

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

**COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

Committees Room

Small Woodlots and the Value of Ecological Forestry

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**NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

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Ronnie LeBlanc
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Claudia Chender
Lisa Lachance

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Karen Kinley
Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Natural Resources and Renewables

Karen Gatien, Deputy Minister
Heidi Higgins, Manager - Forest Inventory

Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners & Operators

Andrew Kekacs, Executive Director

Western Woodlot Services Cooperative

Patricia Amero, General Manager and Registered Professional Forester

The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq

Angie Gillis, Associate Executive Director
Troy Robichaud, Senior Research Advisor - Environment & Natural Resources



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MAY 24, 2022

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

1:00 P.M.

CHAIR

Tom Taggart

VICE-CHAIR

Dave Ritcey

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development. I'm Tom Taggart, MLA for Colchester North, and the chair of this committee. Today we will be hearing from presenters regarding small woodlots and the value of ecological forestry.

Please turn off your phones or put them on silent. In case of an emergency, please use the Granville Street exit, and walk up to the Grand Parade. In keeping with the Province House policy, please keep your masks on during the meeting unless you are speaking.

I will now ask committee members to introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and constituency. I'd like to start over here with MLA LeBlanc.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I would also like to note the presence of Legislative Counsel Karen Kinley and staff from the Legislative Committees Office.

As I said, today's topic is small woodlots and the value of ecological forestry. Our witnesses, I'd like to welcome them and ask them all to introduce themselves, and then I'll ask for them to begin their opening remarks. I'll start, if you don't mind, with Ms. Gillis, then across, please.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I think we'll start with opening remarks. Would the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables like to begin, please? I'm sorry. I'll ask Karen Gatién first, please. Deputy Minister Gatién.

KAREN GATIÉN: I'm pleased to be here on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. I'm joined today by Heidi Higgins, our manager of forest inventory.

About 60 to 70 per cent of Nova Scotia's forests are in private lands. We estimate there are between 10,000 and 30,000 private woodlot owners in our province, and we define private woodlots as privately held forests between 20 and 2,000 hectares in size. They're managed for a variety of purposes. Some are commercial, some recreational, and some as natural forests.

Given the importance of private forests in Nova Scotia, the department invests in silviculture and roadwork on private lands each year. The department also provides learning materials for free to anyone who wants to learn about woodland management.

Continued engagement and support for private landowners are important parts of the shift to ecological forestry. For those who are new to the topic, ecological forestry means giving preference to biodiversity and wildlife protection when decisions are being made about Crown lands. It's a fundamental shift in provincial forest policy that results in greater protection for ecosystems and biodiversity, supports economic growth, and keeps our forests healthy and sustainable.

Working with our stakeholders, including private woodlot owners, we are delivering these changes, and more are coming. There are expectations on the forestry sector now for harvest proposals to reduce clearcutting. We're also moving ahead to protect and conserve more Crown land. While our ecological forestry requirements are only on Crown land, we welcome private woodlot owners to adopt these practices as well.

Before I close, I want to mention that I presented an update recently on ecological forestry at the annual woodland conferences this Spring. I had the opportunity to engage with several private woodlot owners and listened to what they had to say. It's clear to me that forestry is a way of life for thousands of Nova Scotians. They are stewards of private land and provide important economic activity, especially in our rural communities. We

owe it to them to move ahead with ecological forestry on Crown land and set good examples of how things could be done on private land.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Amero, do you have any comments to begin?

PATRICIA AMERO: Do you mean comments to her or my opening remarks? I'm new at this.

THE CHAIR: I'm a little bit new at this too, so we'll get along fine. (Laughter) We go to the presenters and ask if they want to make opening comments. After that, we go around the table and have questions from the MLAs.

PATRICIA AMERO: I do have opening remarks. I was just wondering if it was my time to give them.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Amero.

PATRICIA AMERO: Thank you again for the opportunity to be here. I really appreciate it. Just so you know, I hail from West Northfield in Lunenburg County, but I was born and raised in and still have family down near Digby in Digby County. I'm fully embedded in the west.

The Western Woodlot Services Cooperative's mandate is to provide forest management services that meet the economic, social, and ecological objectives of private woodlot owners throughout the seven western counties of Nova Scotia.

We are a non-profit, membership-based woodlot owner co-operative governed by a nine-member board of directors that comprises woodlot owner members throughout the western region. Currently, our membership is comprised of 283 woodlot owners.

We operate under a service area model initiative supported by the Private Lands, Stewardship and Outreach Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables that aims to increase participation in woodlot management. The service area model serves as a one-stop shop for private woodlot owners where they can access a wide range of woodlot-management-related services dependent on their individual needs, values, objectives, and short- and long-term goals for their particular woodland property.

A big part of what we do is provide unbiased advice and consultations through extension and outreach to woodlot owners with their best interests in mind according to their objectives. This provides them with information on the array of options available, which helps guide them in the decision-making process towards achieving their woodlot goals.

Once we know how to best help them, then we know what services they need and will benefit from. This can include anything from woodlot assessments to forest management planning, operational planning, silviculture, harvesting, marketing, delivering educational types of events, facilitating information sharing, and working co-operatively with partner organizations such as the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute, who specialize in wildlife habitat, species at risk, and high-conservation-value forests to be able to offer a full suite of services to our members.

We follow an ecosystem-based multi-value approach to forest management using the available forest ecosystem-based tools, management guides - now the Silviculture Guide to the Ecological Matrix, and I greatly thank the department for taking that on - and other information available from Department of Natural Resources and Renewables and other agencies. We help woodlot owners build value in their forest by promoting diversity, growth, quality development, and health through ecologically appropriate management activities that in turn maintain a range of multiple benefits for present and future generations.

We also work to facilitate and promote development of markets for forest products, particularly low-grade wood to supply woodchip heat conversion projects, which are critical to help make forest improvement work more economically feasible, create rural employment, and move public and private buildings off of fossil fuel use, which is imported, so we could keep monies local that will strengthen the rural economy and communities.

We have four full-time competent and dedicated foresters as well as part-time staff to do extension work and associated administration and provide services to woodlot owners throughout the large geographic area of the western region. We have limited capacity to keep up with meeting needs and delivering services to our growing membership. Presently, our funding contribution agreement from the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables only covers 75 per cent of our annual operating expenses, and we obtain the difference through some harvesting and silviculture fees.

The provincial government can help woodlot owners in the western region by providing continuing and expanding financial support for service areas and cooperatives like ours so woodlot owners can be made aware of their full range of options and become more engaged in woodlot management. It is important to remember - and Karen alluded to this - that over 55 per cent of Nova Scotia's forest resource are in the hands of these private woodlot owners. They represent 70 per cent of total ownership and almost 70 per cent of the wood volume harvested each year.

Private woodlots are the most productive, accessible forest land in the province, and contribute to economic development and provide ecosystem services such as clean air, clean water, carbon sequestration, storage, et cetera. If I have a few minutes, I'll just add these other points.

Additionally, funds should be directed to training and building our work force for ecological forestry, including supporting development of our young forest professionals to have more boots on the ground, as well as contractors, which is an important link to forest management, and assist woodlot owners to become more engaged in woodlot management.

I also ask that the government please speed up the process to release additional requests for proposals to convert heating of public buildings, like our schools and hospitals, from fossil fuel to wood chip heating using modern, efficient boiler systems like the six already completed in the province, of which there are two in our service area.

Also, I'd please like the department to have more emphasis on an improved and expanded silviculture funding system, particularly in regard to quality standards, and adapt and have more silviculture treatments available for funding according to our new ecological matrix type of treatments, and particularly for restoration. I'll end my opening remarks there.

THE CHAIR: I want to get myself on the right track here, if you don't mind. I neglected in the beginning during introductions, Troy Robichaud is with us today as well. He doesn't have a mic on front of him, but he's here with us as senior research advisor, environment and natural resources.

From there, I'll get back on track with the opening remarks. Mr. Kekacs, did you have some remarks?

ANDREW KEKACS: I do. This is something that's really near and dear to my heart, and something that our association has been working on for a really long time. Karen and Patricia did such a great job that there probably is not that much I can add to the foundation of this discussion. I'd like to offer a couple of stories, though.

One is about my association, the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators, which is 53 years old, and around 1980, began to turn from pulp wood production to a reconsideration of what our forests are all about and what they can provide to us in Nova Scotia. The Prest family in Mooseland was very instrumental in the association in the early years and continuing to the present day. In fact, Sid Prest was here some years ago - I don't know if any of you served with him, but quite a fine guy.

