

JP Presentation
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I'd like to begin my presentation by saying the Jaakko Poyry report is an extremely radical document: it proposes a revolution of sorts to forest policy, a direction new to New Brunswick, and the rest of North America. Radical is okay sometimes, but radical must always be viewed with a healthy dose of sober, careful judgment, if we are to be smart decision makers.

The Jaakko Poyry report offers a radical departure from the commonly accepted direction of sound forest management in North America and beyond. Sound forest management, as I have learned through experience and through the UNB faculty of Forestry and Environmental Management, means managing a forest for its highest economic value while sustaining a diversity of forest values including wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and employment. The Jaakko Pöyry report would have New Brunswick entrench an out-dated, over-simplified mode of forest management that promotes low-value fibre production at the expense of the wide range of forest values that comprise the public forests.

A section of the report I kept looking for, but never found, was a cost-benefit summary of implementing the Jaakko Poyry proposal. What would be the economic, social and ecological implications of implementing the proposal? I guess this is why, in part, these hearing are being held.

Economic and Social Implications

A main thrust of the Jaakko Report is increasing fibre production, and equating this to an economic benefit for the province. However, the rate of fibre production is not the critical factor in our forest economy, but rather it is the actual revenue generated from the sale of wood products.

Fibre Volume or Economic Value? Committing ourselves to producing low value softwood fibre across the majority of our public forest is poor economic planning. Jaakko Pöyry would have us try to compete directly with plantations in southern, hot climates that can grow low-value fibre much faster than we ever will be able to. Pulp mills in our area are already having a rough go: witness the massive layoffs, land sales and mill closures in Maine, and the recent (temporary?) layoffs in New Brunswick. Do we really want to tie the majority of our forest economy to this one, evidently shaky industry?

New Brunswick could be in a very good position to capitalize on the increasing demand and prices paid for high quality wood products, but not if we put all our eggs in the low value fibre basket, with no thought to the overall quality of our raw forest products. The Jaakko Pöyry report simply offers that our forest industry will learn to make do with smaller and smaller trees. This, I believe, is not smart planning.

Interestingly, Jaakko Poyry recently wrote a report for the government of Ontario, in which they strongly recommend moving the province's forest industry toward greater value-added production – exactly the opposite direction they've recommended for New Brunswick.

Jobs... Jobs... Jobs? Low-value softwood is not the way to go if we are at all interested creating and supporting full-time, decent-paying jobs. The Jaakko Pöyry report would see an

increase in the number of tree planters, seasonal work that the forest industry already is challenged to fill with workers from New Brunswick.

The report calls for increased investment in ever more efficient pulp and paper mills. This means fewer people actually working in these mills. Greater efficiency in the woods through mechanization and creation of plantations means fewer people cutting trees. According to data from Natural Resources Canada, New Brunswick has the fewest people employed in the forest industry per unit of wood harvested in all of Canada. And not only that, the number of people working per unit of wood harvested has been steadily decreasing for decades. Is this a trend we wish to continue, as the Jaakko Pöyry recommendations would have us do?

What's the alternative? Maximising revenue and value-added processing by growing high-value wood and diversifying our forest industry is the sensible way forward. Pulp and paper will hopefully remain a part of our economy, but it should be fuelled by forest thinnings and the scraps and waste wood generated while producing lumber and other high-value products. What we need is a diverse, smart forest industry, capable of responding to and taking advantage of the ever-changing world market.

A smarter and more realistic, if more difficult, strategy is to increase value-added processing and promote a diversified forest economy: the more value-added and the more diverse the industry, the more jobs available. Growing low-value fibre and investing in the pulp and paper industry would only send New Brunswick in the opposite direction: a continued decline in the number of jobs per volume of wood harvested.

