

## **By Gwen Martin**

Protected Areas Strategy Presentation

Chipman, New Brunswick, February 15, 1999

Thank you very much, all of you, for the opportunity to speak here tonight. My name is Gwen Martin, I'm a geologist by training and have worked with both the forestry and mining sectors of this province. I fully appreciate the economic importance of both the forest and mining industries. At the same time, I want to state unequivocally that I support this protected area strategy.

I've been following these hearings fairly closely, and appreciate the pressures you've been under. To put it simply, you're caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. The deep blue sea is the fact that you were asked to develop a protected area strategy by a provincial government that doesn't have the courage to do so itself. The devil is the fact that the forest industry has reacted - as the government more or less suspected it might react - with a classically designed campaign of propaganda, misinformation and fear-mongering. We'll get back to that in a minute.

When I first wrote this presentation, I intended to say many of the same things as you've been hearing from others around the province ... the fact that if all 12 proposed areas in your report were protected, they would encompass only 5% of our province; the fact that, even at 5%, this would give New Brunswick the lowest percentage of protected land in Canada, and one of the lowest in North America. It already has been pointed out that all 12 proposed areas contain only 3.5% of New Brunswick's productive forests, which means that the forest industry essentially has unencumbered access to the remaining 97%.

Like I say, those were my intentions. But after following the commotion surrounding these hearings, I've begun to get really angry. Here's why.

When you look at the history of New Brunswick - the development of its natural resources, how the province evolved economically, that sort of thing - you can see that, right from the earliest times of European immigration, New Brunswickers have had to deal with being told WHAT to do, and HOW to think.

In the 16- and 1700s, it was a bunch of French and English kings. When the first timber barons arrived here in the mid 1700s, they told the settlers where they could and couldn't cut. Once we joined Confederation, Upper Canada got into the act. Since the 1920s or so, we've had large forest companies and other corporations basically

running the show. I'm sure that you or some of your government colleagues in this room know more about this than I do.

And now, we have the forest industry telling us what to think about your protected area strategy. For the last month or so, it has spent thousands of dollars in brochures, posters, bumper stickers, you name it, trying to convince New Brunswickers that their jobs are at stake ... because a great big 3.5% of the forest lands in this province might be removed from permanent production??? Why the sudden concern for jobless New Brunswickers? The industry itself has eliminated hundreds of jobs over the last 5 years alone through mechanization. And what happens to those so-called lost jobs once the 3.5% of timber is gone?

What really annoys me is this. I have listened to a lot of small woodlot owners and sawmill operators over the last while. Genuine people with genuine concerns about the land and their jobs. It seems that many of them have become alarmed by this misinformation ... misinformation that has been spread by the very corporations that refuse to give an honest woodlot owner an honest price for a cord of wood.

These industry tactics are wrong, they are dishonest, they play on people's worst fears ... and they are insulting to New Brunswickers. And I believe they are beginning to backfire. When you read the message, don't EVER forget who is the messenger.

Why is the forest industry trying so hard to tell the people of New Brunswick what to think and how to feel about protected areas? It's doing so because it knows the truth ... and it is AFRAID.

The truth, Dr. LaPierre, is contained in a poll conducted in November of 1998 by Corporate Research Associates of Halifax. The poll results showed that 93% of surveyed New Brunswickers want their government to protect the province's remaining wilderness. What's even more amazing is that 94% of surveyed New Brunswickers feel that wilderness and natural areas will PROMOTE local economic growth. Please note that these people were not just some group of university professors from UNB or other urban residents. This poll canvassed a range of citizens from both urban and rural settings.

So where does that leave us? It leaves us with the picture of a desperate forest industry which for a very long time has managed our forests - OUR public forests - so poorly that it is scrambling to remove the last 3.5% of relatively undeveloped forest lands remaining in the province. It leaves us with an industry which thinks that New Brunswickers are so gullible that it can dangle the words 'lost jobs' over our subservient heads like a carrot ... when in fact we've already lost hundreds of jobs through poor forest management and a corporate reluctance to develop more

secondary, value-added industries that would make BETTER use of the wood we have - and that would create MORE jobs.

Now in recent years, members of the industry have attempted - or in some cases been forced - to improve their forest management methods. I know a few of the foresters with these companies, and a number of them are genuinely trying to do the right thing. They have their work cut out for them. Some companies have even created little NATURE parks for us to admire so we can say, LOOK at how they care about the environment.

Now, maybe I'm just being small-minded here, but it really galls me to see the exorbitant amount of environmental mileage that a forest company can milk out of creating a small nature park near a large city on land it cannot use, when it already has so much of the province's forest lands at its corporate disposal. Having said that, I do appreciate that a few corporations are willing - no matter what their motives - to display some environmental goodwill. I'd like to see a whole lot more.

I'm going to finish here with an observation based on my time in New Brunswick's public schools. Over the last decade or so, I have taught in probably 120 elementary and middle schools, telling students about forestry and rocks and minerals. We have talked a lot, the students and I, about the importance of protected areas and wilderness, and how they relate to forestry and mining.

And you know, it has really touched me to see how instinctively and naturally children recognize the importance of protecting our landscape. They feel close to rocks and trees. When I take them on field trips in the woods, they listen and they value the silence. They care about the wildlife. Dare I say it ... they feel a sense of connection with the landscape in which they live. It is part of their sense of community.

Dr. LaPierre, I TRULY believe from the bottom of my heart that most New Brunswickers feel the SAME WAY. The poll results prove it, as do many of the presentations you've heard over the last month. We care passionately about our provincial landscape. It is partly what defines us as a people, as New Brunswickers.

We aren't a people who want to live surrounded by monocultural tree plantations with limited biodiversity, any more than we want to live in a big city with rows and rows of identical houses and no green areas. That's not who we are. And we don't need a greedy, desperate forest industry, which has many of its members with corporate headquarters outside New Brunswick, telling us what to think and how to feel about OUR provincial wilderness.

In these cynical times, many people believe that decisions about matters such as your protected area strategy are made politically, not scientifically. Some people are even saying that the government will make its decision based solely on what it THINKS the people of New Brunswick want - in other words, what they will vote for - instead of what is best for the future of the province.

Well, Dr. LaPierre, I believe that if you had a chance to hear from everyone in New Brunswick - and not just from the people who have money to run propaganda campaigns, or woods employees who are being coerced and intimidated by their employers into showing up at meetings - you would hear one loud message.

And the message is this: We want the forest industry to make BETTER, value-added use of the wood it already HAS, so that we have MORE jobs ... because we want to stay HOME and not have to move to Ontario or Alberta. And we want to keep our last, few remaining wilderness areas from being destroyed, so that our homeland is worth staying around FOR.

We will vote on the basis of how well this government heeds our wishes. And THAT is a message I would like you to take back to Premier Camille Theriault and his cabinet. Thank you very much.