Sid's oldest brother was Murray Prest, and in 1983, Murray sat down and drafted a gigantic brief for the Royal Commission on Forestry, cutting through all of that stuff, which is really good stuff. I'm glad to send it to anybody who wants to see someone who could really think way ahead. Murray said this in his closing to the Royal Commission:

I want to recommend a basic principle that will provide a solution to practically all problems relating to the regeneration and maintenance of a forest. The solution is to use harvesting

techniques and regeneration cutting systems that cooperate with, complement, and utilize the forces of nature.

This is 35 years before Bill Lahey released his report, and this is essentially what Bill Lahey said, and it's what the department is doing right now and what we've been doing since the early 80s. It's quite astonishing. Murray was a saw miller at the time, so he understood the science of forest management. He understood the economics of forest management very well.

[1:15 p.m.]

At the same time, I think it was 1983, Peter MacQuarrie, who some of you know was here for 40 years - is that possible? - at Natural Resources - anyway, MacQuarrie did his first survey of landowners in Nova Scotia, and MacQuarrie found that landowners were not exactly setting their priorities in the way that the industry and the department had always assumed.

Instead of being focused on immediate economic returns from forest management - that was an important goal - they were also interested in having a place for recreation, in wildlife habitat, in a bunch of forward-looking goals. Something to pass on to the kids - money for their retirement, and so forth. It was really quite a complex picture.

Both the approach that Murray Prest offered in 1983 and the observations that Peter MacQuarrie made in that same year have continued and have grown stronger in the ensuing 40 years, so that now this is well-established in scientific literature all across North America, that this is a viable way to manage forests, and landowner values and clearly the public values, from all of the press that you read all the time, I'm sure, have only become firmer in support of this approach to forestry.

I just leave it there. I think the key question for this committee, for the government, for everyone in the province - the fundamental question really is: Why do we own Crown land? I don't think we've really thought about that very complexly for a very long time. I would suggest to you that when we answer that question, we will have made real progress in deciding how to manage the natural resources in the forest.

THE CHAIR: Next we'll move on to the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq. I'm going to ask Ms. Gillis to begin. Ms. Gillis, please.

ANGIE GILLIS: Thank you, everyone, for having us here today. I will start, and my colleague, Troy, will come in when it is his time to speak.

We work for the organization Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, which is located in Truro, Nova Scotia. It is a not-for-profit tribal organization that has served eight Mainland Mi'kmaq communities for the last 36 years. Our mission is "to proactively

promote and assist Mi'kmaw communities' initiatives toward self-determination and enhancement of community.”

Today my colleague and I are here to discuss two topics that hit very close to the heart of what we do as an organization, specifically in our roles on the Mi'kmaq Forestry Initiative. The concept of ecological forestry is one that we as Mi'kmaq value because it aligns with our own concept of Netukulimk - a concept that gives us the ability to use the gifts of our lands to sustain ourselves whilst also providing a thriving and healthy community without jeopardizing the ecological integrity of the land.

We are at a time in our societies where we are faced with threats that will inevitably change the landscapes of our natural world, and in this case, our beautiful province. Today, we talk about forestry, but we know that there also lies the larger threat of climate change. We can no longer look at managing our natural resources under one lens and or in a siloed manner. We must be cognizant of the cumulative impacts that developments, harvesting, climate change, et cetera, are having, both short-term and long-term. We can no longer look at management of our lands and waters in a linear progress-oriented fashion. We must prioritize the health of our landscapes and centre future management on relationships and process rather than results and outcomes.

Part of the MFI's vision is to provide land stewardship services to have our lands managed through the Mi'kmaq lens. We are examining all impacts and effects on land, water, air, and wildlife. This also includes any effect on our social and cultural environment. We are learning from others' past practices and deciphering the “dos and don'ts” of forestry and have identified the need to provide a healthy habitat for all species. Our practices will provide a variety of harvesting methods to diversify our forestry structure; allow for natural regeneration and manage for higher-quality timber; leaving some areas of high-density forest to provide cover for wildlife, et cetera.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Robichaud.

TROY ROBICHAUD: As previously mentioned, private woodlands represent a significant portion of Nova Scotia's stewarded forests. Each of these parcels is not only significant and meaningful within its anthropocentric boundaries, but is part of the natural mosaic of our Acadian and boreal forest systems. Considering the ecological diversity and natural values in our forests, we must work together to not only allow our communities to thrive, but to do so while in balance with the well-being of our ecological communities.

To implement a shift to ecological forestry, education is key. There are many private stewards who are passionate, knowledgeable, and hold the greatest understanding of the ecological values encompassed within their woodlands. These are local forest experts in our communities. If we are to adopt the concept of ecological forestry, it is essential we collaborate with our local knowledge holders.

In contrast, many small private woodland stewards do not have the means to understand their woodlands. As a result, they turn to our forest professionals to express their stewardship goals on their woodland. It is critical we work to engage these stewards as their rudimentary perspectives of their woodlands drive decision making and the resulting outcomes in our forests.

If we are to adopt the practices of ecological forestry, we must also provide everlasting support and training for our province's forest professionals. Our forestry professionals are the eyes and ears in our working forests. We must continue to build their capacities as we learn and adapt, as these are the individuals we entrust to identify and understand ecological values and make integral, on-the-ground decisions to maintain and care for our forests, no matter the tenure.

THE CHAIR: Now we'll move to Ms. Higgins to do a PowerPoint on forest inventory, I think, in Nova Scotia. No? Anyway, go ahead. (Interruption) Mr. Robichaud will be sitting in a seat that was assigned to Mx. Lachance.

Ms. Higgins.

HEIDI HIGGINS: Thank you for letting us speak today on ecological forestry on private lands. The first thing I'd like to go over is, what do we mean by ecological forestry? It's been discussed here by pretty much everyone in the meeting already, but it's forestry that protects, prioritizes, and promotes ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as supports economic growth, keeping the forest healthy while maintaining timber supply sustainably.

On Crown lands, we're adopting the triad model, which uses these objectives by dividing lands into three zones. The first zone is the conservation zone, which preserves the natural ecosystems and biodiversity. We have high production, which is very similar to farming, in which the crop trees are cut, replanted, thinned, and makes efficient use of our forests. We also have the ecological matrix zone, which is the largest of the three. It is maintaining the naturally occurring makeup of the forest while allowing some harvest to happen, but it's only as the forest would grow naturally. As you can see by the three pictures there, they're very different zones.

How are we going about supporting and moving forward with ecological forestry through the department? We're providing a framework of knowledge gained from the implementation of ecological forestry on Crown lands that can be used or adopted on private lands. We're updating our outreach and silviculture programs that will provide support and encourage ecological forestry on private lands. We're providing assistance and training for forest professionals, contractors, and landowners that will allow them to make informed decisions regarding ecological forestry. We're providing support for other groups, such as the Family Forest Network, that are promoting the adoption of ecological forestry on private lands.

Here's a map of Nova Scotia. Private lands are the largest percentage of the lands in Nova Scotia. It's the brown colour there. They make up about 60 to 70 per cent of the land base, with about 30,000 woodlot owners.

Moving on to our current programs, and how we support our private woodlots through them. We have the private woodlands outreach service area program, the development of educational material and home study program, including a new module of ecological forestry. We have silviculture programs that are supported for private lands under the Registry of Buyers program, the Forest Sustainability Regulations as well as funding, and we also support the Association for Sustainable Forestry.

In 2012, the government allocated woodlot outreach funds to improve social, economic and environmental contributions for small woodlots in Nova Scotia. This allocation continues to support certification while providing equitable support to various woodlots. The department recognized the need for woodlot owner support and support organizations to work together under a regional umbrella organization to provide improved, coordinated, and more efficient and effective support for woodlot owners.

The program is a combination of broad-based research and on-the-ground assistance, and is intended to inform and assist woodlot owners. It is based on the idea that landowner outreach will increase engagement and activities on their woodlands, resulting in improved economic, social, and environmental contributions from non-industrial or family woodlot land in Nova Scotia. This program is about a million dollars annually to private woodlot outreach.

We also have educational material that we provide which is providing 18 home study modules - web-based or printed material - to help education of both the landowners and contractors as well as forest professionals on various aspects of woodlot management. Some of the home studies include silviculture, wildlife, wood utilization, planning, pests, and of course ecological forestry.

The Registry of Buyers program is one other program that we support. All facilities in Nova Scotia that procure primary forest products or roundwood from our forests are required to register with the Province under the Forests Act. In 2000, the regulations were developed to ensure that harvest levels on private lands remain sustainable - meaning not harvesting more than we can grow - and these regulations require that the companies or facilities report annually to the department with the volume they procure from each ownership county and along with secondary products manufactured as well as silviculture they complete.

