

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

RESOURCES

Thursday, December 7, 2017

COMMITTEE ROOM

Forest Management on Private Lands

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Resources Committee

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Chairman)

Mr. Bill Horne

Mr. Chuck Porter

Mr. Brendan Maguire

Mr. Hugh MacKay

Mr. Keith Bain

Ms. Kim Masland

Ms. Lisa Roberts

Ms. Claudia Chender

[Mr. Hugh MacKay was replaced by Mr. Ben Jessome]

[Ms. Kim Masland was replaced by Hon. Christopher d'Entremont]

[Ms. Claudia Chender was replaced by Ms. Lenore Zann]

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Large Private Non-Industrial Landowner Group

Ms. Debbie Reeves - Co-Chair

Mr. Darcy Merryweather - Co-Chair

Mr. Jason Stewart - Member-At-Large

Mr. Dave Sutherland - Executive Director, Association for Sustainable Forestry (ASF)



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2017

STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I call this meeting of the Resources Committee of the Nova Scotia Legislature to order. This is a Standing Committee. I'm Chair, Suzanne Lohnes-Croft. We will be receiving a presentation today from representatives from the large private non-profit landowners group. I ask the committee members to please introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'll give a few reminders. Those in attendance, please make sure your phones are turned on silent or off. I would like to remind everyone that only media are allowed to take photographs or record anything from this meeting. The washrooms and coffee are out in the gathering spot. Also, if we have an emergency, we will exit the Granville Street entrance, and we will proceed to the Grand Parade, where we will gather.

I would like to let witnesses and members know to wait for me to say your name so that Hansard knows, and they can turn on your microphone. We will welcome opening remarks from the large group of landowners. Ms. Reeves.

MS. DEBBIE REEVES: Thank you for allowing us to appear before your committee today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could you introduce your group first?

MS. REEVES: I'm going to do that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. I should've known.

MS. REEVES: I'm Debbie Reeves. I'm the chair of the Large Private Non-Industrial Landowner Group. That's what we're called. With me is Darcy Merryweather to my left, he's the vice-chair. Next to him is Jason Stewart, who is a forest manager with one of our members. We have brought with us today David Sutherland, who is the executive director of the Association for Sustainable Forestry, as he may be able to answer questions on details of private silviculture that we may not have all the information for.

I'm going to use some acronyms, so from now on, Association for Sustainable Forestry is ASF, and Department of Natural Resources will be DNR.

We have been working with ASF and DNR since we became eligible to receive silviculture in 2013. Through this partnership, we have led the way in implementing the forest ecosystem classification guidelines to pre-treatment assessments for Category 6, commercial thinning, and Category 7c, selection management, primarily because we see the value of us spending our money and that of government in the most effective way to effect the best results in promoting healthy, productive, high-quality trees on our woodlots.

From this detailed planning work and post-treatment site visits, we have come forward to DNR with a number of suggestions on changes to the silviculture program, particularly around guidelines, rates, the removal of percentage requirements for various categories, and looking at the addition of more treatments. As our forests progress and work to mitigate the effects of climate change, we want to use all the benefits of the silviculture program and other forest management techniques to help them.

The silviculture programs and the federal and provincial forest strategies have changed over the years that we as families have managed our woodlots. There are four silviculture programs, being provincial Crown, Registry of Buyers, private silviculture, and silviculture for certified lots.

One of the difficulties of long-term management of forests is the short-term nature of these documents. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, we had shelterwoods as a treatment category. Now it is no longer available, but as we evolve our woodlots over time, the composition and aging of trees change, and the Category 7c - selection management as the last category does not equate with the longer-term forest management planning that we do and the required thinning treatments we need to keep our forests healthy.

Pre-commercial thinning in softwood stands two to six metres are now coming into jeopardy as the private silviculture program only provides funds for stands that are thicker than 25,000 stems. As a group, we are limited from the funding that we can receive from the Registry of Buyers program. The difference in the program requirements also creates issues for us to hire private silviculture contractors for ASF-funded jobs.

Forest management is complex. We need to use all the tools and treatments, some of which may not even be defined as yet, to enable us to continue our work to improve our woodlots and therefore the forests of Nova Scotia. Government should not impede such tools as herbicides and pesticides on private land.

Another part of this is the economics. Our woodlots are an investment from which we expect a return, and they are used by many of the owners as part or all of their livelihood. As a result, landowners draw from their woodlots much the same as people working in other jobs draw from their RRSPs or tax-free savings accounts. Like the stock market, our woodlots are subject to downturns in the marketplace that give us less return, and woodlots are susceptible to weather and pest-infestation events.

