

Kent County municipal leaders unanimously condemn Tory forestry plan

Written by Dallas MacQuarrie on June 30, 2014



Hundreds rallied against the forest plan and Alward government-JD Irving contract on May 13 at the NB Legislature in Fredericton. Photo by Stephanie Merrill.

St. Ignace – Municipal governments in Kent County have unanimously condemned the Alward government’s Crown Lands Forest Management Strategy announced earlier in the year. They say the Conservative’s forest strategy will “damage the hunting, fishing, farming, maple syrup harvesting, and tourism sectors” while harming “the quality of life of the people.”

Meeting in Rogersville on June 27, the seven locally-elected mayors and nine local service district chairpersons who make up the Kent County Regional Services Commission (RSC) all voted to “demand that the Province of New Brunswick not sign any Crown Lands Forest Management Strategy prior to the provincial election on September 22.” Their resolution says the strategy could “obligate the people of New Brunswick to a contract that restricts future governments.”

One of the more controversial features of the so-called forest strategy is its plan to significantly increase the clearcutting of forests. The Kent County RSC motion by Harcourt Local Service District (LSD) chair Tina Beers condemns the “clearcutting of the forest” that she says “poses risks to the environment, hastens climate change and has a direct impact upon groundwater, wetlands, rivers and streams,” and “will have a direct ecological impact on the forest, plant life, wildlife and fish stocks.”

Scientists who study the ecology of forests, along with private woodlot owners, have now been joined en masse by local governments in declaring the strategy so flawed as to be a threat to the very future of New Brunswick’s forests. The depth of the opposition to what critics say is just

another giveaway to J.D. Irving is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that not a single comment in favour of the forest management strategy was heard at the Rogersville meeting.

St. Charles Local Service District chair Allan Marsh, who seconded the motion, blasted the forest strategy for its failure to consider the impact shale gas development, if allowed to proceed, would have.

“A single shale gas well pad for a single well destroys seven acres of forest forever,” Marsh said. “The government is talking a thousand wells. That’s a minimum of 7,000 acres of forest taken out of production forever!” In a subsequent interview, Marsh said that “when the forest land destroyed by a road to the well pad is included, then the total acreage lost is about nine acres.”

“The Alward government is talking about drilling 1,000 shale gas wells and, with the roads to those wells ‘factored in,’ that means at least 10,000 acres of forest lost forever,” he said. “The failure to taken this very significant loss of forest into account is a major flaw in the strategy.”

Along with its demand that the Alward government drop what some say is really a deforestation strategy, the Kent County RSC is demanding local involvement to ensure “sustainable development” of a resource that is critical to the province’s future. It says municipalities and members of the RSC must be “directly involved in all decisions” that affect the future of the forest here.

Local government leaders say local involvement is necessary “to guarantee the respect and the coherence of the local land use plans.”

While the groundswell of opposition to the forestry scheme is building, both the Liberals and the NDP seem to be unwilling to tangle with the Alward Conservatives on the issue. In May, Opposition Leader Brian Gallant criticized the Province for not doing it sooner.

“Not acting sooner has cost our economy dearly,” Gallant said at the time. A posting with that statement on the Liberal Party website has since been removed, but the front-runner in the race to succeed Premier Alward has made no commitment to kill the so-called forest strategy.

The NDP’s Dominic Cardy is refusing to take a position on the issue. He says \$6,000 in donations by the Irving family to the NDP in 2011 and again in 2012 have nothing to do with his refusal to criticize the plan.

The Green Party and the People’s Alliance of New Brunswick are now the only two provincial political parties that has not received Irving family donations.

It’s the second time in nine months that municipalities across Kent County have lined up against a major initiative of the Alward government. Last September, the Kent County RSC voted 14-1 in favor of a moratorium on shale gas development in the province.