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Communications New Brunswick

Government releases long-term management approach for Crown forests

FREDERICTON (CNB) - A new long-term management approach for Crown forests that balances ecological and economic priorities was released today by the Government of New Brunswick.

The announcement was made by Premier Shawn Graham, Natural Resources Minister Wally Stiles and Business New Brunswick Minister Greg Byrne in response to two reports concerning New Brunswick's Crown forests and forest industry. Both reports were released in August, and public meetings and other consultations followed.

"Our government is committed to a forest industry that is strong and competitive and a forest that is vibrant and healthy," said Graham. "The forest industry has a strong future and will be a major contributor to a self-sufficient New Brunswick."

The Report of the New Brunswick Task Force on Forest Diversity and Wood Supply, more commonly known as the Erdle report, was prepared for the Department of Natural Resources and provided alternatives for the future management of Crown forests.

"Our new sustainable management approach for Crown forests will allow us to generate increasing yields of a wider variety of tree species in the future and will maintain the diversity and important ecological features of our Acadian forest," said Stiles. "In fact, we'll see a renewed abundance of some tree species associated with the Acadian forest that have declined over the past 70 years."

Business New Brunswick commissioned a report from consultants Don Roberts of CIBC World Markets Inc. and Peter Woodbridge of Woodbridge Associates Inc. to provide advice on investment opportunities in the province's forest sector.

Byrne said he endorsed the position that the province's forestry sector is an economically and environmentally sustainable growth industry with a bright future.

"We are embracing forest products as an area of growth," he said. "Our involvement in the re-opening of the AV Nackawic mill and its repositioning to produce a new product line is a prime example of how we are helping industry exploit this potential. We are also working to strengthen the industry base by helping to improve productivity and competitiveness within the sector."

The Task Force on Forest Diversity and Wood Supply was chaired by Thom Erdle of the University of New Brunswick, and it put forward a range of management approach alternatives.

Stiles said his department received more than 600 e-mails and letters related to the Erdle task force report.

"All of this input has contributed to the sustainable management policy for Crown forests that has been adopted by government," he said.

The Government of New Brunswick has chosen a hybrid version of the models presented in the Erdle report. It incorporates elements of various alternatives in the report as well as the array of input the Department of Natural Resources received following its release.

The major features of the new approach are:

- * The conservation forest will make up between 23 and 25 per cent of the total Crown forest, including the portion designated as protected natural areas. The conservation forest is managed primarily for conservation purposes although some wood harvesting is permitted except within the protected natural areas;

- * protected natural areas, which make up four per cent of Crown lands, will increase to between six to and eight per cent;

- * at least 30 per cent of the total Crown forest will be comprised of old forest;

- * in areas where the combination of late successional tree species dominate, clear cutting will not be permitted so that these species are retained. Late successional tree species are long-lived species that include sugar maple, hemlock, cedar, white and red pine and yellow birch. This mixture of tree species is an integral part of the traditional Acadian forest;

- * wood supply objectives will be established for six species of softwood and hardwoods. These objectives will promote larger-dimension trees with sawlog potential. Currently, management goals exist only for spruce/fir and total hardwood, and they were not specific to large-dimension trees. Having a mix of tree species is also a hedge against climate change and the impact it could have on individual tree species; and

- * plantations will be limited to a maximum level of 28 per cent of the Crown forest area and will be planted with a variety of tree species.

Graham announced that an additional \$5 million will be invested in Crown land silviculture beginning in 2009-10. This will bring the total investment in silviculture operations on Crown land to more than \$25 million annually.

Stiles said government intends to work with industry on performance standards and accountability related to silviculture operations on Crown land.

"These plantations are at the heart of an increasing Crown wood supply, so it is important that we get the best results possible from our silviculture operations," he said.

The new management approach will establish objectives for renewed Crown forest management plans that will be implemented in 2012. It is based on long-term planning and extends over 100 years. The forecast is for a 75 per cent increase in Crown wood supply after 50 years.

"The wood supply from Crown land will be increasing over time and for a wider range of tree species, but there will be no new wood available tomorrow," Stiles said. "In the short term, the wood supply from Crown land will not be increasing."

He said government has an objective to maintain the current annual allowable cut for softwood when new management plans come into effect in 2012.

The challenge will be greater on the hardwood side, and Stiles said government will work closely with industry to find ways to mitigate what could potentially be a substantial reduction in the annual allowable cut of hardwood on Crown land. One part of the solution will be an increase in hardwood silviculture, he said.

"We are also going to have to look at other solutions, including using all available hardwood in our province," he said. "This means that private woodlots will have to take on an increasingly important role in meeting industry's wood fibre needs. By industry, wood producers and government all working together, we can overcome this short-term challenge and ensure we have a sustainable supply of wood."

Stiles said the strength of the forest management approach is that it produces a sustainable, predictable and dependable wood supply over the long term, while also addressing conservation needs.

"A dependable, growing wood supply that includes a wider variety of tree species opens the door to new investments in our forest industry and to new products," he said. "Our existing forest industry can plan for the future and make investments that will allow them to succeed in a very competitive industry, and we'll be able to more easily market New Brunswick to new investors."

Byrne said the advice contained within the Woodbridge-Roberts report will inform and influence his department's policy as it works to support the province's forest industry.

Business New Brunswick will continue to market the forest products manufacturing sector as a key investment opportunity to outside companies, and it supports New Brunswick companies exporting to new markets, he said.

In addition, Byrne said his department will encourage industry and private woodlot owners to work toward establishing a partnership that ensures competitive prices and long-term supply stability of wood fibre, whether it comes from private or Crown land.

Business New Brunswick will also continue to work with industry, Efficiency NB and NB Power to help mills develop co-generation capacity, adding green energy to the province's electrical grid and reducing dependency on fossil fuel power generation.

The government's recent support of sector companies, including Irving Paper, J.D. Irving Ltd.'s Deersdale sawmill and Grand Lake Timber mill, Fraser Papers, Groupe Savoie, Flakeboard and Future Alternative Wood Products, demonstrates its commitment to helping the forest industry be strong and competitive in New Brunswick.

"This industry is a key growth sector that will help New Brunswick achieve its goal of self-sufficiency by 2026," said Byrne. "That is why we must continue to maintain a balanced approach over the long term that will respect the management of the forest while encouraging the growth and success of the forest industry."