To do good forest management and partial harvest thinning, we must have a market for the low-grade wood fibre coming from these jobs. It is either that they do not meet the silviculture guidelines, there is not enough funding available at the time that we want to do the job, or the funding is inadequate to cover the extra costs of doing the job without the sale of the fibre we remove.

As a last point, we bring up the impact of various regulations on how we manage our woodlots and the effects on available fibre. The requirement for watercourse buffers, wildlife clumps, and various other areas we either need to harvest in a different way or reserve altogether, reduces the available forest land we have to produce revenue, although we are still paying taxes on all the land and sometimes even on the waterways.

We are becoming increasingly concerned with the watercourse buffers, as some of these have been in place for a long time. Some of the trees in them are dead or dying and the areas are growing more unhealthy. We suggest that the DNR and the Department of Environment provide assistance to landowners to manage these zones to retain or enhance their health. The treatment of these zones would be a labour-intensive job, as no machinery can go into the zone and the trees would need to be fallen away from the waterway. However, if we don't start looking at ways to manage these buffers, the outcome could be disastrous for the rivers and streams and the land along them when numbers of large trees start blocking them. Also, if large trees were to go downstream, it could result in blockages and major flooding in our downstream communities.

Our goal is to manage our woodlots for our livelihood. We recognize the value of clean water and clear air, but we are at a point with the investment in our woodlots and the desire of society for these values our woodlots provide that we not only want but think we should be able to expect society, and therefore government, to provide funding to assist us in the management of our woodlots for these societal values. There are examples of calculations of values of clean water and clean air in other parts of the world that could be used to formulate the payment to private landowners.

To end, I would say that we have a group of members who have managed our woodlots for generations, who have in recent years worked well with DNR on various initiatives, and who are in a position where we can work with government to enhance good forest management and to manage for other values. But we need government to invest funds in our woodlots to support all the economic and societal needs of our citizens.

We'll take questions now.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Reeves. We'll start with Mr. Bain.

MR. KEITH BAIN: Thank you very much for your presentation this morning. One thing you did mention in your remarks was the addition of more treatments. I wonder if you could expand on that.

MS. REEVES: I mentioned shelterwood. Shelterwood was a treatment that was used quite extensively for a long period of time, especially in the 1970s and 1980s and into the 1990s. I'll let Dave maybe add to this, but I think it originally came through the Forestry Canada Program. Forestry Canada was doing some of the silviculture on private lands in Nova Scotia directly. It's a progression for a treatment after Category 7c, which is select management - the thinning of larger trees and leaving the younger stock to grow.

As land progresses, we need to then treat those stands to keep moving the cycle of the aging of trees and the regeneration of trees forward.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sutherland, would you like to add any remarks?

MR. DAVE SUTHERLAND: Certainly. The shelterwood treatment is undertaken to regenerate sites which do not have young trees growing on them. This is sort of a non-clear-cut technique that is used to regenerate sites which are low in the stocking of trees. As Ms. Reeves mentioned, this treatment was in place primarily through the late 1970s, the 1980s, and early 1990s to restock or regenerate sites with natural regeneration, without clear-cutting the sites.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Thank you very much for your presentation. I was curious, you said that you do use silviculturalists and I know from talking with a number of people that a lot of them are of retirement age. They also talk about that the pay is not so great anymore so it's hard to get new ones in that particular sector.

It sounds like we're reaching a point where we need to do something to reach out and get more young people to actually become and train as silviculturalists. Is that something you would support?

MS. REEVES: Yes, definitely. We see the need for more silviculture workers, and we do have an aging population in that sector. The funding that's available for those treatments, if we equate it to back in the 1950s when their wages were 90 cents for doing those same treatments, that should be substantially more.

One of the issues is with what we call pre-commercial thinning, which was the six-to nine-metre stock that I talked about - the more thick it is, the more work it is to cut down the competing stock to release the trees. Obviously, the more work it is, the more time it takes. But the rate is so much per hectare - so for the density. Whether you have 25,000 stems or 30,000 stems, the rate is much the same but you'd have to remove - on 25,000 stems, you've got to remove down to 1,500 to 3,500 stems so you're removing not 80 per cent or something like that of the standing stock that's competing.

It's quite labour-intensive and with wages today, a lot of people find that it's not enough to equate to them for a decent day's pay for the work.

MS. ZANN: Can I follow up just to clarify something? I'm not quite sure how it works, so are you saying that government does help subsidize some of the hiring of the silviculturalists but it should be more? Or what do you mean exactly? How can government help?

MS. REEVES: The silviculture program is funding through the Department of Natural Resources, and there are rates set by hectare for the different jobs. I guess what we're saying is the funding levels that exist have been in place for some time and some of them actually have - either the rates have gone down or the requirements have gone up, as far as densities are concerned, so you have less money for more work.

