

Crown land management plan addresses environmental, economic and social needs

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FREDERICTON (GNB) – The provincial government announced today a Crown forest management plan that balances social, ecological and economic needs.

"This balanced plan reflects the significant and helpful input I received from New Brunswickers during more than a year of consultations," said Natural Resources Minister Bruce Northrup. "It will keep our public forests vibrant and healthy while providing benefits in terms of a wide range of jobs and recreational opportunities."

Northrup said he was especially thankful to First Nations for their input on how the province's public forests should be managed.

"First Nations people have a special connection to the land that has been passed on from generation to generation," said Northrup. "This plan respects the views expressed by First Nations leaders."

The major features of the Crown land management plan include:

- establishing an annual allowable cut (AAC) for softwood species (spruce/fir/jack pine) of 3.27 million cubic metres, which is the same AAC as in the 2007-2012 management plan;
- a reduction in the hardwood AAC from 1.77 million cubic metres in the 2007-2012 plan to 1.41 million cubic metres. This 21 per cent reduction will ensure a sustainable hardwood supply in the future;
- implementation of non-clearcut harvesting measures to maintain the diversity and important ecological features of the Acadian forest;
- meeting all 20 of the provincial conservation objectives established to maintain healthy wildlife populations and old-forest habitat types;
- doubling to eight per cent the amount of forested Crown land designated as Protected Natural Areas. In total, 9.4 per cent of Crown land will be designated as Protected Natural Areas; and
- designating 28 per cent of the total Crown forest as "conservation forest," which is managed primarily for biodiversity conservation purposes. The conservation forest includes the Protected Natural Areas.

The conservation forest remains well above the 23 to 25 per cent proposed in 2009, Northrup said.

"At 23 to 25 per cent, less than half of the province's 20 wildlife habitat and old-forest habitat targets would have been met," he said. "Biologists have told me that at 28 per cent, the conservation forest will be able to fully meet all of these conservation targets."

New Brunswick has six target levels to ensure the Crown forest can support desired population levels of vertebrate species that require forests to survive. Another 14 targets relate to forest types and are designed to maintain functional amounts of old forest community types across their natural range. All 20 targets for wildlife and habitat are fully met within the new management plan.

Northrup said conservationists had repeatedly stressed that meeting these targets was their top priority. The major concern of the forest industry and of the 10,000 people who work directly in it was to maintain the AAC for softwood, which is used to produce most of the province's lumber products.

"This management plan addresses both of those concerns," Northrup said. "It strikes the best balance possible while preserving jobs in rural and northern New Brunswick, where forestry remains a major employer and a \$2.7-billion industry."

The softwood AAC has been set at a level that is sustainable and is based on an in-depth analysis of Crown wood supply undertaken by the department over the past year.

"This new analysis has shown us that Crown wood from managed softwood stands grows differently from the non-managed forest; it has less rot and yields more usable wood," he said. "As a result, there's more Crown wood out there than previously thought and this has certainly been instrumental in allowing us to maintain the softwood harvest level while meeting all of our conservation objectives."

Based on projections, it is expected the softwood AAC can be maintained at the current level until more of the province's managed stands begin to generate an even larger wood supply.

"All our information indicates there will be a rapidly growing wood supply beginning around 2030 as these managed stands mature," said Northrup. "Until then, we are confident there will be enough wood to at least maintain the softwood AAC at the present level and that is our objective."

Northrup said the reduction in hardwood AAC on Crown land is unavoidable if New Brunswick is to have a sustainable hardwood supply in the future.

"It would be in no one's interest to harvest hardwood species at a level that would require an even larger AAC reduction in the future," he said. "This reduction is necessary and, at the same time, it represents an opportunity for the province's private woodlot sector to sell more wood into the marketplace, which is a top priority for our government."

The recent report by the Private Land Task Force on timber objectives noted that many previously harvested private woodlots have regenerated primarily with hardwood species.

"This supply of private wood can fill the void caused by the reduction in the Crown land hardwood AAC," said Northrup. "This is potentially a 350,000-cubic-metre increase in demand, which is an amount equal to one-third of all wood harvested from private woodlots last year."

The new management plan sets out the major objectives for Crown land management and will allow foresters and biologists to proceed with detailed planning in time for harvesting operations beginning April 1, 2013. The management plan objectives will be in effect for 10 years - from April 2012 to March 31, 2022 - which is double the length of previous management plans.

"The Crown Land Task Force on timber objectives recommended we move to a 10-year planning cycle in order to provide greater certainty on allocation levels as well as commitments to conservation measures," said Northrup. "We agree with this approach and will take the necessary legislative steps to implement a 10-year management plan."

Providing certainty on harvest levels over a longer time period will give industry the predictability it needs to make investments to modernize their businesses in order to compete in the international marketplace, he said. It will also reduce costs related to management planning for both industry and government.

"Our government sees a strong forest industry as essential to fostering job creation and economic growth in our province," said Northrup. "We believe there are great opportunities ahead for forestry and especially for value-added forest products. Achieving these opportunities will require companies to be innovative and we will continue to work with industry to create a climate where they feel secure in investing in their future and in the future of our province."

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