

Protected Areas Strategy Presentation
Doaktown, New Brunswick, February 17, 1999

By Emily McMillan.

My name is Emily McMillan.

First, I want to say thank-you to you, Louis, and your team for all the work you have done and all the sleep you have lost over this important issue.

I am a fourth year biology student from the University of New Brunswick and am very thankful for this chance to present my opinions.

The fact that I am up here tonight should show you how much I care about protected areas as I have a great fear of public speaking. And so, I was afraid to come up here tonight, however, I am more afraid that this protected areas strategy is not going to be implemented.

I am afraid people are forgetting that nature is more than just a resource waiting to be exploited. Nature has many values: spiritual values, educational values, scientific values, recreational values, and especially intrinsic values.

I am afraid we are using our province (as well as our planet) as a big experiment without any controls. As a scientist, I have learned that no results are meaningful unless there is a control to compare them too. I would have thought the forest industry would jump at this chance to learn more about the forest and thereby learn how to improve their forestry practices. As Paul Erlich once said, "Human beings are transforming nature on a gigantic scale without the slightest notion of what the long term consequences might be." This protected areas strategy is our chance to mediate this situation in our province.

I am afraid people are blinded by their fears and not listening rationally to the facts. The fact is that this strategy will mean only 3% of the productive forested land will be taken out of the harvesting loop. If the forestry industry will collapse because of the loss of 3% of its wood, I am afraid they have a bigger problem than protected areas. The fact that these areas have not been harvested already is because they are extremely

inaccessible - many are surrounded by bogs and wetlands. They are not prime forest land and should not even make a dent in the amount of wood that is harvested.

I am afraid people will not think critically about the alarming figures being circulated around the whole province by the forest industry. For instance, they are saying up to a thousand jobs will be lost. To me this seems unreasonable at best. Everyone outside of the forest industry, including professors at my university, have agreed that job losses will be minimal if any. The forestry industry is an expert at these alarmist campaigns. In Cape Breton, they threw around the same figures of enormous job losses that would result from not spraying Cape Breton's forests with toxic chemicals. Well, in that case no jobs were lost despite industry predictions and I believe this will be the case here in New Brunswick.

I am afraid people are forgetting to think long term. Thrown into a frenzy of fear of unemployment (quite understandably) people are not stopping to think that future jobs may depend on these protected areas. Who knows what we will learn from them. The possibilities are endless. The forest industry has already admitted that a wood shortage is inevitable. Perhaps this can be averted by studying these protected areas and learning more about how forests behave.

I am afraid people are letting their fear override their common sense. Industry's alarmist numbers have been blanketed across the entire province. This has put people into complete survival mode. However, if people could put aside their fear and look at the report rationally, although it is understandable that this is difficult, they would see what I see. And what is glaringly obvious to me is that this system of protected areas would only remove 3% of the productive forest land from industry's grip. 3% - is this too much to ask? It is a tiny fraction of the province to put aside for future generations.

I am afraid people are only reacting instead of thinking. They are reacting to the threat of unemployment instead of thinking about if this threat is real or not. Environmental protection is not what has cost jobs in the past. Rather it has been mechanization and loss of labor intensive practices. I do not blame the common forester or mill worker for this. After all they are just trying to make a living. I blame the big corporations that are so powerful in our province. It is obvious to me

that these corporations only care about the bottom line - making a profit- and they do not care who or what they hurt in doing it - whether it be the environment or their workers.

I am afraid people are not considering the future wants and needs of their children. They may be thinking right now that if they lose their job they won't be able to buy their child that new toy or those nice sneakers they really want; however, what about the future. What will you say when your child comes up to you and says: what was it like to be able to go camping in unspoiled wilderness? Why did I not get to learn how to fish in a stream surrounded by more than a stream buffer? What if they say: how could you let all of our forests be harvested? Protected areas are a great gift to our future generations.

I am afraid when I hear people say we already have enough of our land protected. New Brunswick has the lowest amount of land protected in all of Canada. I look forward to a time when I can travel to other places and feel proud to call New Brunswick my home instead of cringing when people remember we are the province that gets such low grades for preservation of our lands. Places such as stream buffers do not count in my book as a protected area. How can a 100m strip of trees compare to 20 000ha of wildlands?

I am afraid people will let their government railroad them into thinking there is lots of time to implement a strategy such as this one. Just because it may be an election year is no excuse to put of such an important issue. Because this is almost now or never. There will never be a better chance to set aside these areas for I am afraid if we put it off they will be harvested if only to insure this sort of process won't happen again. We need these areas to be protected and we need them to be given interim protection until this issue is resolved.

I am afraid people are taking the "it's not scientific" claims too much to heart. As a budding scientist I can tell you that science is an imperfect discipline. A better measure is the precautionary principle which basically says we should not let lack of scientific proof be the reason we don't do something. It should be the other way around, once we have scientific proof that we don't need protected areas then maybe it would be okay not to have them. Science does not have all the answers and we should be able to rely on our common sense rather than something being scientific. After all, if you saw smoke coming out of a doorway would you wait for

scientific proof that the building was on fire before doing something about it? Ecology and economics, as someone once told me, are both complex models that we don't really understand, it is just that economic models are believed while ecological ones are not. If I was going to question science, I would question the science of the economics that came up with these inflated job loss numbers.

I am afraid people will forget how important it is to preserve our natural heritage, our source of biodiversity, our beautiful province. As Donald Worster said, " To conserve that heritage is to put other values than economic ones first in our priorities: the value of natural beauty, the value of respectfulness in the presence of what we have not created, and above all the value of life itself, a phenomenon that even now, with all our intelligence, we cannot really understand."

I have hope that my fears will not be realized and I hope I have been able to make a small contribution to our future by supporting this protected areas strategy.

Thank you.