MS. ZANN: Right, okay, thank you very much, I appreciate that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for coming today. I have just a couple of questions around process, and forgive me, you probably get these kinds of questions, especially from those of us who live in HRM and may not know about the sector as much as we should. I did start receiving a lot of questions. My family and I recently purchased some land in New Ross and there were some questions about cutting down in New Ross, so it became a bit of an interest to some of us.

[10:15 a.m.]

I wanted to know how the process works. It's a question that has always kind of been in the back of my mind. For public and private, is it done differently if we're removing trees from Crown land compared to private woodlot owners? Also, when removing trees, are you removing both the softwood - obviously - and the hardwood? Then when replenishing those, are you putting back the hardwood/softwood and other vegetation that is impacted? That's my first question.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Replanting, you mean?

MR. MAGUIRE: Yes. When going into a private woodlot where you're removing the wood, the trees, from the lot, are you removing both the hardwood and the softwood and any of the vegetation? If so, are you replacing both the hardwood and the softwood and the vegetation? I'm just trying to get my mind - I've actually had a lot of questions from people in my community, believe it or not, because a lot of them do have land in rural Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Merryweather.

MR. DARCY MERRYWEATHER: Like anything, that's a very complex question. Every forest stand is different, so it very much depends on the stand.

I guess I could speak for our family company. We've managed land since the early 1900s. We've actually just completed a forest model that allows us to forecast 100 years into the future. That's kind of our overall guiding tool to ensure that we're sustainable.

When it comes to an individual stand, it very much depends on the physical characteristics of that site - whether it's well-drained, what slope it's on, where the prevailing wind is coming from. It's very site-dependent. DNR actually developed the ecological land classification tool that we use on our private land, and it's used very much on Crown land to determine what treatment should be applied to that area.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves, you wanted to add something?

MS. REEVES: I would. I'd say in lots of cases on private land as well, we use the natural regeneration. Once the regen comes back, we use the treatments to nurture the regen, based again - as Mr. Merryweather said - on what is deemed to be the best growing there with the forest ecosystem knowledge we now have and the land capacity.

If I could, I would extend an invitation to Mr. Maguire. I'm from New Ross, so if Mr. Maguire would like to come see me, I'd take him for a tour and give him some explanations in woodlots.

MR. MAGUIRE: I'd love to. I'll meet you at Vittles for lunch. I'm down on Lake Ramsey. I don't know if you know where Lake Ramsey is. I'm right down there, so I don't mind coming down to see you.

The reason I ask is that I'm just wondering that - obviously, there's a lot of science behind this practice. Sometimes the industry can be villainized by people who maybe don't have the information they should have around it. I'm just wondering, to inform myself and to inform individuals who email me and reach out to me, what kind of science is behind this, especially when it comes to herbicides and pesticides? When you say those words, some people cringe. What kind of science goes into what you spray? When you do use those herbicides and pesticides, is there evidence to show that it's not having an impact or that it's having very minimal impact on the wildlife, including the forest animals and the streams and our natural surroundings?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: There's all kinds of science to back up the validity and the safety of using herbicides. We currently use only one. Its main ingredient is glyphosate. It's used in agriculture and forestry. In forestry, we use a very small amount. We generally use it in areas - a lot of our woodlots that we've acquired from other people weren't managed very well, perhaps, so what you've ended up with is non-native species on that particular site. For example, you might have a stand with white birch and balsam fir, whereas if you look at the site characteristics and use the ecological land classification scheme, it should have sugar maple and mature spruce. We will often use herbicides to direct stands back to their more natural states.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bain.

MR. BAIN: I guess my question is going to be two questions in one. What I would like to hear is what message you feel the government needs to hear from your organization. If there's one thing that the government could do to make the sector better, one thing, what would it be?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves, do you want to take that one?

MS. REEVES: Madam Chairman, if you would permit us, I think each one of us would like to have a go at that one.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, sure. You may go first.

MS. REEVES: I think the first thing that we have been advocating needs to happen is more private landowners such as ourselves need to be engaged with DNR directly in some kind of committee structure where we can work on some of the initiatives that we have mentioned today and possibly other things. At the end of the day, regardless of what government picks as a policy or strategy or practice, our trees have been around for a while and we need to take that and apply it on the ground. Oftentimes, that's where the hitch kind of comes up, and it doesn't really apply as well as you would think - taking it from a book to the ground is a little bit different. That's the one thing we see. We have been working some with DNR, and we have put out that we will continue to do that and with the suggestions we have.

The other part of this is - we have suggested this, and we have done a couple in the past - to do pilots of certain treatments or certain modelling that exists, as Mr. Merryweather mentioned, so we can work with the department. We have been around for generations, and we expect our next generation to be there as well, whereas in government circles - no offence - the politicians and the bureaucrats are termed. The trees are far older than the 25- or 30-year-old DNR staff who are in and out. We would like to see some of this done on private.