Any registered buyer requiring over 5,000 cubic metres per year from private or industrial lands is required to, through regulations, conduct a silviculture program or to contribute financially based on the volume they harvest.

[1:30 p.m.]

This is a graph here of provincial harvest history. As a few people have said, about 65 to 70 per cent of the volume is coming from private lands, and you can also see that the volume has been going down over the years.

We also have the Registry of Buyers support program. As well as administrating the program, we provide support for those buyers who choose to complete a silviculture program based on the planned volume and silviculture requirements, treatment types, private ownership classifications, and funding that is available. Expenditures to large landowners - those over 2,000 hectares in size - are capped in this program. The majority of the treatments are funded at a percentage of the credit value but to encourage partial harvesting treatments, commercial thinnings, and selection management, they are funded at a higher percentage.

We also have the Association for Sustainable Forestry. This is used as a mechanism to provide additional funding to private lands. This private lands program supports small and large land ownerships, certified private lands, the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership, and Western Woodlot Services Cooperative. Like the registry program, the percentage of large private, those over 2,000 hectares in size, is also capped.

Like the other program, we encourage more partial harvesting, and the department sets a minimal annual target for the percentage of funding to be allocated to these treatments. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We're ready to go to the question and answer portion of our meeting. Typically, our practice has been to have one question each around the table. We had a little discussion beforehand, and I think it's appropriate to have a follow-up, provided it stays within the context of the original question. I'll remind everyone to wait for their name and their microphone to turn red before they speak. I'll try to remember to indicate your name so Legislative TV will turn them on.

We're going to wrap up questioning around 2:40 p.m., and that will allow our presenters time for some wrap-up comments from them, then we'll continue to finish up committee business.

MLA Chender is first.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I want to start with the Lahey report, because this is a thread. As you all know, the interim report that was released as a follow-up to the original report was, I would say, damning, in terms of our progress to date. My first question essentially is to the department, and if anyone else wants to chime in: where are we now?

We know the silviculture guide is out, and Ms. Amero thanked the department for that. I think we're hearing that across the province. I noted in the presentation, it noted the triad model. Has that triad been appropriately allocated on Crown land? Where else are we on Lahey? Is there any update since the report from Professor Lahey?

KAREN GATIEN: We've been making great progress, we feel. In terms of the three legs of the triad, we had already begun the conservation leg and the ecological matrix, and we should very shortly hear something on the third leg, which is the high production forestry piece. We're in the stages now of just fine-tuning some pieces of that.

What we've done in terms of the SGEM piece - we released the guide, of course. We've done a lot of training, so we started first with people who are closest to it in terms - rolling it out now to contractors and doing some training the trainers, and that will continue. As of February 1st, all new harvest plans had to be SGEM-compliant, and as of June, we will at that point be at a place where the ones previously approved will have gone through a bit of a transition assessment to see how do we move from that, how they were previously assessed, to the SGEM model.

The old-growth forest policy - we had a consultation on that in the Fall. We've been taking all of the feedback that we heard on that policy. We expect to be able to release a revised version of that in the Summer. The work is continuing. We have all the species at risk, in terms of those species that are within the 100 per cent responsibility of the Province, those plans have all been completed as well. We're continuing to work in terms of species perhaps that are more under federal requirements than provincial. The work is ongoing.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: There are two different things that I want to ask about. I want to ask about wood energy, but I'll come back to that. I'll just go back to Ms. Amero's presentation - I guess I'll put forward those questions that she put forward at the end of her presentation.

Given all of that - we'll get to wood energy hopefully later, but particularly around the funding piece. Now that we have those SGEMs, how is the department working to kind of strengthen and quicken funding for folks who want to be compliant with that on private lands, or who are managing Crown lands?

THE CHAIR: That's fine with that question. That's really two questions, and the follow-up was supposed to be, if we were going to have follow-ups . . .

CLAUDIA CHENDER: No, it's not. She said the SGEMs were part of Lahey and were implemented, and I'm asking how the department is funding them. That's a direct follow-up.

THE CHAIR: All right. Thank you. Deputy Minister Gatien, please.

KAREN GATIEN: I actually noted her comments as well and made some notes, partly because we're about to embark on a review of our silviculture program, for sure. When I recently presented at the Woodland Conference, one of the things that I asked of the private woodlot owners is we need to hear from you. We want them to participate even if the consultations we're doing aren't obviously something they think they belong in. We still want to hear from them, and if they have ideas and good practices that they use.

I certainly have heard before around the funding mix, so that will all be looked at. I don't have any answer for what we're doing today. We have added a little bit of extra funding, so the last couple of years there's been a little bit of extra funding added to some base funding that was issued, and we were able to add to that, like for the Association for Sustainable Forestry, an additional \$600,000 to their base of \$1.9 million this year.

There have been no final funding decisions around that, but all of that will be reflected as we do our review going forward.

THE CHAIR: Next I have MLA Kerr, please.

CARMAN KERR: Thanks, everyone, for joining today. Hemlocks are in steady decline across the province. We've all heard that, and it includes subject to harvesting and invasive species. We would know that hemlocks are part of an old growth strategy. They protect streams and rivers from warming up, so trout are able to thrive. They provide - or combat flooding, I know at least in Annapolis, in southwestern Nova Scotia.

My question would be, I guess, for everyone: Are you hearing from private woodlot owners that they're looking for more funding support to work with their hemlock stands? My understanding is that 50 to 60 per cent of hemlock stands are in private woodlot hands. I guess my question to everyone would be: Are there funds for private woodlot owners to help conserve the stands that they have on their properties?

KAREN GATIEN: This is an issue that we're very concerned with at the department as well. There is not a pot of money necessarily identified for this, but what we have been doing is looking at the issue. We've written to a federal department that's allocated some funding to try to see if we can get some assistance to address it. It needs to be addressed quickly, for sure.

Our group at the department that looks at invasive species - so things like the spruce budworm as well - is kind of figuring out what's our best solution forward and how quickly we can work on it. We don't have the plan completed at this time, but we are working on it.

CARMAN KERR: I believe one of those invasive pests, the hemlock woolly adelgid - HWA - and apparently there's a federal strategy looking at ways - rather than

inject chemicals into these trees, there is a bio program or a bio strategy that they're looking at. Provincially, are we looking at a bio strategy to help these conifers?

KAREN GATIEN: I know Patricia wants to get into this - I'll just have a quick comment. That's part of what we're looking at, when I said we're reaching out to our federal colleagues to try to get some information. Our own experts are looking at what the possible solutions are.

You're correct: What we know to date is a pesticide application. Are there other ways to do this, and what does that look like? How quickly can we do that? It will spread quickly and affect my favourite hike at Kejimikujik National Park. It's not okay. (Laughter) We're looking at what the possible solutions are.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Deputy Minister. Ms. Amero, would you like to comment on that, please?

PATRICIA AMERO: Yes, I would very much like to comment on that. A fair number of our members, particularly in southwestern Nova Scotia, and now even in Lunenburg County - there are sightings of the HWA. It's a sucking insect, so the hemlock will basically have a slow, painful death. They're saying anywhere from three years, but even as much as 10 years, depending on the population levels.

We've been working co-operatively with the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute as well as the Medway Community Forest Co-operative. That is work in conjunction with the Canadian Forest Service in terms of doing various silviculture trials. We're working together on our members' lands to do some silviculture trials, basically to open up these hemlocks, give them more room to grow, because we're thinking the more vigorous they are and the more healthy they are, perhaps they may have a fighting chance in fighting this insect off.

I know that there are also programs available and this is where funding may help. I think that the Medway Community Forest Co-op is working on this as well: What would funding look like in terms of chemical injections, either the direct injection or the basal bark treatment? You might not be able to save all of them because of the cost associations but you may be able to save some of the bigger, nice seed trees maybe for the future.

I do know that there's talk, and I think there are trials going on about having a biological control that they used down in the northeastern states - Laricobius beetle? I think I got that name right. But down there, it's kind of a native beetle that basically feeds on these aphids, on these adelgids. That's not native here, so as I understand, they are doing studies and trials to see if that may be a solution for here or part of the solution for here. Of course, any time you're thinking about introducing something, you want to see what the ecological implications of that are.

I just want to say that probably 30 of our members are involved with these silviculture trials and also the Medway Community Forest Co-op and the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute do very well in getting educational material out to woodlot owners. We help disseminate that information so they know what to look for - what are the signs that you look for and what you could possibly do. That's all I wanted to add.

