

New Crown forest policy opposed by 61% in survey

Researchers at UNB's faculty of forestry and environmental management commissioned poll of 525 N.B. residents

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Opposition to the Alward government's new forest policy is running three times greater than support for the initiative, according to a new survey conducted for researchers at the University of New Brunswick.

The survey of 525 New Brunswickers found 61 per cent either strongly opposed or opposed the new Crown forest strategy, compared to 20 per cent who strongly supported or supported the initiative.



Tom Beckley, a forestry professor at the University of New Brunswick, said New Brunswickers want to be consulted on forestry issues. (CBC)

Premier David Alward's government announced it would increase the amount of softwood industrial forest companies can cut on Crown land by 20 per cent annually in March.

To help achieve that, the area of Crown land that is deemed off limits to industry is being reduced by five percentage points, to 23 per cent of the province's Crown land.

The provincial government and forest industry say the commitment to an increased softwood harvest will secure and create jobs in the province.

The survey also repeated two questions from a 2007 survey and the results were consistent in showing New Brunswickers want to be consulted about Crown forest policy, said UNB professor Tom Beckley.

"Much of the criticism of the government strategy has to do with the lack of public consultation that went into it," said Beckley, who was the lead author of the survey.

"These results are as much about democratic process as they are about the details of the forest policy."

Oracle poll of Ontario was commissioned by researchers at UNB's faculty of forestry and environmental management to carry out the survey. People were surveyed by telephone, using both land lines and cellular service, between May 16 and 23.

The survey results are considered accurate with 4.28 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Beckley said the new policy represents a departure from the long-held philosophy that in the Crown Lands and Forests Act, conservation values were taken care of first before allocations of timber were made available.

"Eighty per cent of respondents said that's the approach that they prefer," said Beckley.

"The new policy basically turns that on its head and says we're going to make our timber allocations first and we'll do conservation on the land remaining. And only 11 per cent of the public expressed a preference for that."