For example, I now have a research lot with DNR on my private property that we're working on for what we're calling seed tree release but doing it from natural trees to regen. Those are the kind of examples that we think we should be looking at. Our group is open to that because with the larger landholdings, if one of the pilots doesn't work and it makes a mistake, it's not going to impact us as far as revenue or how we grow our forest in the future as compared to smaller landowners.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sutherland, your wish list?

MR. SUTHERLAND: I would agree with Ms. Reeves with regard to this group having more input on a silviculture program committee so that our needs and desires would have an effective message conduit.

I guess if there is one wish that I would have, it would be through the Association for Sustainable Forestry where we often are limited by interim funding agreements that only last a few months. I would like to see multi-year agreements so we could actually plan in order to have more sustainable forestry done on the ground. It's difficult to manage forests on a four- or sixth-month basis without knowing there is a future for that. I would like to see multi-year agreements in place if that's possible.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Merryweather.

MR. MERRYWEATHER: I echo Debbie's comment about more communication and more input for private landowners in Nova Scotia. Many of the policies over the past few years have been kind of on the backs of landowners. I'll just give you a few. The wildlife regulations were implemented and they are excellent regulations. They require buffers along streams and require us to leave clumps in our harvest sites. Unfortunately, that does tie up - in our case, when we did our modelling, it ties up about 10 per cent of our land base. It's pretty significant.

Sunday hunting was another issue that came up. Government polled the general public and also landowners. I don't believe there was a single landowner group in the province that thought Sunday hunting was a good idea, but it still went ahead for two days.

I want to be clear, I'm not against hunting. Some of our best visitors to our woodlots are hunters. But unfortunately, we've got a lot of hunters who aren't invited, who are driving motorized vehicles with loaded guns, which makes it very difficult to allow safe - for me to give permission to the people who ask. I'm not against Sunday hunting, but it has just added another day of unsafe - it was the one day of the week during hunting season that I could take my family to our woodlots and know that there wasn't a loaded gun pointed at them.

Another example would be the off-road vehicle voluntary planning process. There was a lot of good input into that. One of the outcomes of that was that if you are going to drive a motorized vehicle across private land, you need written permission. Unfortunately, there was no follow-through on that, and we currently deal with a huge liability issue when it comes to motorized vehicles. Our roads aren't designed for these vehicles to travel at the speeds they do. It's pretty unsafe both for them and for us.

It has also led to a lot of environmental concerns. A lot of the watercourse crossings aren't properly installed and are dangerous to both the operator and to the environment. I guess just more consultation with landowners.

What we've found, especially in our case when we have, let's say, a hunter who is causing problems. If they just don't know, it's a communication issue. They don't know that we're working in that area. We've got no way of communicating with them nor do they have any way of communicating with us.

Fortunately, with technology there are a lot of answers out there that are available. There could be a web-based interface for hunters and for land users that could very quickly go on, much like the province has for protected areas - pull up the map, even on their iPhone, and determine whether or not they should be doing that activity on that particular area, or it could be a communication tool to ask for permission.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Stewart.

MR. JASON STEWART: I would echo all the same comments my three colleagues just had. I'd also like to add markets. If the government could find or promote markets, especially for our low-grade products - pulpwood or biomass. I don't mean just kind of put money into our existing - but look for markets in local areas for biomass. It would help us a lot with our silviculture treatments, having a market for all the products that we could be taking out of the woodlots. That would be the big one.

Also, if there is some way the government could fact-find. If you are receiving emails or getting questions, it would be nice if there were some way you could fact-find and find details on a cut or something that was coming up and question it.

Usually there's a good reason behind things that are happening. It seems that the public would rather jump at the negative in a story, so if there's some way the government could help promote the practice of forestry and our industry, I think that would be a big help.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: I wonder, Madam Chairman, if I could just ask a couple of real short snappers.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Two questions. You'll get another turn.

MS. ROBERTS: I guess I'm interested to know - and just to clarify for all of us, are you all from southwest Nova Scotia, working exclusively in southwestern Nova Scotia?

[10:30 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: I'm from New Ross, as I said, so I'm in the west.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Merryweather.

MR. MERRYWEATHER: Just to give you a snapshot of our landholdings, we own and operate approximately 20,000 acres and we're throughout five different counties in central Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stewart.

MR. STEWART: I'm with Bragg Lumber Company. We would have landholdings primarily in Cumberland County but we also go down as far as Guysborough, nothing in Cape Breton, and then down to Kings County - I guess that's the Valley. That would be our extent.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: If I could add, we started with eight families that were interested in getting silviculture funding back because through bureaucratic changes, we had lost that opportunity. Now we are 25 or 26 members. We cover all of mainland Nova Scotia. We have no members in Cape Breton, simply because we're not aware of anyone who qualifies to be in our group because you have to own more than 2,000 hectares to be part of our group.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts, do you have a follow-up?