THE CHAIR: I have MLA Ritcey next, then Palmer, Boudreau, LeBlanc, and Smith. And Chender.

DAVE RITCEY: This question is for Ms. Amero: From your experience, can you describe what the decision-making process looks like when attempting to balance economic and ecological goals?

PATRICIA AMERO: I find that every woodlot owner - it's a lot like a group of woodlot owners that you deal with. We have woodlot owners and part of our membership who are more on the economic side, because they basically have their livelihood from their woodland - perhaps their farm too. Then on the other side, you have woodlot owners who are mainly interested in their high priority of biodiversity and conservation. Then you have many - the majority of woodlot owners - in the middle. They want a little bit of everything - all the benefits that the forest provides.

For us, it's really important to go out with these woodlot owners in their woods and talk with them to really understand what their goals and objectives are of their woodland and what they need from that woodland. I do find, especially for woodlot owners who have had woodland for quite some time through the generations - they're really tied to their woodlot. It's personal. They have a lot of pride and value in their particular woodlot.

Even myself - for folks who want to have some income but also have the multi-age, wildlife biodiversity, carbon storage, all that - it's just a matter of understanding. Forest management is two things: It's the woodlot owners' objectives and what they want or need from their land, and then it's the forest inventory or the ecological information. Then together you can put together recommendations of activities for them to pursue that best suit those landowners' objectives by keeping ecosystem health and diversity in mind.

I know, and multiple members - even before I was involved with the co-op, I had my own consulting company for about 16 years dealing with private woodlot owners throughout the Maritimes. There certainly is a way that you can still harvest wood and maintain all the ecological functions and processes, if done properly. That's why, as a forest professional, it's important, one, yes, objectives - come to the recommendations.

Then it's how you can lay that out on the ground, map it, communicate it well to the contractor - or, if it's not the landowner doing it themselves, the contractor to properly implement it, so that they have the economic benefit, but also they still have a nice standing

forest that has a lot of health and diversity and an improved value over time. Hopefully I answered your question.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer, please.

CHRIS PALMER: Very important topic today. As someone who represents a rural constituency in western Nova Scotia, a lot of the things we're discussing are very important to hear today. I appreciate all the opening comments and what we are learning today. I'm also fortunate to represent a constituency that has Annapolis Valley First Nations, and some conversations I've had with people there, that they definitely want to be part of the discussion and part of the solutions going forward.

My question is for Ms. Gillis. You had mentioned in your opening statement how some of the ecological forestry practices being discussed really go hand in hand with traditional methods. Could you maybe drill down in that again for our committee today and just explain how the ecological forestry practices that we're talking about align with traditional forestry management and practices?

ANGIE GILLIS: Absolutely. At some point I'll defer to Troy for the more technical aspects, but with respect to how we manage our lands - another way of explaining Netukulimk is essentially what we're looking at is we take only what we need, but we also leave enough for tomorrow.

A lot of what Ms. Amero was talking about with respect to going in, identifying patches, let's say for harvesting, and looking at how we can best maximize the harvest while also maximizing the ecological integrity, ensuring that we're looking at the species that are there, catering to ensuring that that landscape remains what it needs to be in order to ensure all species remain healthy, and also looking at different ways of generating revenue off of that area.

It's not just about harvesting. We heard a little bit about wood chips. Rather than leaving wood chips there, using those wood chips, looking at other non-timber forest products that we can generate off that area of land. We're not just going in and saying, we're going to harvest this area and then leave it. We're looking at what else can we take from this area and ensure that there's a natural regeneration of the area. Not necessarily planting just one species, but looking at what species we're taking and putting it back in the same breath.

That for us is practising Netukulimk. We don't want to leave an area completely wiped out. We need to ensure that hundreds of years from now that area, that patch, will be the way we found it today. From a technical aspect, I'll let Troy talk, because he's more on the ground there in the work they're doing with their MFI.

TROY ROBICHAUD: As Angie mentioned, the Mi'kmaq Forestry Initiative has been a vehicle to make a lot of these concepts and discussions come to life. Some of the mentorship words that I've been given are: Listen to the forest and let it determine, through your interpretation, what it needs to thrive. Foresters talk about forestry succession, where after a clear-cut, you're pretty much leaving a forest in its first succession. Through time it will develop to an old growth forest.

What Angie is alluding to in speaking about forest utilization is 100 per cent part of that conversation. How we look at this is around how we can best utilize that without losing our ecological integrity. I will mention a commercial thinning that we had done on the MFI properties this last Summer. It was, in its simplest sense, a monoculture. It was double pre-commercial thinned to be predominantly a conifer forest.

When we were in there doing our assessments, we found a large amount of LIT species - long-lived intermediate species - that can live and are associated with old-growth forests. The way we interpreted that was that these long-lived trees, and these trees that are associated with old-growth forests, are meant to be here. So what we did through our decision-making is, even though we did a commercial thinning - again, a very conventional practice - we left a lot of these hardwoods to try to bring back a more mixed-wood and more natural structure within our forest stand.

THE CHAIR: MLA Boudreau.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Thank you all for coming today. I guess I'm going to be a little broader and ask a bit about the relationship between the department and private woodlots. What type of work is the department doing to engage with some of these small private woodlots and their owners? I guess I'll ask anybody who wants to speak to it, but Ms. Gatién first.

KAREN GATIEN: Perhaps I'll start and then I'll maybe ask Heidi to fill in the details. As Heidi talked about in the presentation, in terms of woodlots and the work that we're doing, we certainly are supporting silviculture and some roadwork for private woodland owners, as well as outreach through financial support, of course, to organizations like Patricia's and the work that they're doing.

We also host this conference that I spoke about, our three woodland conferences that happen. Obviously with COVID they didn't happen for the last couple of years, but they have happened, historically, in the three regions of the province - Western, Central, and Eastern.

It's really an opportunity for the department to provide updates to private landowners in terms of the work that we're doing, to hear from them. I personally did the update on the rollout of Lahey recommendations, but there were also a number of other updates through the day that were quite helpful and informative to private woodlot owners.

We hear from them about what was helpful, what wasn't, and what else we can provide you with.

I think I will stop there and let the expert actually speak to it a bit more.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Higgins, please.

HEIDI HIGGINS: What we are doing is learning from what we're putting forth on Crown land and providing those techniques that can be used on public lands as well or adopted and adapted to private lands. We provide support mechanisms as well that are being updated to account for these changes.

Currently, we're providing a million dollars of outreach, as well as \$4.1 million for the ASF and silviculture programs for private woodlot owners.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Kekacs. I hope I got that right. If I don't, I apologize.

ANDREW KEKACS: That's a great question, actually. For all that we can be in disagreement about how the department is performed, one place that they've really performed very well is in woodlot-owner outreach. I think it was Deputy Minister Gatien's comments about the influx of provincial money at that time. I was hired in 2012, and we were part of that push to get out to see landowners: to engage them, to teach them, and to make them - to help them become active stewards, obviously, not "make them."

One thing that the department did really well was - and I don't think it was intentional. Those of us who were in the process didn't realize at the time, and I don't think the department did either, but they started to get small woodlot owner groups together and we sat in a room for several years in Stewiacke, actually, and we talked about small private forest lands and what they needed. Out of that, in 2013-14, that created the capacity for us to move forward with some really big initiatives.

If I could take just a minute, these are not funded - well, one is funded by the department, one is not. Out of that departmental support, in 2020, basically these groups that had been meeting and working together more collaboratively made a very large presentation and proposal to the Forestry Innovation Transition Trust, and we said the department's hands are full. Somebody needs to tackle the small landowner issue, the Lahey implementation issue on small private lands, the ecological matrix, which has been talked about.

We put in a very large proposal, and we said we'll do that work for you. It was approved, and it was a significant amount of money, \$9.8 million actually, over the next five years. We'll do several hundred treatments across the province to show that this approach to forestry is viable across the province.

Then, just this year, the department did also provide some follow-on funding of \$500,000 to look at alternative silviculture treatments that can spur the Lahey recommendations being adopted on small private lands. One was more about harvesting and one was more about, if you will, timber stand improvement and tending. The department has been very important, I guess. It's hard when you want to step away from all the criticism that we might have made about the department five years ago, but the truth is things are changing, probably changing very much for the better.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a follow-up, MLA Boudreau?

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Kind of. I think you answered a little bit about it, but maybe to the department: What have you been hearing from this engagement with the private woodlot owners, and even some of the larger woodlot owners as well? I think we talked a bit about it, but what are you hearing?

