

## Submission to the PEI Forestry Commission

I am concerned that trees, particularly native tree species growing in natural settings, are undervalued by society on PEI. Trees provide many ecological, economic and societal benefits that are crucial for the well-being of Islanders. The ecological services and other amenities that are provided by trees are vital for healthy agriculture, tourism and even fishery industries. Island soil is vulnerable to erosion and trees on agricultural landscapes are vital components of effective erosion control. Tree cover is important for water relations, amelioration of weather extremes and of course for carbon storage. All of this is well-known and undisputed.

Most of the Island's trees occur on private land; in many cases, as small private woodlots on farms, so the responsibility for maintaining, managing and increasing tree cover falls largely to the Island's farmers. While it is indisputable that trees are vitally important to agriculture writ large, it is less clear that they contribute to economic value for the individual farmer/owner. In fact, land that is converted from forest to potato fields or other cropping systems almost certainly has greater economic value, after the conversion, for the individual farmer. Converting wooded land to a housing development remains an even more lucrative option as long as there are no protections for farmland, including farm woodlots.

In my opinion, it is unrealistic and unfair to expect private landowners voluntarily to give up potential income to maintain a societal value. Just as the benefits accrue to all Islanders, the burden of ensuring the continuation of those benefits should be borne by society at large. Farmers need an economic incentive to keep trees on farms. This must go beyond a carbon pricing mechanism, to one that apply to any landowner who chooses to avoid conversion of treed land to other uses. I recognise that there would be challenges and obstacles to developing and implementing such an approach, but I believe it is necessary.

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