MS. ROBERTS: In an ideal world, I'm imagining for a forester, the cost of silviculture treatments would be covered and surpassed by the sale of the biomass or the wood that you would thin on a lot. I'm just trying to understand, when we're talking about government subsidy for silviculture investment, what percentage of the expense of silviculture is currently paid for with the government funding that you receive? Are you able to generate revenue from the wood that you thin? I recognize the question from Mr. Merryweather there around markets for that low-grade pulp.

MS. REEVES: For example, I did a selection management in one of my woodlots and I kept fairly good track of everything that we had done. Basically we took off only about 20 per cent of the fibre and we left about 80 per cent of the wood value standing on the ground.

The other part of it is the wood that we did take off was mostly low-grade products because that's sort of the goal of a thinning - you want to enhance the quality of your trees and the more productive, lucrative growing stock. Taking off the low-grade products, the silviculture funding - basically all it does is supplement helping pay for the contractor because if you're covering, say, 50 acres of land to do a silviculture, it takes as long or longer than if you cut everything down on that same site.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Thank you very much. You've covered a lot of questions that I kind of had in my mind but I'd like to go on to ask you a question about how you harvest wood in your woodlots. Not through silviculture but what are the types of wood you are looking for - sawlog-size, maples, or hardwoods? Where do you sell those?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: I can speak to our family company. We currently do not harvest any of our own wood, just because primarily of labour shortages and the cost of having the machines. Through using our model we'll identify what areas we'd like to harvest on an annual level and then we'll approach a mill or a buyer and sell the stumpage that way. That way we can kind of - through the stumpage agreement we can be very clear on what we want harvested and how we want it harvested and get down to details for road conditions, when they're finished - that type of thing. That's how our company does it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is anyone else going to respond to that? Mr. Stewart.

MR. STEWART: It would be much the same for our company, Bragg Lumber. We don't have any employees who harvest timber or equipment. We use contractors and stumpage agreements with mills or wood buyers.

As far as marketing it, what we would look at as cutting - we're trying to go through an improvement or forestry enhancement stage, so most of our cutting would be over-mature, low-volume, or stands that are declining for whatever reason, old age or insects, so we do some - that's primarily what goes on in the softwood end of things.

We have quite an acreage of hardwood, and we have been thinning that, doing a commercial thinning on some of that. That would take out a small percentage of logs because we're trying to improve our log quality, and the rest would be a hardwood pulp or pellet wood type.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: I would like you to continue on your topic about recreational use of your property by individuals, if you have further ideas on how that can be better communicated with communities so people don't go in there hunting. I think in the Province of New Brunswick, you can put signs up, a yellow sign versus a green sign or a blue one.

MS. REEVES: For example, there are requirements in the legislation about how you would have to post your land. For 100 acres, we would have to put 100 signs around the perimeter. It's not really feasible. Plus, there would be a gap in between the signs, so if people went through the woods and didn't see a sign, they could use that as an excuse. They do use that as an excuse.

One of the things that we have talked about, as Mr. Merryweather referred to, seeing if the DNR database and their GIS could be used. It shows the Crown land. It shows the protected areas. It shows the non-forested areas. Possibly there could be a way of enhancing, showing that the rest is private land. Then if there were landowners who wanted to entertain recreational uses or hunters or whatever, those could be put there so people could source them through their phones or whatever.

The other thing is, we did a presentation to DNR on this some time ago around the liability issues we incur as landowners because of people trespassing. Although the legislation, we are told, is clear, we run into issues with our insurance companies and with other lawyers if there is an incident. Oftentimes with the acreages we have, we don't even know there's anybody there. We certainly couldn't afford to put fences up around all of our property, so it's quite an issue.

There is legislation in other jurisdictions. For example, we brought forth one from Ohio, where the government puts out the permission slip, if you will, with the hunting licence that is signed, and it's marked with whose land they can hunt on or whatever, so it's allocated. There are also examples of jurisdictions where the landowner is compensated by the hunting association or government, whichever, for the public to be able to use their land for those recreational uses. Again, it's some legwork to deal with some of these issues.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Merryweather.

MR. MERRYWEATHER: Thank you for your interest in this subject. Our family is very concerned about liability issues. It's a very real issue. Not a lot of landowners realize that it is indeed a concern.