KAREN GATIEN: I think certainly consistent with what you've heard from the smaller woodlot owners - I think we are trying to find a way to perhaps work with the larger landowners in a different way. We've had some great reach-out conversations from them, and some requests for how might we be able to work with them in a different way, because they don't necessarily belong to these other groups. Perhaps some of them do, but as a group they've come forward and said, is there a way that we can work with you? We're certainly looking at that at the department.

By and large, we're really trying to listen closely and act with intent and act deliberately in terms of what we're hearing. If there are things that we can do, we'll do them. If there are things we can't do, we'll explain why we can't do them, but it's pretty consistent with what we've heard as well.

THE CHAIR: Next we have MLA LeBlanc, and from there it's Smith, Chender, Kerr, Palmer.

RONNIE LEBLANC: As mentioned numerous times, forestry is extremely important to rural Nova Scotia. One thing I continually get questions on and hear when I'm speaking to landowners, harvesters, mill owners, is the lack of a market for low-grade wood and what the closure of Northern Pulp - and now I think Brooklyn Energy is temporarily closed. The pressure on the industry is even greater with inflation and the cost of fuel.

I guess the question I have is, I know you guys are pushing for phase two of having more public buildings being modified to burn wood chips, but other than that, what's the department doing, or is there anything the department can do to try to address this? I'd appreciate your comments on that.

[2:00 p.m.]

KAREN GATIEN: I think that's actually probably our biggest issue right now. I have great confidence that we'll get to a good place with ecological forestry, but we do have some challenges around the residuals and low-value wood.

In terms of what we're doing, we are actively engaged in what the next phase of what the small wood heat initiative will look like. Are there other opportunities around district heating? What other biofuel? We're literally meeting with anyone who has some intelligence and can work with us on this - FPInnovations, the Verschuren Centre. What are some opportunities for the low-grade wood market that we could explore and maybe some innovative options that we could develop?

We don't have an answer yet, but it is definitely something that we're very focused on - how might we move this forward, and what can we do fairly quickly. Some options are great but they're five, ten years down the road.

You're right, Brooklyn Energy is not operating either. We're looking for newer innovative solutions as well, so that wasn't going to answer all the issues either - even keeping that open.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I'd like to thank you for that answer. My follow-up would be to Ms. Amero. How is the lack of market for low-grade wood impacting your ability to meet your objectives? You mentioned earlier it has to be economically feasible, and that's a revenue stream that from what I'm hearing is not currently there. Can you speak a bit about how this is impacting you in trying to get people on board?

PATRICIA AMERO: I sure can and thank you for bringing it up. Yes, this has been impacting our end of the province - the southwest in particular - since the Bowater Resolute closure back in 2012. Even at that time, contractors and landowners had to change how they did business.

Really how it's impacting is especially on first entries when you go into a stand for the first time - maybe it's 40 or 50 years old and hasn't had any previous management - about 50 per cent is low-grade material. So if you don't have a market for that, or if there is a market and if the price isn't sufficient, basically it either just doesn't get done or - it just doesn't get done basically, because the economics don't make sense for the contractor to do it.

However, there are some landowners who do the work themselves. If they do the work themselves, they can afford to do that improvement treatment if it's thinning or a partial harvest and they can leave that wood lie.

Even Lahey made a point of it in his report, that markets for low-grade wood is a critical piece in moving ecological forestry forward. When I speak of ecological forestry, I'm usually speaking to the ecological matrix - the maintenance of all values, multi-value management.

So basically, it's tough when you have landowners who are really keen, and see the value and the benefits of carrying out this forest improvement type of work - commercial thinning, partial harvest, crop-tree release, whatever it may be - but then the markets don't dictate the feasibility. It needs to be feasible, even with the silviculture funding. Even if that site is eligible for silviculture funding, it's not near enough to cover the cost of carrying out that work.

I just have to emphasize that the market for low-grade wood is critical, but I also realize that sawmills are having a tough time with their sawmill chips and what they do with them. For instance, I know a mill, and when they sold it to Northern Pulp, they were getting roughly \$40/tonne for their chips. Now because of Brooklyn Energy being down, they have to send them all the way to Sheet Harbour to Great Northern Timber and they might be getting \$8/tonne. With increasing fuel costs, it's going to be even less. It really is just going to be gotten rid of.

Again, I can't emphasize enough how important it is, not only for low-grade wood, but also for the sawmill chips, to have markets available to make this ecological forestry more economically feasible to pursue, but also to have silviculture funding reflect that. Maybe it's only a temporary kind of subsidy to help, but again, just get that value back in the woods.

Yes, really that first entry, usually about 50 per cent of the material is low-grade wood. Sometimes they get done, sometimes they don't, depending on the scenario. I know in Digby County, we're actually quite fortunate, because we do have a decent market for our low-grade wood with Spec Resources. They buy what they can - they don't buy it all. They buy some to basically supply their contracts with Université Sainte-Anne as well as the NSCC COGS campus in Lawrencetown. At least that's a help.

So in Digby County, that's where there tends to be maybe a lot more harvesting activity, because there's actually a market there that make sense. The landowner might even get paid a little bit for the stumpage for that low-grade wood.

I'll guess it end it there.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith, please.

KENT SMITH: I've said this comment before in other committee meetings, that one of the best parts about being an MLA is to sit on committees like this and learn the ins

and outs about a topic that you might not necessarily sit around on Victoria Day and read about. (Laughter)

My question to begin is for Ms. Amero. Can you speak a little bit about the ways in which promoting proper woodlot management will support biodiversity conservation?

PATRICIA AMERO: Okay, so ways in which promoting proper woodlot management would support biodiversity. Well, again, going back to proper woodlot management - with private woodlot owners, a lot of it is dictated by them, right?

Going back to my previous comment, when woodlot owners want to manage for multiple values - I mean economic, ecological, social, they're very tied to their land. It's basically just to make them aware, first of all, to use the ecosystem-based tools that are out there. The department has done an excellent job and put a lot of pieces of the puzzle together for me in terms of the ecological land classification, the forest ecosystem classification system, now the pre-treatment assessments, and the management guide, which now has - I think the silviculture guide, the silviculture matrix is awesome. A lot of our landowners do that type of work, but there was never a name put on it.

The thing is basically to use those tools available so that you know the ecological characteristics of a particular piece of forest - what we call the ecosite - based on the soil and vegetation type, the micro-climate, what that area is suitable to grow in terms of species, and also what the natural disturbance regime is for that particular area.

So having all those considerations in mind, together with the woodlot owners' objectives, you can then formulate high-risk silviculture activities that make sense for that particular piece of land, and especially for that particular woodlot owner. I guess that would be the best way to answer that question.

KENT SMITH: Taking that question and going over to the department, does the department have expectations on how the private woodlots are managed with respect to conservation and biodiversity? I know you talked earlier in your opening about the Crown land. You hope that you use it as a role model for the private woodlot owners. Are those expectations being met, in your opinion?

KAREN GATIEN: In terms of the ecological forestry, it is voluntary on private land. Certainly, our hope is that they'll work with us. I would argue that many of them may already be doing it - maybe did it before us, right? If you walk a woodlot, and I say this as if I have years of experience - I do not, but I know the few that I've seen. Woodlot owners themselves have identified in some cases areas that they would protect in terms of conservation - some have, I should say - but it is voluntary.

The only thing that would be mandatory would, of course, be the species at risk, because that's regardless of whether it's private or Crown. Our hope definitely is that more

and more of them will embrace it, and really use it on their land. My sense from speaking with many of them recently at the conferences was that they're really interested in doing so and have begun, and might need the tools that were referenced. Maybe there are other tools that we can do some training on and perhaps develop. I definitely think there's great interest.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Amero.

PATRICIA AMERO: Can I just add a little bit to what Karen said as well? I just want to say that I referred to the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute earlier in my opening remarks. I now want to say that I'm quite delighted that they're in our service area because we work closely with them on species at risk, identifying the areas. They have biologists on staff as well. When there is an expected species at risk, or a species-at-risk habitat, we work together with them and put them in touch with landowners so that they can learn of species at risk and what the habitat requirements are, and things along those lines, but also other sensitive habitats and high conservation-value forests. We work closely with them.

When landowners really do emphasize that conservation is one of their main goals and priorities, then we work closely - more closely. We work closely now, but more closely with the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute to provide them with that information, and other areas of expertise, like the biologists. I'm a forester so it's great, again, to have them in our area and have biologists kind of at our availability. Thank you for letting me add that little bit.

