

Forestry Commission

Excellent group of people on the commission...

i don't have as much skin in the game as many others in the forest industry... while forests make up most of the farm i live on.... 45 of 50 acres.... i've been lucky enough to work at a job where i didn't need to make any income off the trees... it's a forest that's seen in many places on the island... farmland abandoned in the 1950s... grown up in old field white spruce.... i did clearcutting and replanting on some of it... (unfortunately red pine was the go to species back in 1980.. not worth much now) anyway i did patch and strip cuts in other places... i got to enjoy what the Forests offered: i had a jet stream boiler and burnt softwood for heat for more than 40 years... including buying in hardwood as well... but mostly the woods provided refuge, privacy, places to walk, shelter for wildlife, and more recently the knowledge that trees are first responders in the fight against climate change. That's a lot to feel good about.

Then Fiona came along. like for so many Neighbours' houses were all of a sudden visible. Traffic could be seen and heard. Our forests turned from protecting refuge to serious liability. Not as onerous as the damaged homes, barns and outbuildings, but a daily reminder of the years of hard work ahead, the risk of fire growing as the seasons go by.

it has however given us all a chance to consider what we've been doing and whether we can do better...

at the heart of the challenge for the commission, the government and the rest of us is something that will play out over the next few years as the government starts the long process to develop a land use plan... can... will... provincial... municipal and rural

governments have the ability to manage activities on private land.. there are some regulations now especially if those activities effect neighbours or communities... but despite an effort in the late 1990s to control clear cutting this was quickly criticized as offending property rights and abandoned.. there's an unwillingness by governments to do this... JP Arsenault related in a speech that a veteran politician called this step of gaining the authority to control what people can do on private land a poisoned chalice.... in other words political suicide...

is there an intermediate step that might be considered??

yesterday i went to see a recent clearcut in my community... there was nothing illegal about... but i'd call it at least unfortunate... and not in the spirit of what people have been talking about managing the woods for the last couple of years... i'm sure there's a story... and some justification that could be offered and I don't have it... it was acres of healthy hardwoods... trees with many years left to grow.... some of it close by waterways....

here's what i'm thinking... could there be a requirement that people get a permit to clearcut... not a permit that could prevent the cut... but an intermediate step to at least make sure the forest owner has all the information to make an informed decision.... pei is slowly moving to be able to offer carbon credits for standing timber... this forest could have benefited from that.... might have led the owner to wait another decade before harvesting... or select cut to only take the mature trees and leave the rest....

there's another example of a clearcut in my community just down the road... in this case the parents in a family had died and willed the land to their children who all lived elsewhere.. they decided to clear cut and split the cash.. a neighbour of mine said if he had known he would have tried to raise money from the community to buy the land and leave the woods intact.. again if a

permit to cut were required there might have been a chance for this to happen... and i'm sure there are many other examples if this kind of situation....

i've heard other suggestions from people who care about this....

there was a suggestion i remember when John MacQuarrie was the deputy that if an older couple for example required money they could apply to the government to get it and the government would hold the forest in trust until the trees matured and harvested and the money gets paid back....

could the government buy up the cutting rights from landowners... money in return for a covenant that leaves forests intact....

there needs to be some way to resolve this push and pull between private rights and public good.... and as i said earlier i think these issues will be discussed and played out once effort to develop a provincial land use plan gets started... i suspect that won't happen until after the next election...

I think there also needs to be more discussion about the role trees can play on farms.... there's a farmer in my neighbourhood who's been very open to discussion with the local watershed group SEA about managing irrigation on some of his land.... and when we started talking about trees and forests he fully admitted that his understanding was that they're either in the way.. or can be treated like any other crop and harvested every few decades... i put him in touch with gary schneider and they had very productive discussions... the farmer said he learned a lot... things he had never considered.. and this is a very thoughtful man who is trying to do the right things... trees obviously help with erosion control... but also retaining water... both will become more important issues with climate change... should presentations be made to farm organizations on the importance of trees to a resilient farm...

can farmers like many other Islanders learn to see trees as integral to healthy ecosystems...

We Islanders are a strange lot when it comes to our natural resources. We're proud of the beauty we see all around us. We know it's not a rural Disneyland with happy workers setting off each day to make things more beautiful, and we want to honour the risk and hard work taken on by farmers, fishermen, and foresters. That's become more difficult. Technology, essentially bigger machines, has vastly increased the capability to harvest, catch and cut. Producers have needed these behemoths to keep up with the economics of the race to the bottom in all markets. If you're not a low cost producer you're simply not in the game. But we all know staying in the game has come with a price: eroding soils, anoxic waterways, the overfishing of herring and groundfish, and forest clearcuts. Tree harvesters remove, in a seeming heartbeat, critical habitat for wildlife and essential water retention.

While farming practices get most of the headlines, our forests are an even better example of the ongoing struggle between public good and personal rights. The creation of a new woodlot owners co-op in eastern PEI reminds us that a succession of governments over decades has been unable to bring sustainable practices to our forests. More than 90% of PEI's forests are privately owned and enough land owners have stubbornly resisted all efforts at mandatory management.