Back in 2003, our sawmill burned, and in that same year, we had an ATV operator, at around three o'clock in the morning, trying to navigate around a second locked gate that was properly marked and signed. Unfortunately, they overturned and had an accident. We were five years fighting with our insurance company and the lawyers to remove that. It's very real. Had we planned to rebuild our mill at that time, it could have had a significant impact on how we do business, which is very concerning.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I want to go back to the issue - I think Mr. Stewart brought it up - when we were talking about markets and we talked about biomass. We have people who are for biomass and people who are against biomass. I just wonder, how does it factor into the work that you guys do, and what do you say to those two groups? Like I said, you've got supporters and detractors at the same time. I don't know who wants to take it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves will take it.

MS. REEVES: Coming from the west, this is a huge issue for us with virtually no markets left for low-grade fibre. When we talk about low-grade fibre, we talk about a couple of things. We talk about low-grade species or maybe bug-infested wood, like a low-quality; the smaller trees that are thinned in the stands that don't have a market any other place; and then there's your tops. In our business at least, we practise diligently to put our tops and limbs and stuff back on the ground, and we've always believed in that. But there's

still wood in the tops, especially big pine trees and that, where there's not a market for that fibre.

To leave those big pieces on the ground - I'll give you a little example. I was in an area of our forest not so long ago where I had been as a child with my father. I remembered the area and there was a big tree that had fallen down at that time and he said, jump on that. So, of course me being me, when I was up this time, I jumped on it again, and here's this moss and these little trees trying to grow on it but it's still quite solid, it hasn't biodegraded. That's one of the issues of leaving big biomass on the ground.

Our idea of biomass is not cutting everything down for biomass. It's about using it as a tool to have a marketplace to use that fibre that we need to remove that helps us with the cost of improving our forests to make better stands.

MR. STEWART: I'd just like to add to that, this past year we had a number of areas that we wanted to go in and thin. They weren't ready for a final harvest, we wanted to thin them. Due to the lack of market for pulpwood or biomass, it wasn't worth our while to thin the stands. If there was a stand of trees, if you could picture it, a stem - you could take one piece of stud wood out of it, so you could make a bit of lumber out of the bottom. But then the whole rest of the stock or top of the tree - not the branches but the stem of the tree - we couldn't do anything with. So the options were to not do it or we could pay a bonus to the contractor. It would do us no good to thin that stand so we didn't do anything to these areas.

I guess I'm with Debbie - we're not interested in going in and flattening and taking all of the material off an acreage. We want to use the whole stem of the tree, leave the branches on the ground. We just want to have a market for those pieces of the wood.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont also asked about the opposing view?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Yes, the people who are against - I mean the whole idea of biomass, do they feel everything should stay on there? I don't know how that fits into how my question worked out here because I think they had two good answers to what they actually want to do with it, compared to what we've heard in the media anyway, where people were just cutting down full stands and chipping it up and sending it off to the biomass machine and making electricity out of it. There's a challenge in what people understand even, I think, what biomass tends to be. I appreciate the answers that they had anyway.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Did anyone want to respond? Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: Just to add, I think the definition of biomass is all the fibre of every tree and every bush, so that's a bit of a misnomer when we're talking biomass. What we're talking about is that low-grade fibre product. Since 2012, the reduction in low-grade fibre facilities in the province, we're at 40 per cent capacity to what we were in 2012. That has a huge impact on the lack of being able to market that product.

[10:45 a.m.]

Obviously, there are some small facilities coming onstream. The issue we're finding with some of it is because it's governmental or institutional or big business, most of that is a tender process. Unless we can come together to try to tender, it leaves the landowners kind of out of the mix, as far as being able to access that type of market.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Go big or go home.

MS. REEVES: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: We haven't heard much from Mr. Sutherland yet today so I'd be very interested in hearing from you, sir, what you feel the forests need in Nova Scotia in order to remain sustainable and healthy.

Just a lead-up to that, when I was on this committee last in April, a Mr. Robert Taylor came to visit us from Taylor Lumber company. He mentioned when he did his presentation that there is a need to encourage the use of local wood here in Nova Scotia but the need to diversify the sector and help develop value-added products. He actually said, "We need to cut fewer trees but do more with them."

How are the members of this association working to add value and producing more with one tree than using, say, 10 trees to make one or two products? Do you have any comments on that that you could provide for us?

MR. SUTHERLAND: Silviculture is essentially the work that we do in the woods today to improve Nova Scotia's forests for tomorrow. Because Nova Scotia's forests are about 60 per cent privately owned, which provides about 70 per cent of the wood supply in the province, the private woodlot sector is a very significant one.

To develop value-added products is, I think, easier said than done. I'm a great believer in the fact that woodlots provide a number of values, not only timber supply but also recreation, spiritual values, and other sort of intangible values.