THE CHAIR: That's fine. Thank you very much. MLA Chender next, and then I have MLAs Kerr, Palmer, and Boudreau.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you. I'll just pick up on something that keeps coming up but maybe ask it a little more directly, and that's about the small-scale wood energy. We've identified that we need this market. This was identified in the Lahey review as important. I think we heard from the former deputy minister in 2019 that at that time, there were 100 buildings that had been identified, and yet here we are. Fast-forward three years, we need the market more than ever, and we still only have six.

I'm also glad to hear about the innovation and working with the Verschuren Centre and others, but here's this thing right in front of us. What's the delay? Will we see more sites, and how many? Will there be explicit funding for that in the climate plan that's coming?

KAREN GATIEN: Thank you for the question. It has been a long time. I was in a different portfolio and talking about schools that might be possible at that time.

I don't have a number for you. Definitely, we are really - what's the next phase going to look like? What can we do? How can we work with our other department colleagues to really get the next phase moving and moving quickly?

I don't have a copy of the climate plan at this point, so I can't answer your question on that one. But yes, there will certainly be something coming forward soon. We know how important it is. It is a small, tiny step in the right direction in terms of the residual and woodchip issue, but it's an important one. I think we're also looking at what makes the most sense - continuing additional buildings? Is there an option somewhere that we could look at, in addition to that?

I don't have a clear answer or an excuse for how long it's taken, but we're hoping that we'll have something soon.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I appreciate your honesty. I do think it is small. I'm not an expert in forest economics, but what I will say is - as we've also heard today with the explosion in the cost of fuel, and with our acknowledged need now - I think that to be as self-sufficient as possible even in regions of the province, it's actually such a good opportunity. I think it's one that will grow in terms of its impact as costs grow and the ability to export becomes more challenging.

Just to follow up, we had thought that the place where these decisions and others would live, in terms of advocacy, would be in the minister's advisory committee for the Lahey report - so the small-district wood heat and others. This was a table that I think - according to the Lahey report - said was vital to ensuring transparency and accountability in recommendation and implementation.

That table, as we understand, maybe is being dissolved. Its mandate has lapsed. I think the minister met with that table once, because it was previously scheduled when he was elected. Can you speak to where we are? Do you feel that the committee has fulfilled its mandate or know what the plans doing forward are? Also, if anyone else had an interest in speaking to that as well.

KAREN GATIEN: Actually, I joined the minister for that meeting. There was one meeting. The members of the MAC, as it was previously configured, had a two-year term. Those two years expired. We did a survey of the members to get feedback on what worked, what didn't work, and going forward, are there some things that you would recommend in terms of how it might look? Does this work best as it's configured presently? Would an external chair make more sense than a deputy minister chairing it? Those kinds of things.

We're hoping to be able to announce something shortly, but it's not gone away. It's a priority, certainly. We're just reviewing all of the recommendations that we received, looking at what makes the most sense, and made some recommendations to the minister. Hopefully something will be announced very soon. It is important though, I agree.

[2:15 p.m.]

ANDREW KEKACS: I happen to sit on that committee, as does Angie. There's a fair amount of energy and desire to see that work continue, so I'll just pass that along to the committee. I hope it does.

THE CHAIR: Now we'll move to MLA Kerr.

CARMAN KERR: The Lahey report recommends a ban on whole-tree harvesting. I'm wondering if there's an appetite amongst private woodlot owners to follow through on that ban. Maybe the follow-up being - each of you in your groups, would you support that as well?

THE CHAIR: I'm going to shoot for Mr. Kekacs first.

ANDREW KEKACS: I'll turn to Patricia, but whole-tree harvesting isn't done a lot in my group for sure, and probably not with a lot of the co-ops. Unfortunately, I can't speak to the folks who are not members of the group who often are more economically oriented than perhaps the bulk of small landowners are. I think that is an approach that runs counter to a lot of small landowner values in the associations that we work with.

PATRICIA AMERO: I basically concur with a lot of what Andy said, but to reiterate, full-tree harvesting has not really been a favourable harvest system - actually in my whole career working on private woodlots for small private woodlot owners. It's usually just your short wood. You cut the product in the woods, logs, dug wood, pulp would be hard to market now - low-grade wood, if we had a market. It doesn't really affect us all that much. I know that is particular to Crown land, and probably Crown land with hardwood perhaps. I guess I'll just stick to that.

TROY ROBICHAUD: I would concur with those comments. I don't think it's commonly done from my experience, so I concur.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: I appreciate the recognition today by many of you regarding the rural Nova Scotia experience and the culture of many generations. It's part of the fabric of rural Nova Scotia.

Obviously, private woodlot owners do have a keen interest in making sure it is sustainable, but there's also recognition that there are new practices to learn as well. I appreciate that as well. One of the main observations I've taken from today is that private woodlot owners have a lot to teach the department, and the department has some things maybe they can work with private woodlot owners as well.

I guess I'll direct my question to Ms. Higgins because you gave a beautiful presentation at the beginning today. In that, you discussed some training and some educational material. Ms. Gatien, you had mentioned it as well - about how the department can maybe work with private woodlot owners in regard to educating them on the new ecological practices. I know that private woodlot owners want to be part of that solution.

Can you maybe elaborate a bit more again on some of those training methods and educational material used for private woodlot owners?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Higgins, please.

HEIDI HIGGINS: Sure. With ecological forestry, our initial focus was on Crown lands, because it is mandated on Crown lands. We are focusing on getting our forest professionals and contractors trained there on the new guides and implementing the new treatments on the ground. A lot of those professionals are also working on private lands as well and are also getting trained within that section.

We are also providing the private woodlot owners with the new home study program - part of the woodlot management program. There's a new guide there as well that can help educate the woodlot owner and give them information so they can make an educated choice on how they want to manage their lands.

THE CHAIR: We'll move to MLA Boudreau.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I think I'm going to ask Mr. Kekacs a question. You kind of brought up some funding that you received. What would you be using that funding for? What would be some examples of the funding you would have received - I guess that \$9.8 million and the \$500,000? What would you be using that funding for?

ANDREW KEKACS: First off, most of it has not arrived. We hope to sign a contract with a representative in the next day or two. There were some issues because our program extended beyond the life of the trust that we had addressed. I think that's been worked out, or I'm told it was. A significant amount of that money was . . .

THE CHAIR: Sorry, I apologize. I'm going to have to ask you - I don't think your light's on, is it?

ANDREW KEKACS: No, it's not.

THE CHAIR: I was asleep here. (Laughter) I'm going to ask you to start again. Mr. Kekacs, please. Sorry.

ANDREW KEKACS: Yes, and I don't remember. (Laughter) Oh, heavens. The bulk of the money has not yet arrived. It had to do with the question of our project extending

beyond the life of the trust. That question was resolved this week, I'm told, and we should have it fairly soon.

Speaking forward, I think the largest single share of those dollars will go directly to contractors to enable us to do the treatments. Because if you don't have loggers who are willing to do the work, then you can't demonstrate the techniques that you're trying to demonstrate.

I just don't remember the percentage, but it's a significant share of that. We'll do that through a contract for logging services. Rather than having the typical stumpage payments that are used - we may be working in areas where there's not a lot of money to be made, and so we're actually just going to hire these folks and say do the treatments.

This will also be true for silviculture contractors through the department's funding for the alternative silviculture treatments. Again, a significant amount of that is going to go directly to people who are working in the woods. The second-largest component, I think, is for the foresters at places like Western Woodlot Services Co-op, and our other members. We have co-ops throughout the province for the foresters to do the robust analysis - the biodiversity assessments, carbon assessments, high-level forestry assessments - so that we're actually looking at a parcel, taking the best data we can, and formulating treatments that make sense. That, I think, is the second-largest.

Some money actually comes to us, because although we have great co-ops - we really do, and we're very fortunate - they're not everywhere. So we're going to be hiring some staff to be able to deliver similar services for the period of the pilot. It's not a business we really want to be in, but for the period of the pilot, if someone calls me up in Hants County - where there isn't a co-op functioning right now - they can get the same level of services as anybody else.

There may be someone in Patricia's area, for example, who just doesn't want to work with her, and we would serve that situation too, right? (Laughter) I can't imagine why, being that she's probably one of the two or three best foresters in the province, but it's possible. That's most of it.

THE CHAIR: We'll move to MLA Kerr, please.

CARMAN KERR: Andy, I think you posed all of us in the beginning, maybe, in opening remarks: Why do we own Crown land? Could you answer that question?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Kekacs, please.

ANDREW KEKACS: I've thought about that a lot, you know, and if we're wise, Conservatives, Liberals, progressives, I think should come to the same conclusion with that. I really do. I believe that. I think it's really important that we do.

