

Oral Presentation to the Select Committee on
Wood Supply, Thursday, November 20, 2003,
Knights of Columbus Hall, 24 Coburg Street,
Saint John, New Brunswick

Good morning

Comments on the Jaakko Poyry Report

The report's most important recommendation (on page 9) is that :

"The public should participate in reviewing the objectives of management for New Brunswick's Crown lands to provide a mandate for the direction and magnitude of change in forest management."

In the past NBDNRE not only did not solicit input regarding its VISION document, but it did not even have the grace to acknowledge sincere efforts to make constructive suggestions. Suggestions, in writing, were met with silence.

THE MAJOR FLAW IN THE REPORT / AND INDEED IN THE FORWARD PLANS FOR SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY IN GENERAL / IS THAT JAAKKO POYRY ASSUMES THE MARKETS OF THE FUTURE WILL BE AN EXTENSION OF PRESENT MARKETS.

-- OUR FOREST INDUSTRY'S MARKETS HAVE BEEN EXPORT BASED (MOSTLY TO THE UNITED STATES) AND HAVE SERVED:

- * A VORACIOUS AND GROWING DEMAND FOR SOFTWOOD LUMBER FOR CONSTRUCTION
- * A VORACIOUS AND GROWING DEMAND FOR PULP AND PAPER MADE LARGELY WITH SOFTWOOD FIBER
- * A VORACIOUS AND GROWING DEMAND FOR HIGH QUALITY HARDWOOD TIMBER AND THE VALUE ADDED PRODUCTS MADE FROM IT
- * AND MORE RECENTLY A VORACIOUS AND GROWING DEMAND FOR PAPERS, TISSUES AND RELATED PRODUCTS THAT CONTAIN A HIGH PROPORTION OF HARDWOOD FIBER.

THESE VORACIOUS AND GROWING MARKETS HAVE DEVELOPED ON A TEMPORARILY AVAILABLE NON-RENEWABLE ENERGY BASE.

IMPLICIT IN THE REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDING VASTLY INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN PLANTATION SILVICULTURE -- IN ORDER TO DOUBLE THE FUTURE SOFTWOOD HARVEST -----IS THE CONFIDENCE THAT THERE WILL BE MARKETS FOR THESE PRODUCTS AND THE FUEL TO TRANSPORT BULK COMMODITIES TO THESE MARKETS IN THE ALTERED ENERGY SUPPLY ENVIRONMENT THAT WILL EXIST AT THE END OF THIS FOREST ROTATION.

IT IS EXPECTED THE SHORT-LIVED (~200 YEARS) 'PETROLEUM INTERVAL' WILL BE A DISTANT MEMORY LONG BEFORE THE CURRENT FOREST ROTATION (IN WHICH THE REPORT WANTS TO MAKE MAJOR INVESTMENTS) REACHES HARVEST AGE.

show petroleum depletion graph

SUCH INVESTMENTS IN SPECIFIC COMMODITY PRODUCTION DO NOT APPEAR JUSTIFIED FOR AN ENERGY SUPPLY ENVIRONMENT THAT WILL INCREASINGLY VALUE FOREST PRODUCTS FOR THE ENERGY THAT CAN BE OBTAINED FROM THEM.

THIS INDUSTRY HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN DRIVEN BY AN INCREASINGLY AFFLUENT AND OPEN-ENDEDLY GROWING MIDDLE CLASS.

HOWEVER AS WE APPROACH THE END OF THE 'PETROLEUM INTERVAL' WHICH WILL INVOLVE THE USE OF MUCH LESS ABUNDANT AND MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE RENEWABLE (SOLAR BASED) ENERGY, THE HISTORICAL PATTERN OF OPEN-ENDED ECONOMIC AND POPULATION GROWTH (THAT SPAWNED THIS MIDDLE CLASS) IS EXPECTED TO END.

show population / energy / trade depletion graph

UNDER CONDITIONS OF ENERGY SCARCITY IN THE FUTURE, THE LEVEL OF AFFLUENCE WILL DIMINISH AS SOCIETY ADAPTS TO THE SOLAR ENERGY THAT FUELLED IT UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF THE 1800s.

NOTE:

THE SOLAR ENERGY IN THE 1800s WAS SHARED BY FAR FEWER PEOPLE THAN EXIST TODAY SO THAT THE AMOUNT OF ENERGY AVAILABLE TO EACH NORTH AMERICAN CONSUMER WILL BE ONLY A FRACTION OF WHAT THE AVERAGE CONSUMER HAS BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO DURING THE EXCESSES THAT HAVE DEVELOPED SINCE SOCIETY GAINED ACCESS TO THE TEMPORARY, EXHAUSTIBLE ENERGY SUBSIDY FROM STORES IN THE EARTH.

IN THE CONDITIONS OF FUTURE ENERGY SCARCITY, IT IS EXPECTED THAT NEW BRUNSWICK FOREST PRODUCTS WILL BE MORE VALUED FOR THEIR ENERGY CONTENT WHEN BURNED -- OR PERHAPS USED TO PRODUCE HYDROGEN -- THAN FOR THE EXPORT COMMODITY MARKETS THAT HAVE DEVELOPED DURING THE SHORT PERIOD OF EXPONENTIAL POPULATION AND ECONOMIC EXPANSION WHEN THE ENERGY NEEDS OF SOCIETY BEGAN TO BE SUPPLIED FROM FINITE GEOLOGICAL SOURCES THAT WERE LAID DOWN IN THE EARTH OVER MILLIONS OF YEARS.