The conversation that Mr. Taylor had in the Spring, I think he was probably hinting at the fact that there are more things we could likely do with our forest resources. We currently have a fairly strong sawlog sector and stud wood sector. Our pulp mills may be struggling a bit, there's a lot more pulpwood being produced than can be used, so I would like to see perhaps the private sector pick up the ball on value-added products from our forests. I guess it's something that really is as wide as your imagination. I've seen lots of different value-added products from the forests, sort of small cottage industries that make use of forest products and not big, commodity-type production.

I think to sort of bolster that impetus of improving our forests through silviculture and looking towards using not only the wood but other values of the forest for the future is very honourable.

MS. ZANN: For my second question, I'd like to just say I agree with you that the forest has more values than even just monetary value. When we talk about the fact that - I know Ms. Reeves mentioned it in her opening comments - that society receives a lot from the woods. I mean because of the woods we can breathe oxygen, right? If you cut down every tree on the planet I think we would be in major trouble. I think you're right, there's a lot more to it as well.

I also am curious, as the Environment Critic, about the endangered species. For instance, our Endangered Species Act includes provisions to protect species by acquiring land and designating it as core habitat. The government has also used other means, such as acquiring land through land trusts, things like this, or working with private landowners to protect the habitat.

How do you and your members work to protect species at risk?

MR. SUTHERLAND: The Department of Natural Resources has been very effective, I think, in identifying the areas of habitat in the province that support species at risk. Just within the last year, in fact, there's been the publication of a biodiversity handbook by the Department of Natural Resources. I think that goes a long way toward helping folks realize what's on their woodlots and how they can further the protection of habitat that is critical for species at risk.

MS. ZANN: Thank you. Do the rest of you have a comment about that as well?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: I'd just comment that fortunately there are solutions. What we're really talking about is that timber does provide us an economic value that all the non-timber values currently don't, but we still manage for them because we feel it's important.

We've been working with the province some, and we'd like to continue to work with the province. One of the suggestions we've given in the past - under the Forest Sustainability Regulations there's a number of silviculture treatments you can do - planting, spacing, and so on. What we'd like to see is perhaps an eighth category added for non-timber values. If there was a need - let's say, for example, to preserve old-growth hemlock in the province - there could be a category added to help protect that so the landowner could receive some monetary value for doing that.

MS. ZANN: And about endangered species?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: It would be the same thing. If there was a type of habitat for an endangered species, we'd certainly be willing to work with the province to set aside those areas. We do already, but we'd probably get a lot more buy-in if there was a mechanism to provide some monetary value for it.

MS. ZANN: Right, and that's what you were talking about - about the waterways, right? The buffers that you were mentioning as well, Ms. Reeves?

MS. REEVES: Yes. We call them riparian zones, but the waterway buffers. If we don't keep that material there healthy, then we, at least, as landowners in our family, and lots of other private landowners, have always left buffers along the waterways, before it was ever thought about of actually having to do it.

Now some of those are getting quite old. It's labour intensive, as I said, but we need to find ways - and we're pretty creative in how we can do things - to take out some of that over-mature and dying material and maybe plant some new trees, or if there's regen or whichever, to keep those healthy.

One of the things we do see is that when a big tree falls down, oftentimes it goes into the water because of the slope of the bank. Once it blocks off that water, it backs up the water, and eventually, with a storm or something, it will let go. The first thing is it's downstream somewhere causing a problem, flooding someone's house or something.

We can provide the services, but that's labour-intensive and it's costly and it doesn't give us back any revenue. This is where we need some of this assistance to create this kind of revenue-neutral assistance to help us pay for the costs of these services that we're providing.

MS. ZANN: Great. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Madam Chairman, through you, I'd just like to start by saying that the community I represent, Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, is kind of historically entrenched in the industry - probably less visible today than it was at one point in time - particularly in Upper Hammonds Plains. Admittedly, my generation probably would not have been as intimately exposed to your industry as they would be today in the community.

I have heard it said several times this morning, on the topic of succession planning within the sector, your industry, maybe your individual scenarios, I'm curious about the present initiative that the industry or you folks individually are taking to ensure that there is a succession plan perhaps for your industry as a whole or your individual circumstances. What would you aspire to do if you're not already doing it with respect to succession planning? I extend that question to all four of you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Who would like to start? Mr. Merryweather.

MR. MERRYWEATHER: That's a good question. It's a very important question. Much like a dairy farm, we are farmers, we just have a much longer rotation for our crops. It's very important because many of us are family-owned businesses.

From our perspective, what would be very helpful would be to have resources provided to help do the modelling that our company has currently gone through. It's very expensive computer modelling. Basically, you grow your forest over time using a computer modelling. You can ask it all sorts of questions if you want to maximize timber or maximize habitat. You can manage for a number of different values using this computer model. I think if there were resources available to do that - we're getting there. The province currently uses a model, but it's not available to private landowners.