I guess my first assumption is that Nova Scotia is going to be here forever. It's not unlike the Mi'kmaw perspective of looking forward into the future - not just seven generations, but forever, doing the right thing. If that's the case, that tells us that a short-term focus on immediate wood values for current wood buyers is not the right approach, because in that situation we've sacrificed all of the other options that may come out of that forest, right?

Carbon sequestration, for example - whether you like it or not, that's becoming a thing. I mean, there are people in Nova Scotia now who are going to get paid for carbon. You saw some private businesses, in fact, that are going to use carbon revenues to improve management and to buy lots that might otherwise have been clear-cut and make that economics work, right?

When we take a heavy hand, what we're saying is that the money right now is worth a heck of a lot more to us than everything else, and I think it's not. I don't think we're smart enough to know which of our wood buyers are going to actually survive. It's a very competitive global market. I hope they all survive. This is nothing against those wood buyers, but if we believe in the market, for example, growing the best forest we can, the most valuable, the most diverse, the most natural, protects more of the values, both economic and ecological, and gives us options, right?

We had created a system with Northern Pulp. You heard it again and again and again with all of the folks on the buyer side who said we can't survive without Northern Pulp. We've created a system around clear-cutting and residuals to this mill.

I've got to say ten years ago, in 2012, we sat in with Don Roberts. DNR had a conference and Don was a stock analyst for CIBC, I think, at the time - I don't remember for sure. Don said, you know, there's only going to be one pulp mill that's going to survive. It's going to be Port Hawkesbury Paper, and that's because they have a diversified production system. It's one of the most modern mills in America. That's what he said and he was dead right.

We're not smart enough to pick the winners, really, so we just have to invest in our asset, improve the value of our asset, and let the market determine what the best way is to use that, and I think that's why we own Crown land. If we're going to be here forever, it's not to extract today all the value we can and to heck with the future. That's not a recipe for success over the long term for rural Nova Scotia.

CARMAN KERR: I guess for all of you, you made a comment in your closing remarks but a more consultative approach, me asking you: What should our main takeaways be if you have a top one or two or three list? I think I'd start with Andy. For all of the MLAs to take away from this and be focused on, what should they be - on behalf of the members you represent.

ANDREW KEKACS: I really think that question is really important and while I don't at all ignore the critical importance of forest products to rural Nova Scotia, we need to answer that question well for the longest term possible. Gosh, that is my biggest thing. Again, the takeaway is that we could extract some values and use them now or we could protect values for the long term for all of the social, ecological, and economic benefits that they are or may provide.

[2:30 p.m.]

For example, the above-ground trees in the forest in Nova Scotia constitute - let's just give it a value of 1. That's all the carbon in the aboveground trees. If we cut them all down, we now have 0. But it's not well understood that the carbon in the soil actually counts for 2.5, and the amount of soil carbon you lose if you cut down the 1 is a significant share of the 2.5. There are real ramifications for global warming, for wildlife habitat, and on and on and on.

For the future, we're talking about tourism. We're talking about quality of life. I know that doesn't always put food on the table, but I'm not sure that in the future it won't put more food on the table. We need to be cognizant of that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ritcey.

DAVE RITCEY: Earlier we spoke about the attempt to balance economic and ecological goals through the decision-making process. Now I'm just going to pass it back to Ms. Amero to elaborate on the impact that the private woodlot community has on economic sustainability.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Amero.

PATRICIA AMERO: All right, so elaborate on the impact the private woodlot community has on economic sustainability. Well, as we know, private woodland holdings are a great percentage throughout the province. When you look at the harvested wood that's supplied to various mills and businesses - what is the harvest, 2.5 million cubic metres of primary forest products that are harvested from the province each year - close to 70 per cent is 1.6 million right there, just in terms of forest products. But I know a lot of landowners are open to even recreational - I guess it's not really an economic driver though.

I guess I'm just going to go back to private woodlots comprising a huge part of the province and having the ability to produce a wide range of forest products - both softwood species and hardwood species - that can support our existing mills, but also provide opportunity for value-added businesses to add value to that. We've had value-added businesses, and they've had to fold up.

But also, again, I've got to keep pressing about the markets for low-grade wood, and by making that conversion over from fossil fuels, which are imported from Venezuela or wherever. If we can keep that money here, keep that money local, we're creating employment, we're strengthening the rural economy, we're strengthening our rural communities.

I just can't stress enough that it's basically those things. Again, it goes back to proper, responsible ecosystem-based forest management that maintains all forest values but also promotes the health, diversity, and high-quality products for our industry. Industry is a big part. You get the woodlot owners; you get the resource; you get the managers who help manage it, including the landowners; you get the contractors, who are a big, important link in the chain - I think they're totally overlooked in terms of the experience and the skill that they bring; and then the processing facilities and then end user.

It's very integrated and important - all those links in the chain. When one's broken, it's all messed up. I'll end it there.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I have MLA LeBlanc next.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I have a question for Ms. Amero. Earlier, when you were answering one of the questions about silviculture, you mentioned the possibility of a subsidy. With the price of fuel and everything going up, is the silviculture program incentivizing landowners to really immerse themselves in ecological forestry, or is the cost of everything going up without any more help - I don't know. Could you elaborate on your comments earlier?

PATRICIA AMERO: Okay. I'm just trying to get the question. So basically you're asking if the silviculture subsidies are available with the increasing cost of everything, not just fuel, is really hindering the implementation of ecological forestry or just ecosystem-based forest management in general.

The thing is, landowners are contracted. They don't do harvest work or treatment just to get the funding. The funding is really meant to help supplement or help offset some of the cost of carrying out that work. Presently, because of sometimes with the amount of low-grade wood, increasing fuel costs, it certainly doesn't cover the cost - so basically, in some sense, those areas don't get done or they get done at a later time.

The present silviculture system, as I alluded to - I knew the silviculture system review was under way. We were part of the stakeholders. All of us staff got together and came up with what we saw as concerns and problems, but also, we came up with some solutions to the present silviculture system. However, that still needs to be expanded to go in line with the treatments, as outlined in the *Silvicultural Guide for the Ecological Matrix*.

Even so, again, the subsidies are really just to help offset the cost. They're not to pay for it. They're to help offset some of the costs of carrying out that work. Presently, even with that funding that's available, in some instances it's not enough to put it over the edge and get it done.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer, with three and a half minutes left.

CHRIS PALMER: Thank you, Chair. We've discussed some funding. That's been out there today. Maybe I'll direct this to Deputy Minister Gatien. Could you just tell our committee a bit more about the forestry innovation transition fund and the eligibility of that, and who and how would be eligible to receive funds from that in particular?

KAREN GATIEN: Do you mean the Nova Scotia Forestry Innovation Transition Trust? The trust fund? That was \$50 million - I almost said "\$50,000" - \$50 million that was put in trust with three trustees, so it's outside of government.

Essentially they will provide some funding to individuals, although I don't believe there have been too many individuals, if any. It's generally for projects that are looking to advance the forestry sector - be innovative, move it forward, certainly in line with the outcomes of ecological forestry. But it is administered outside of our department. We don't actually have anything to do with it, to be honest. They might reach out to us and say, "What are you doing in this area?" just in terms of intelligence, but it is administered by the trustees.

CHRIS PALMER: Just to clarify, did you mention that there's only been three recipients? Sorry - could you explain that again?

KAREN GATIEN: Three trustees. There are three trustees who manage it.

THE CHAIR: We have one minute, and I have MLA Kerr again. MLA Kerr, do you want to talk for a minute? (Laughter)

CARMAN KERR: For Deputy Minister Gatien, I know the department's worked on plans and recovery models for species at risk on Crown land. How do we ensure that this happens on private land?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Gatien, please.

KAREN GATIEN: The plans are for all species at risk, regardless of whether it's Crown or private. We are hoping that through education and outreach with private landowners, we'll be able to work with them in terms of knowing how to react. There are other organizations, as Ms. Amero mentioned, that are also supporting us in that work. My experience has been that they certainly want to do the right thing and manage their lands appropriately. We've worked quite closely with them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. With 10 seconds left, I think we'll move on to the closing remarks. Where do we want to start? I think I'll start with Deputy Minister Gatién.

KAREN GATIÉN: I'll make it quick. I just wanted to thank you very much for your questions. We're really happy to talk about the work that's happening. I think one of the things that we're most pleased with at the department is the work that we're doing in collaboration with private landowners. I can't remember which of you said it, but we are learning from them and we're hoping that they will learn from us as well. As the tools evolve and the programs and supports evolve, the relationship can only get stronger, I think. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr. Kekacs.

