on television and in the media, and despite **Jaakko Poyry's** own praise for current management practices, these must be changed if New Brunswick is to remain competitive. And, in order to remain competitive, the report stresses that New Brunswick must look to doubling its supply of fibre over the next thirty-five years. In other words, one might venture to summarize this aspect of the report by suggesting that non timber producing goals having to do with recreation, aesthetics, or ecology all make for fine, idealistic publicity, but, in reality, they must not stand in the way of what we all must acknowledge to be the real reason for the existence of New Brunswick forests, and that is to turn a profit for industry shareholders.

The proposition that fibre supplies must be doubled over the next thirty-five years raises several serious concerns for many people.

One of them is rather philosophical in nature and it has to do with the necessity of growth and expansion being the only way to maintain economic viability. Might not one argue just as convincingly that the New Brunswick forests of thirty-five years hence could still be producing commercial timber at the same volume as they do today, while maintaining and enhancing those other, currently primary, values? Or are we to believe, because we do not follow this recommendation, that there will be no markets for the timber that our forests continue to produce at that time? One could argue that a good product is always sellable, regardless of the volume.

It is becoming increasingly clear to many thoughtful people that one of the great economic fallacies of the twentieth century is that continual growth is possible, let alone desirable. Continuous growth is impossible. Sooner or later, any organism, be it a microbe or a forest, reaches a point where it can expand no further. At that point it has two options: It can stabilize and continue to function, neither growing nor shrinking, at least for a considerable time; or, it can begin to decline and die. Good management and proper care will ensure that the second option is delayed for as long as possible. There is no third option: growth beyond potential can only lead to collapse and chaos.

One has to wonder, then, what happens after thirty-five years of effort to double production. Does one argue that another doubling will be required in a further thirty-five years? And after that? At what point does further growth become a physical impossibility? And what happens then? Sooner or later, those who live off the forests in New Brunswick are going to have to accept that that they have reached maximum production. At that point, they will have to cut back, reduce profits, and do all those other things that they threaten us with now.

If we allow the process to continue to that point, what will we be left with? Do we really want half of the landscape of New Brunswick committed to plantations, devoid of life except for uniformly sized spruce or fir trees? That does seem to be the only long-term option, given a commitment to this philosophy. What happens then to those supposedly laudable recreational, aesthetic and environmental objectives, even if they are reduced to the status of secondary importance now?

In summary of this point, we would like to stress that the original document, **A Vision for New Brunswick Forests**, struck a responsive chord in the minds of many New Brunswickers precisely because it emphasized values for our forests that we hold to be extremely important. While commercial values are very important, those dealing with a fundamental view of our world are as well – and they cannot be sacrificed.

In fairness to the **Jaakko Poyry** report, it does mention, on several occasions, that it believes that:

New Brunswick can essentially double its long-term supply of softwood for commercial use while meeting all other environmental and social objectives for Crown Land usage.
(p. 7, and again on pages 21 and 50)

However, details on how to do this are almost non-existent in the report. Instead, it focuses almost entirely on ways to increase productivity. Fundamentally, it looks at three possibilities, all of which one can find potentially disturbing.

A: Protected Areas and Special Management Zones

On several occasions, the report calls into question current practices and restrictions concerning the ***“high levels of protected areas and special management zones (32% of Crown Land)”*** (page 8, and again on pages 9, 11, 33, 34, 51 and 59). On page 33, for example, it examines the

“Watercourse Protection Buffer Measures” to illustrate that New Brunswick imposes stricter buffer zones than do the other “benchmark” jurisdictions in the report (Finland, Sweden, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec and Maine). At no point does the report suggest that it might just be a part of New Brunswick’s “sophisticated and complex” response to a sensitive environmental concern; instead, the practice is portrayed at lost opportunity. The following statement is particularly revealing, although not entirely in the way in which one imagines the writers originally intended:

All regions note the importance of maintaining a viable stand structure in these and other special management areas via controlled harvesting. However such selective harvesting in more sensitive areas can add significant cost to the extracted wood. When special conditions are placed on harvesting, companies often elect to forego the volume available from these sources due to higher costs of planning and executing harvesting operations within these areas. Under these circumstances, the timber is not recovered, but more importantly, forest stands within the buffers are not renewed except by uncontrolled events (fire, wind, disease, etc.) (P.33)

Earlier, on page 8, we find a statement that is even more revealing: “...***there may be substantial volumes of softwood in these special management areas that may serve no environmental purpose and are at risk of loss through natural causes.***” In examining this statement, one is at a loss to understand what is meant by the term “no environmental purpose”. Instead one suspects that the writer simply confused “environmental” with “economic”. It certainly stresses that, in the eye of the writer(s), natural processes can only be of any value when they contribute to a financial balance sheet.

This attitude reflects, quite clearly, the fundamental bias of the report: terms such as “environmental and social values” are really catch phrases scattered throughout the document to appease those who might object to what one realizes are the truly importance values of forest management. Indeed it eventually becomes evident that the very concept of an “unmanaged” landscape is anathema to the writers of the report.

