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Where's balance in forest strategy?

Tracy Glynn
Conservation Council of New Brunswick

Natural Resources Minister Wally Stiles says in his Feb. 19 letter the government's new forest strategy won't cut wildlife habitat zones by half.

Currently, 30 per cent of public land is conservation forest; the government plans to reduce this to 23 to 25 per cent.

Much of the conservation forest isn't accessible to logging for regulatory or natural reasons. Environmental laws limit logging in stream buffers and some areas are too steep to log.

Therefore it is wildlife habitat zones that will be sacrificed with this plan.

The government's plan does not adequately protect old forest, threatening the survival of many species like the barred owl and flying squirrel.

Old forest will only be protected in stream buffer zones that are too narrow to meet minimum habitat requirements of many species.

We must make the restoration and protection of old forest habitats a primary goal, instead of an afterthought.

Premier Graham justifies its industry-sided plan by pointing to increases in protected areas, reductions in clearcutting and increases in silviculture dollars. However, the goal to increase the amount of protected forest to six to eight per cent will still rank New Brunswick behind the rest of Canada.

The miniscule reduction in clearcutting is nowhere near the amounts presented in the options in the Erdle report. Public funds for silviculture will pay companies to convert our natural forest to plantations on a massive scale and in areas rich in biodiversity. Where's the money for restoring our degraded natural forest?

Where's the balance?