NOTE:

THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF GROWTH IN HUMAN HISTORY HAS TAKEN PLACE AND BEEN DEPENDENT UPON AN UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS TO ENERGY SINCE THE GLOBAL SOCIETY BEGAN ITS SHORT-LIVED USE OF FINITE GEOLOGICAL STORES.

DURING THIS VERY SHORT PERIOD, THE HUMAN POPULATION ON EARTH HAS INCREASED TO SIX (6) TIMES WHAT IT WAS DURING THE 1800s, WHILE THE SIZE OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY HAS INCREASED MUCH MORE THAN THAT.

LIMITS TO THE GROWTH OF THE TOTAL HUMAN ENTERPRISE WILL MAKE THEMSELVES APPARENT AS HYDROCARBON AND NUCLEAR FUEL PRODUCTION SLOWLY DIMINISH EVEN AS DEMAND FOR THIS ENERGY IS GROWING DUE TO EXPONENTIAL POPULATION INCREASE AND A MINDLESSLY EXPANDING GLOBAL ECONOMY.

On page 40, the report states that "the opportunity between now and 2020 [for increased fiber production] in New Brunswick's forests is zero".

Implicit in this statement is the belief, of neoclassical economists, that human enterprise can grow for ever. However natural ecosystems have limits and they can not support endless open-ended growth. Growth has been a characteristic of the entirety of human history but the quest for further growth is now increasingly seen as an anachronistic frontier attitude whose byproducts and wastes incrementally degrade an already damaged global environment. Similar to all biological populations (especially those whose numbers are not effectively controlled by predators), unchecked human populations will experience catastrophic collapse as they exceed the carrying capacity of their environment.

Indicative of the open-ended expansionist attitude (and in defiance of the limits of natural ecosystems and finite energy supplies) is the statement on page 41 -- IN THE JAAKKO POYRY REPORT-- that :

"If industry does not continually invest , the efficiency and scale of production assets will decline, and mill closures become more likely."

I understand this investment treadmill to imply endless expansion of mill capacity -- WHICH THE FOREST IS EXPECTED TO SUPPORT.

If continual investment and growth is a precondition for the viability of the forest-based industry in New Brunswick, then mill closures are a certainty..... because forest fiber production is NOT

infinitely expandable --- EVEN IF MARKETS WERE TO CONTINUE THEIR OPEN-ENDED HISTORICAL EXPANSIONARY PATTERN.

----FROM A BIOLOGICAL STANDPOINT ----

On page 40 the report states that "constraints have been placed on licencees' ability to choose planting over natural regeneration." I can tell you that there is a general understanding in the ecological community that man made forests tend to simplify and lower the biodiversity of the forest estate and you you have heard from Professor Marc-Andre Villard (in the first day of hearings on Monday) about the extirpation of bird species from Finnish plantation forests. Both economic and biological sustainability are understood to depend, to an unknown degree, upon biodiversity.

The report states, on page 49, that "the objectives outlined in the document 'A Vision for New Brunswick Forests' prevent large scale changes in the forest type distribution."

This is demonstrably untrue (see Erdle and Pollard, The Forestry Chronicle November/December 2002, Vol. 78 No. 6, pages 812-821) – a paper that documents the decreasing representations of exposure-prone species such as red spruce and sugar maple that are generally associated with the large scale clearfellings, mechanical site preparation, and herbicibe use that are required for the production of softwood plantations.

GENERALLY, the report's wish for New Brunswick's forests is for a more intensively human managed forest estate so as to "sustainably" increase CONVENTIONAL softwood fiber production.

Given the inevitability of future energy scarcity conditions, there is a certainty that markets for these CONVENTIONAL products will collapse.

There are no precedents to show that even the current level of intensive human management is sustainable -- much less the greater intensity of management visualized by the report.

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF SERIAL SOFTWOOD PLANTATION OPERATIONS OVER SEVERAL ROTATIONS IN EUROPE -- SUGGESTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCREMENTAL SOIL NUTRIENT DEPLETION AND DIMINISHED WOOD PRODUCTION AS THESE SHALLOW ROOTED SPECIES IMPOVERISH THE SURFACE SOILS AND CAUSE EXCESSIVE NUTRIENT LEACHING.

FOOTNOTE:

The intersection of increasing energy demand -- driven by skyrocketing population numbers coupled with mindless escalation of global trade -- and decreasing energy production will be the defining phenomenon of the 21st century as peak world hydrocarbon production is reached within the next decade or so -- please read the paper:

Younquist, W. 1999. THE POST-PETROLEUM PARADIGM - AND POPULATION. Population and Environment 20: 297-316 (<http://dieoff.org/page171.htm>) to which I have specifically referred in my written submission.

The implications of future energy scarcity are profound for the export-dependent forest industry whose decades long planning should encompass - at least- the time required for presently regenerating trees to mature.

During these decades distance transportation, which is almost completely dependent on petroleum, and the recently established growing and affluent middle class, whose consumption behaviour is supported by cheap and abundant energy supplies, will slowly become a memory.

As the memory fades so too will the markets fade for CONVENTIONAL products from N.B'.s forest industry.

Peter Salenius, President
Nashwaak Watershed Association Inc.
522 Route 8 HWY, Durham Bridge, NB E6C 1K5