Guaranteed Wood Supply? Government giving companies a guaranteed wood supply, as the Jaakko Pöyry report recommends, is dangerous. The dynamic nature of public values, climate, scientific understanding, market demands and growing stock, along with the uncertainty associated with future plantation yields (and other allowable cut effects), dictate that timber supply cannot be guaranteed. Our Department of Natural Resources and Energy (DNRE) must retain a reasonable flexibility to adjust timber supply as required due to the numerous factors affecting timber supply, and to incorporate the public's values associated with Crown land. The notion of guaranteeing a certain level of timber supply is unprecedented to my knowledge, and would put DNRE in an extremely untenable position if they were to adopt this approach.

What's in store for private woodlot owners? Increasing intensive forest management will likely make low-value wood products from Crown land even less expensive. This will put woodlot owners at a disadvantage when trying to sell their wood, as mills will be supplied with abundant low-value Crown wood. Woodlot owners already get a poor price for their pulp and stud wood; flooding the market with more low-value wood will only make the situation more difficult for private woodlot owners and producers. It is not appropriate for public land to be the primary supplier of forest products, with the potential to seriously out-compete private woodlot owners.

Woodlot owners need a decent market for low-value wood in order to carry out forest activities that will increase the value of their woodlots over the long-term, such as thinnings and removal of low-quality trees. If Jaakko Pöyry were implemented, woodlot owners would likely end up with lower prices for their low-value wood, and as a result, fewer woodlot improvement activities would take place, leading to an overall decline in forest value in the long-term.

In a word from the Swedes: From an article by a Swedish forester (Hagner 1999) on forest management in Sweden: “[Swedish forest managers] have come to the conclusion that, to stay in business, they must abandon the production of low quality wood and focus on the production of high-value wood products.”

Ecological Implications

The Jaakko Pöyry report recommends that Crown Lands should be 60% softwood forest cover. Of this 60%, 40% will be softwood plantations and 18% will be intensively thinned softwood: the majority of the Crown land’s forest cover will be either planted spruce or stands simplified through thinning treatment. This means a significant loss of New Brunswick’s naturally occurring forest, creating an ecologically simplified, largely agriculture-like forest.

From an ecological perspective, this means a real loss of our forest’s natural diversity, and resistance and resilience to fire, insects, wind and disease. These problems only worsen with the potential for climate change: pure softwood will be even more stressed by a warmer climate, and thus more susceptible to insects and disease.

Watercourse buffers too big? The report suggests that DNRE’s watercourse buffer widths on Crown land are too large. However, the report does not include any scientific evidence or risk assessment to backup this statement. Simply criticizing the buffer widths in absence of substantiated information is inappropriate. In fact, New Brunswick’s watercourse management has been complemented for being scientifically based.

Fibre volume targets to override ecological constraints? Jaakko Pöyry recommends allowing fibre volume targets to take precedence over other management requirements. However, in order to maintain a healthy forest, DNRE must be able to set reasonable ecological management requirements, such as maintaining habitat for a diversity of forest species. Fibre volume supply objectives must not be allowed to override basic, sound ecosystem management. After all, Crown land is supposed to be managed for a wide diversity of interests and values, not just softwood fibre production.

In making these comments, I am assuming the report is entirely accurate in the facts it presents and the information given. Unfortunately, I cannot say whether this assumption is valid, given that the report is not referenced. In my experience, unreferenced work presented as fact is unprofessional, and somewhat distasteful. Any report such as this worth its salt, or its ½ million dollar price tag, must be referenced to be taken seriously. Referencing is standard procedure, and this is too important an issue to do otherwise. It’s not difficult either; one simply keeps a list of all sources of information used, so that anyone can verify the information presented.

I also wish to say that I had the opportunity to talk with the author of the report, and I asked him why he presented such a narrow approach to forest management for New Brunswick. Wouldn’t it make more sense, I asked him, to take a broader view of forestry for the province? Interestingly, he agreed with me that his report presents only a part of what New Brunswick should be considering for the future of its forest industry.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the committee for giving me time to voice my thoughts on this issue. I believe we are facing a critical time in the forest industry. Whatever we do, I believe we must make the people, communities and forests of this province as our first priority. It is clear to me that the Jaakko Poyry report has not done this.