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Coon sees flaws in forestry plan

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Dear editor:

I wanted to pass on a bit of our analysis of the government's new forest management strategy.

Nineteen per cent of the forest is currently managed for wildlife habitat and biodiversity conservation which means clearcutting is not permitted — only selection cutting. This area will be reduced by at least half to provide new sources of spruce and fir in order to maintain industry's annual allowable cut at current level.

Protected natural areas are supposed to increase in area from four per cent, to six to eight per cent — no details.

The area in plantations will go from the current 10 per cent to 28 per cent , rather than the 20 per cent provided for in the business-as-usual case. Scientists say they should be kept to 15 per cent of the forest to conserve biodiversity. Jakko Poyry and the industry had been lobbying for 40 per cent.

Rules for what kinds of forest can be converted to plantations will be relaxed so that it will be permissible to convert richer, productive and biodiverse mixed wood forest to plantations — hence increasing the volume of softwood that can be grown a given amount of plantation land.

The percentage of older forest will be allowed to decline from 45 per cent today to 31 per cent, well below the 40 per cent threshold conservation biologists believe is necessary to avoid local extinctions.

The average amount of clearcutting will decline from 81 per cent to 71 to 76 per cent over the next 25 years. The options developed by the Erdle Task Force were 45 per cent, 49 per cent, 50 per cent, 52 per cent, 63 per cent, and 66 per cent . These are much lower because the threshold for percentage of tolerant softwood or hardwood that triggers selection cutting was lowered. Selection cutting will only be triggered when the percentage of these species in an area reaches 50 per cent .

Related to this, the area of forest that will be cut according to whether selection cutting or clearcutting mimics natural conditions will be 35 per cent , which is up from the current 23 per cent , but well below any of the options developed by the Erdle Task Force. These ranged from 100 per cent to 40 per cent .

Also related is the area of forest that will be of an uneven age after cutting, which under the government plan will be 10 per cent , up from the current seven per cent , but well below 16 to 19 per cent presented in three of the Erdle options.

The area of forest that remains unmanipulated shrinks from 23 per cent to 20 per cent , compared to the 26 per cent and 29 per cent in the scenarios proposed by myself and Roberta Clowater of The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS).

Over 80 years, the area of forest in mixed and pure tolerant species rises from 21 per cent to 29 per cent , largely as a result of thinning of new regeneration to favour valuable hardwoods, but doesn't come anywhere near the 37 per cent that resulted from my scenario which relied heavily on selection cutting to favour hardwoods rather than intensive silviculture.