ANDREW KEKACS: Thank you. Oh boy, that's quite a series of statements to sum up, isn't it?

I was out in the woods with an older forester from one of the bigger mills, and I was complaining - I occasionally complain - about what I described as some of the mistakes that we had made over the past 50 years, and the person got really upset, you know? He was actually allowing many of the points that I was making, but he was pretty close to retirement, and he didn't really want to think about mistakes at this point in his career.

I'm really trying now to say that, regardless of what you think about where we were and where we are, we have real opportunities going forward. I've spent a lot of my life studying this stuff. I took a master's at Dalhousie and it was all around landowner values and attitudes. I'm glad to talk with you at any time.

I've actually - there aren't many people, but I've been out in the woods with Jim Irving in New Brunswick, 30 years ago, but we actually looked at what they're doing. I've been all over North America, really, and I would love to talk with any of you at any time about any of this stuff. I'll tell you what I know and what I believe, and I'll make clear what the difference is, and I'll tell you what I think we should do about it.

I'd love to hear your opinions. I gave some cards to Sherri and I think they got passed around. Please do call me. I'd enjoy it very much. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms. Amero.

PATRICIA AMERO: Yes, thank you. I've got a business card that I wouldn't mind circulating too - just to say that first. I really want to thank you all for the opportunity to come here today to represent our members, to touch on some of the challenges that we have as a co-operative and as woodlot owners.

I want to again stress the importance that private woodlot owners and the woodlots have to the rural economy and also our communities, and stress how we as foresters, as part of the co-operative - it's really important to give the information to woodlot owners, to provide them with a wide range of options. Then they're aware, so then they can make informed decisions and we can help them carry out their management activities.

It's keeping the ecosystem health and diversity in mind, but also the economics of it. It needs to make sense economically and how much that - I don't know what the word is - complements the ecological-based tools that the department has developed and that they're continuing to develop. There are a lot of things - research and materials - going on behind the scenes that really help us as forest managers to apply ecologically-based forest management properly and responsibly.

Also, the education part of it for the owners, the contractors and the forest professionals on the basis of ecological forestry and all the components and everything that needs to be considered when carrying out harvest and silviculture-type activities. Even on the biodiversity and the biological features, the species at risk, the wildlife habitats, the sensitive areas, and all those types of things.

I think you guys got it from me that it's really important to increase the markets for low-grade wood and how critical it is to move off fossil fuels so we can keep our money here and strengthen our economy in our rural communities. But also for the sawmills, for the residuals, it's important. I know that some of the mills are looking into what they can do. The mills, the industry, it's really important. Again, it's part of that long chain, right? It's critical.

This is my opportunity too to let you know - and some of the MLAs in the western region would have received this invitation letter from Hon. Jill Balser, who is the MLA in Digby. The Western Woodlot Services Co-op along with Spec Resources, the supplier of the chips to Université Sainte-Anne, as well as NSCC COGS and North Range Forest Products - mainly Harold Alexander, who is one of our main harvesting contractors, but he's been involved with the Co-op from the start, since its inception - actually, since the development of the business plan. We're holding a field tour on June 4, 2022 and we've put this out to western MLAs but it's really open to any MLAs.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables would have received this invitation, same as the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister of Economic Development, as well as Renee Blinn, head of the economic development profile there with the department. Basically, it's going to be from 10 to 1 o'clock on Saturday, June 4th.

It's really important to see the facility. We start from the forest where the wood comes from, responsibly sourced, sustainably managed. Then you see where it's then sent to Spec Resources who then chip it, store it, and dry it and then it goes to the facility itself,

which uses these chips for the wood chip heating boilers. It's really critical, and actually I just have a really interesting fact because these wood chip boiler systems are so efficient - I mean, Université Sainte-Anne's usage average is about 1,700 tonnes of low-grade roundwood. Actually, it's 1,700 tonnes of chips, which relates to about 2,200 tonnes of low-grade roundwood.

Basically, that's what we supply - that and maybe a little bit - about 3,500 tonnes a year of low-grade roundwood to Spec, and then they supply that to making of the chips - 1,700 tonnes and they use that at Université Sainte-Anne. That displaces approximately 556,000 litres of oil.

Right now, the going price of oil is about two dollars a litre. Take this fact: Three tonnes of dry wood chips displaces about 1,000 litres of oil. So three tonnes of dry wood chips at approximately \$100 a tonne for that roundwood is about \$300 compared to two dollars a litre for 1,000 litres, so that's \$2,000. So the savings are just phenomenal, plus you're getting off fossil fuel use.

Again, if you're interested in attending this field day on June 4th, just reach out to me. I'll pass around the business cards, but I have to take the opportunity to invite you all because, as Andy said, you have to be there to see it to truly understand and appreciate it.

THE CHAIR: I'd ask if you would table that, maybe, with the clerk - the invitation - and that way we can get it out to all MLAs. Ms. Gillis, please.

ANGIE GILLIS: Thank you all for having us here today. Before I go into my written comments, I just want to stress the importance of Indigenous inclusion in the management of Nova Scotia's forests. In doing that, we welcome partnerships with the Province, with small woodlot owners, with foresters.

One thing we have really learned over the years is that partnerships are key in moving forward. Right now with a lot of the federal mandates, we have established strong partnerships with departments like Natural Resources Canada, the Canadian Forest Service. We are one of the key native wild seed collectors in Nova Scotia to help defeat invasive species and protect our trees for future generations.

We cannot forget the marketability of Indigenous harvesting techniques. We've seen it in fisheries. We are seeing it in forestry. Our friends out west have generated revenue and are living very comfortably because of how they've harvested their forests out west. It's very important to remember that. It's very important to remember the partnerships and how important they are here in Nova Scotia.

We are the ancestors of the future. Our people will look back and determine if we did our part to protect who we are as a people. For us, we are so passionate about the work we do to protect our lands because we see all our lands, waters, species, air, culture,

spirituality, et cetera, as all being interconnected. We are and will remain healthy if these elements remain healthy. However, if we lose a species, as Mi'kmaq - any species - we are losing our right and ability to practise our culture and traditions. The Mi'kmaq will lose a part of who they are.

What the introduction of ecological forestry has done is that it has opened to doors to the Mi'kmaq, to small woodlot owners, to the Province, and to foresters to come together in what we have called an "ethical space" - nationally, the term exists - to discuss and manage our forests in Nova Scotia. To accomplish this task, we also must make great efforts to understand one another and be open to understanding. We must all recognize in coming together that yes, we do have distinct histories, knowledge systems, values, and interests, and social, economic, and political realities.

But we do share one thing in common, and that is that we are a generation of Nova Scotians who are responsible for managing the health of our current landscapes. We must ensure that we are feeding our communities and economies of today while also ensuring that one will still exist tomorrow. Together, we must stop making decisions, policies, and regulations that only focus on the right now and think about what we are leaving for our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren. We are all responsible to the next seven generations because we are all treaty people.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Robichaud, if you have comments? We need five minutes at the end, okay? (Laughter)

TROY ROBICHAUD: First, thank you all for this great opportunity. It's great to have these conversations at these levels and to see the importance of our forest sector and the health of our forests.

One of the overarching themes I've gathered from today is the importance of diversity. We've talked a lot about ecological diversity, and I think we're all here to see a more prosperous and thriving forest, but also to think of diversity in the sense of our social aspects. As Angie's points allude to, looking at things holistically, with all perspectives and rural values and views, as well as economically. We've spoken today about how two main destinations for our wood products have created economic turmoil. Diversity is one of those ways we can achieve and strive for better.

THE CHAIR: That concludes the question-and-answer portion of our meeting. The witnesses are free to leave.

We typically have a five-minute recess where we have a chance to just kind of meet and ask a few questions, but we have to continue on to finish our business. You folks are excused, for lack of a better term, but if you'd like to hang around, I'm sure there's lots of conversation.

With respect to correspondence, we had a response to a request for information from the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables from the January 29th meeting. This was sent to all the members on April 5th with backup correspondence regarding the delay in receiving the information and sending it on May 20th. Is there any discussion on that whatsoever?

Hearing none, we'll move on here. We had an email from the Canadian Franchise Association addressed to the Chair, sent May 17th, and again, on May 20th. Do we have discussion, questions, concerns on that? No comments. That's good.

Any other business? I like that "no comment" there. Our next meeting is Tuesday, June 28th from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. The topic is the Nova Scotia park system, with witnesses to be the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables.

With that being said, I call for adjournment.

[The committee adjourned at 2:55 p.m.]