

Notes for Comments on the Protected Natural Areas Strategy for New Brunswick

Presented at the January 21, 1999 Public Meeting - Fredericton

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The scientific evidence indicates there is a need in our province to take action to stop the deterioration of our biological diversity.

We are convinced that a network of protected areas representative of the diversity of our ecosystems is an essential step to conserving biodiversity, along with a shift to low impact harvesting practices on the rest of the forested landscape.

This initiative must be kept in perspective. The Conservation Council calculates that seven protected areas, one for each ecoregion, would make 2% of the productive forested area of the province (once you account for bogs, wetlands, lakes, and areas that are unproductive or inoperable from a forestry perspective) unavailable for timber production. The New Brunswick Forest Products Association, which speaks on behalf of the pulp and paper industry, insists that we are talking about 3% of the productive forested area of the province. The Protected Natural Areas Coalition calculates that percentage of productive forest land represented by all 12 candidate areas amounts to 3.5%.

For discussion purposes let's use industry's numbers. Three percent of New Brunswick's productive forest lands to be set aside for future generations as wild lands -- 97 % where timber harvesting will continue. A portion of this includes the watercourse buffers, deer yards and mature coniferous habitat areas designated as special management areas, but logging is permitted in all of these under particular conditions.

We have a unique opportunity at this moment to do something for future generations - to set aside some of the last remaining wild areas that exist in the province. It's not often that one generation has this kind of chance to do something for the next. We must seize the moment.

The New Brunswick Forest Product Association's scare-mongering, on behalf of the pulp and paper industry is shameful. We should reject this effort to polarize our

communities, turning neighbour against neighbour, and creating unneeded stress among thousands of New Brunswick families. This is not British Columbia. It's New Brunswick. Our own organization, the Conservation Council, has wood producers on our Board and millworkers among our membership. Forcing people into opposing camps, stereotyping and manipulating them is unacceptable.

First it was private woodlot owners that the paper companies attempted to vilify for selling their wood over the line and overcutting their woodlots. Then it was the Indians. Now it's protected natural areas and those who believe they are a good idea.

Suddenly big industry is the friend of the little guy, friend of the worker, champion of the the small local saw mills and defender of rural New Brunswick. If the New Brunswick Forest Products Association is so concerned about jobs, where are they when their members eliminate hundreds of jobs to fatten their bottom line? Where are they when their corporate members ship raw logs for milling in the United States instead of New Brunswick? Wouldn't it be something if the pulp companies were forced to consult New Brunswickers about changes to their woodland or mill operations that might kill jobs.

It seems to me the real concerns about -no wood-no mills-no jobs has more to do with the 97% or 98% of our productive forest land on which timber harvesting will continue rather than the 2-3% of forest land that might be protected as wild lands. Could it be that the indiscriminate use of clearcutting, the current rate of harvest and the industrial capacity which drives it is what is really threatening our wood supply, mills and jobs? Is it these things that really represent the assault on rural New Brunswick or is it setting aside a small proportion of land as protected natural areas for future generations?

The Conservation Council hopes that Dr. LaPierre recommends in his final report that action is required not only to set aside 2%-3% of our productive forest lands as protected wildlands, but that action is required to ensure harvesting activities on the 97% of our forest lands devoted to timber production use practices and are carried out at a rate that will sustain jobs and conserve biodiversity for the long-term. Specifically, we request that he make a recommendation that government implement the forest management guidelines to protect native biodiversity developed for the Irving sponsored Fundy Model Forest on the vast area of Crown lands that will continue to be managed for timber production.

With respect to the proposed protected areas strategy there are a couple of specific things we would like to highlight. One is the development of interim guidelines for candidate-protected areas. This is critical to ensure that no new roads are built into

these areas or new mineral claims are made until the final decisions are made to afford areas legal protection.

Secondly, we would like to see the strategy place added emphasis on the need to follow-up the establishment of these large protected wildlands with the so-called fine filter approach to ensure that those rare and unique biological features of the province that have not been captured by this work are not lost.

Finally, given how relatively inaccessible the candidate sites are for the lack of roads, we see no reason to place any special restrictions on hunting or fishing. Neither of these activities pose a particular threat to biological diversity unless they are carried on at a very high intensity where they actually threaten entire populations. The inaccessibility of these areas provides a natural limit to the amount of hunting and fishing that goes on. Which leads to one additional point, which is once protected, government should not be building new roads in these areas.

Thank you.