B: Silviculture:

Much of the increase in fibre supply envisioned over the next thirty-five years in this report will come as a result of a massive increase in the plantation growing of trees. “***When compared to the current management permitted by the DNRE, the area planted would double to approximately 40% of the Crown Forest area... .*** (P.7)

Plantation growing of trees to an extent that it could cover 40% of the Crown Lands within New Brunswick raises several vital questions:

1. How can such a massive increase in monoculture be reconciled with DNRE commitments to biodiversity?
2. How can such plantation growth be sustained without massive increases in the uses of herbicides to control unwanted species’ intrusions?
3. How can insect and disease outbreaks be controlled without a return to the horrific old days of DDT and other devastating insecticide applications?

The short answer to each of these questions, of course, is that it cannot be done. We cannot have biodiversity that exists, hand in hand, with monoculture – and it does not take an ecologist or a logician to understand that. Nor can we grow thousands of square kilometres of one or two

species of tree without massive interventions against those natural forces that would respond to such an attempt; again, we do not need specialized knowledge to learn from the endless examples from the agricultural world.

Current practices with which we are familiar in the Upsalquitch Licence are far from ideal in the eyes of an environmentalist. However, they are massive improvements of practices from years past, practices that, in large measure, are responsible for the current dilemma. To this writer's mind, the current mix of replanting and natural regeneration, together with a one-time application of herbicide to encourage early growth of new conifers once they have been planted or begun to grow spontaneously, is a reasonable compromise between the spectre of a cut over area overrun with raspberry and fireweed and that of endless rows of carefully tended conifers growing out of an otherwise sterile landscape.

Finally, there is the spectre of genetic modification and the threat of "Frankenspruces" running throughout the landscape, just as GM Canola is doing in the Prairie Provinces of Canada at present.

C: Private Lands Involvement:

On page 9, one encounters the seemingly innocuous statement:

Conservation values of private lands should be taken into account when evaluating the need for set asides and special management on public lands. This should include a process to establish a form of voluntary conservation designation on private industry lands (and woodlots)

It is only on page 54 (at least as far as this writer could detect) that the full intention of this proposition comes to the fore:

We recommend that the conservation values of private lands should be taken into account when evaluating the need for set asides and special management on public lands. Industry experts and DNRE experts could collectively work on developing corridors, management for under-represented communities and other non-timber objectives on industry lands to maximize the value of these lands in meeting the overall shared goal of sustainable managed forests in New Brunswick irrespective of tenure.

We believe there should be a process to establish a form of voluntary conservation designations on private industry lands (and woodlots) that could provide a level of assurance of management intent that would allow DNRE to relax constraints on equivalent areas within the Crown Lands. (Underlines are the writer's).

In other words, shift the responsibility for conservation, for biodiversity, and for ecological responsibility to the private land owners, thus permitting the large forest companies to get on with what it really important: making money.

We have no difficulty with the concept of encouraging private landowners and woodlot managers to become involved with the practices of forest management that encourage recreational, aesthetic, and environmental values. Indeed, we deplore the present situation where many private woodlot owners seem to be falling over themselves in their hurry to have their holdings clear-cut and devastated, often to the detriment of adjacent woodlots, rural water supplies, and wildlife habitation.

However, when the implementation of a policy such as this becomes simply a permit for the holders of our crown land licences to do as they wish, that policy becomes little more than an excuse for unbridled irresponsibility on the part of those licensees.

Conclusion:

Over the past several years, the writer of this report has had several opportunities to examine current forestry practices as conducted by one of the major licence holders in the province. While he does not agree with everything that he sees or has learned in that time, he is convinced that, in this instance at least, there is a serious commitment to improving such practices in such a way that the original “vision” of the Vision document remains relatively intact. He recognizes that the large forest product companies of the province face serious challenges in the years ahead (challenges largely brought about by very serious errors in judgement and an encompassing greed in years past), but he has also come to believe that the will is in place to do business in a much more responsible way in the future. To compromise those practices, or to revert to any sort of an old “business as usual” would not only be unwise, it would, within a very short time, be disastrous to everyone.

New Brunswick’s forests belong to the people of New Brunswick. One cannot over emphasize this point because it so often seems that it is forgotten, certainly by industry spokespersons who seem to assume that the forest exists solely or primarily for their own economic purposes. Government, too, needs to be reminded of this because they are often preoccupied with financial and economic matters, frequently to the detriment of other values.

No, the Crown Forests of New Brunswick belong to the people of this province. We are the ones who dictate uses. Government is responsible for seeing that our wishes are satisfied and industry, in the final analysis, has (or should have) no option than to do business within those perimeters. New Brunswickers have spoken and continue to speak. They want forests, in all of their complexity and diversity, for themselves, their children, and their grandchildren.

Nothing less is acceptable.