

Presentation to the Select Committee on Wood Supply

December 17, 2003

Fredericton, NB

By Emily McMillan
Director of Operations
Atlantic Canada Chapter, Sierra Club of Canada

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to speak on the issue of the future of Crown Lands Management in New Brunswick. I grew up in Sussex, New Brunswick, and have known many whose lives are based around working in the woods. I hope that these meetings will result in some positive changes to Crown Land management that will benefit both our Acadian forests and our forest related jobs.

I am here today representing the Sierra Club of Canada. The Sierra Club of Canada is a membership-based, volunteer-governed national environmental organization with chapters across the country. It is dedicated to exploring, enjoying and protecting the wild places of the earth and to practicing and promoting the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems. The Sierra Club of Canada - Atlantic Canada Chapter represents the four Atlantic Provinces: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. We have many members and supporters in New Brunswick.

I hold a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Masters of Environmental Studies. I am not a forester. However, when I read a report like the Jaakko Poyry report, it is absolutely obvious to me that it is not the right path for New Brunswick. I am sure you have heard many well-spoken people during your time on this committee with well-reasoned arguments. I think the report speaks for itself: 40% plantations, ever-increasing wood supply, a fiscally binding guarantee of wood supply, and increased cutting along rivers and streams and in deer wintering areas. When I explain to people I work with that these are the recommendations of the Jaakko Poyry report, I see eyes widen, eyebrows raise, usually a chuckle comes forth. Jaakko is Waakko say the youth of the province, and I have to agree. Who would ever agree to something with such a lack of flexibility, something that is obviously ecologically damaging, something that is so intuitively wrong. Apparently, some people think that the Jaakko Poyry recommendations would benefit the people of New Brunswick. I don't want to insult anyone, but I think that is laughable. I'll take that back, one benefit would be starting this process of looking at the management of Crown Lands and hopefully leading to some positive changes.

We need to get with the program, and enter into the next century. Let's be progressive and innovative, not restrictive and close-minded. Let's use terms that show we are thinking about our future, terms like value-added, diversity, low-impact, quality, community. New Brunswick is incredibly fortunate to have beautifully diverse Acadian forest. Thirty-nine tree species! And yet the forest industry only wants to use a few of them, and turn the forest into pulp and fibre farms. Every one of those species presents an opportunity to make products and create employment, not to mention providing

habitat and having a right to exist! This type of debate always seems to come down to jobs, so let's create the jobs by keeping all of our options. There are many different types of products we can create from our many different species. There are many innovative and practical solutions to the question of forest stewardship. There are many different types of management that could be developed: community forests, municipal forests, individual tenure, First Nations tenure, plus ecotourism, recreation and non-timber forest products. These management solutions can create more jobs, retain and circulate wealth, require less capitalization, maintain watersheds and ecosystems. These are empowering and democratic solutions. This is in contrast to the status quo of increased mechanization of harvesting on Crown Lands and its attendant planting and spraying leading to job losses, habitat loss and elimination of species. We should aim for local employment, local value added enterprise, training opportunities, recovering the highest possible value from the forest, including ecological values. Our Crown Lands can provide a wide array of forest industries leading to great benefits for all New Brunswickers, present and future, including economic and ecological security.

How could we even think about transforming 40% of this incredible opportunity into monoculture plantations with small, sad trees useful in only one sector of society? It makes no sense, economically or ecologically. Talking about jobs, the pulp and paper industry seems to consistently reduce employment; I believe it is called "efficiency". Why don't we instead try diversity, aiming for value added and high quality industries that retain the capacity of our forests? If we choose plantations, we are choosing to suppress this diversity that could sustain us on a long-term basis, choosing to spray heavy doses of herbicides, harming our health and the health of the environment. Again, intuitively wrong.

The Jaakko Poyry report also recommends fiscally binding guarantees of wood supply. That must sound dreamy to a forestry company executive. To anyone else, it sounds lunatic. In this day and age of changing climates, changing management methods, changing ideas, how could we think of committing taxpayers to compensate multinational companies if they aren't able to meet their wood supply? I'm told this has not been done in any other jurisdiction. I wonder if it is because it is intuitively wrong? Would we do this for any other type of industry – guarantee that if they don't make their profits we will pay them? It is ransoming ourselves to companies who would be quite happy if we never have another protected area and never settled First Nation land claims. Let's keep our options open for future changes.

My recommendation is that we must manage our crown lands to maintain the greatest value and the greatest variety of options for the future. This means moving into 21st century forestry by managing for complexity, for a wide range of ecological goods and services, and across broad landscapes. Jaakko Poyry would see us move toward forest simplification and conversion, which is firmly out of step with today's science.

I don't even want to talk about harvesting in stream buffers and deer wintering areas. It is a totally selfish proposition that puts no value on any other living creatures or even on human health, only on short-term profit.

I don't know if the government is considering options that include a progressive forestry strategy. It seems that these hearings are simply to respond to an industry report, an industry agenda. There has been no government discussion paper put forth that the public can comment on, only this industry report that presents one point of view that would see private benefits take precedence over public benefits. As with many issues involving our use of nature, you most likely have not heard from many of the experts in this province: scientists who work for provincial government or even, sometimes, the forestry companies that are advancing this report. Although they may have expertise and good thoughts on where to go with crown land management, they are not able to speak. There is a similar situation happening with seismic testing in Nova Scotia; fisheries scientists are not allowed to speak out about a situation they know may be dangerous to our fish stocks. I have friends working for government who tell me they are not allowed to express their opinion on issues such as these. I hope that you have gained enough information through these hearings, but if not, I hope you are able to speak with some of these experts in a non-formal way and that they are able to give you their independent opinion without endangering their employment.

If you think back on what you have heard over the course of these hearings, you will remember that everyone agrees there is a big problem and everyone agrees that our present system is not sustainable. This message is coming from industry, sub-contractors, people who work in the woods, mayors, teachers, environmentalists, youth -- the difference is in how we look for solutions. Industry is presenting a more extreme version of what we already have and what is not working. Almost everyone, except for the industry (by that I mean the direct licensees), is calling for changes to the licensing system. Right now tenure is going to six big companies, with some 80 sublicensees who get their allotment through those six companies. Changing the tenure system to allow more direct licensees would allow more people to be actively involved in decision making about the land itself, and would allow diversification of employment. It is all a matter of scale. I hope the committee's report will include an analysis of the number of people who support changing the tenure system and getting more access to more people.

When considering all that you have heard, please keep in mind the law, which states that Crown Land and its resources are a public trust to be managed for public benefit to today and in perpetuity without diminishing their inherent value. It is the responsibility of this government to safeguard this public trust and to manage our Crown Land for long-term public benefit, which makes the recommendations of Jaakko Poyry indefensible. Please think carefully on behalf of future generations and wildlife, both of who are not able to be engaged as stakeholders, as to what constitutes value and makes sense for the long term. Listen to your intuition on what makes sense -- lots of people involved in a diversified industry, or monoculture and monopoly. You have a weighty responsibility in this task. The future of our forests is depending on you. In turn, I hope our government has the political courage to stand up and do what is right for our forests.