

New forestry plan is not balanced
ROD CUMBERLAND, COMMENTARY
Telegraph-Journal, March 31, 2014

How on earth has government been able to release not one, but two forest management plans in as many years - each strikingly different - yet each claiming to be balanced? Who called for a new forest strategy to replace the 2012 forest strategy announced by then Natural Resource Minister Bruce Northrup - one that by the current government's admission was "the best balance", and that was "to remain in effect from April 2012 until March 2022"??

In the 2012 announcement, Min. Northrup stated his plan "respects the views expressed by First Nations"; biologists told him "At 28 per cent, the Conservation Forest will fully meet all conservation targets". Min. Northrup spent the time to listen to all involved parties - including his professional and knowledgeable department staff at DNR.

He advised staff to communicate to him directly about their professional opinions on what levels of Conservation Forest were acceptable to meet public demands without the fear of retribution for their professional perspective. That, along with perspectives from all other parties is why he considered the 2012 strategy with 28 per cent Conservation Forest to be "balanced".

Has the science from these biologists changed in two short years? Have the opinions of the leaders of the First Nations?

Have the opinions of conservationists and environmental groups, maple sugar producers and private woodlot owners or the public who owns the land?

Where are the DNR Foresters, Fish and Wildlife Branch biologists, regional biologists and hundreds of field staff that see and know the impacts of intensive silviculture and increased wood harvesting on Crown land firsthand?

I'll tell you where they are - they are sitting in their offices knowing that the last few colleagues to speak their professional opinions have been removed from their current posts. Why isn't the biggest issue surrounding this entire forestry debate more focused on the lack of democracy and the loss of freedom through tyranny?

If this new strategy is supposed to be balanced - lets ask a few questions. First, the increase of 660,000 cubic metres is coming directly from old growth forest, stream buffers and deer yards.

We will be told the deer yards are "vacant". Really? And when were these deer yards surveyed? If governments are losing money on Crown wood presently, how on earth are they going to generate money for a sinking economy by selling this newly available wood for even less than the current going rate of Crown stumpage?

How is this going to generate wood sales from private woodlots if the industry has access to even cheaper wood from Crown land? Will private woodlot owners consider this a good balance?

Do the biologists and scientists who have spent 20 or more years of their professional lives describing and managing habitats for songbirds, marten, woodpeckers, white-tailed deer and a host of other wildlife, invertebrates and flora consider this a good balance? I sure don't.

We have a forestry issue in New Brunswick because we have a bullying issue; we have people daily using tyranny to get their way and to spin their stories; We have a media monopoly that controls freedom of speech to most New Brunswickers.

Government employees across the province are muzzled on an issue that they can and should speak to - without fear of repercussions.

The last time they were permitted to speak freely - the forest strategy had 28 per cent Conservation Forest. This was balance.