If we had access to modelling, that would allow us to demonstrate to Revenue Canada that we are actively managing our land. That's one of the requirements for passing on the lands tax free.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stewart.

MR. STEWART: I don't want to get too technical, but I would bring up LIDAR, which is something that I think New Brunswick is ahead of Nova Scotia on, but I understand Nova Scotia is currently flying it in the province. This is something that would really help in the modelling and with our forecasting. Traditionally, you would go out into the woods and look at the trees and take measurements and so on. This LIDAR is something that is as good or better at a much more reasonable cost that's becoming available. When the province finishes flying it, if they could make that information available to the private landowner and, in addition to that, help them with whatever software they would need to help model that would be on my wish list. We currently use a GIS program to map the woodland and to help keep track of what's going on and where we're going to be in the future. This would be a huge help for us.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: I guess I would just add that from the time we started with the government with our silviculture program, the two things that we had brought up and we continue to bring up are fairness and balance.

What we see as fairness is in the programs. There are assistance programs for management plans to be done for small private landowners. There are assistance programs for certified lot landowners, regardless of their desires of how they want to use their woodlots. There is no such similar program for us as landowners. We have asked them to assist us with that but give us a little bit more latitude because most of the people in our group have different skill sets and capabilities that we can contribute ourselves to our management plans, and we do that.

[11:00 a.m.]

It's an expensive proposition, and maybe to be consistent across our land base, if we had some assistance from DNR to do that, then our plans would be modelled on somewhat of a similar basis. Some of us could do the planning work, some can do the groundwork, whichever. We wanted a kind of different formula, if you will, but we thought we should be able to expect to be treated fairly from government, as well as the small private and the certified lots.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bain.

MR. BAIN: We certainly covered a lot of territory this morning and I think every one of us around this table have been educated by the things you've told us, for sure. I know I certainly have.

I want to go back to something you said before about the negative image forestry has when it comes to dealing with the public and especially with the media - the negative comes out in the media. We know that the industry is doing what they can to get rid of that negative image. I guess my question will be, can government do anything to help improve that image as well?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Who would like to? Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: I'll give it a try here. I think education is the biggest thing that we need government to provide and we need more clarity on some of the information that is being presented to the public. I'll give you one example, the global Earthwatch - whatever they call that - where they look at what is considered to be a clear-cut. All my Christmas tree lots come up as clear-cuts. The Christmas tree lots in my family have been operated as Christmas tree lots, some of them for 75 years. They're sustainable, they're consistent, but on that database, it comes up a clear-cut.

The other thing is, since the start of the inception of something called so-called clear-cut, the definition has had to be formulated by staff because they had to have something to measure it on the ground with. The whole concept is flawed. We need to do good forestry, based on how our sites need to be done.

Some of the partial harvests that we're doing - for example, with me in Lunenburg County, I'm dealing with a lot of balsam fir, obviously, and some of the stands all get mature at the same time. Or they're Christmas tree stands we've rotated out for a time and they just simply need to be all cut at once - the regens are coming in at the bottom and we need to release that. The longevity of balsam fir is probably about 35 years now. But if we make it a certain size that we cut, it's not a clear-cut if we do patches. But if we make one of those patches that we cut a little bit bigger, then it's a clear-cut. It makes no sense to us as forest managers to leave a fringe that's in worse shape than what we're probably cutting.

It's some of the dynamics of how you look at things such as patch cuts, strip cuts. But if you go through the Forest Ecosystem Classification, your pre-treatment assessment, it takes you to the treatment that you should use for the site you have, based on your soils, based on your trees and your plants that are there then, and based on the land capacity of what that land can grow. That's the most critical thing that we need to be trying to educate the public with.

I have a new treatment that I'm using myself. It's not sanctioned by anybody but it's called DQNCC. It's actually a "Debbie quasi non-clear-cut" because as far as I'm concerned, it's not a clear-cut but if you put all the measurements into it, it may be but just by a little bit, because either what I've left is a little too small or what I've taken out is a little too small, or vice versa.

If I were quite factual, we really need to get rid of the clear-cut definition that we have and try to work with something that is better designed to do forest management, especially since we now have the Forest Ecosystem Classification and the pre-treatment assessments to work with that we didn't have when the definition was first brought forward.

MR. BAIN: I didn't realize we had a clear definition for "clear-cut." We have been asking for years for a definition of "clear-cut" and never really got one.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You've never talked to Ms. Reeves before.

MR. BAIN: We certainly haven't. What you're saying is the right approach we should be taking - it's my understanding, when you described it, all clear-cut is doing today is defined in an area and the size of an area. If it's a certain size, it's called a clear-cut. Am I right? Is that what you have been saying?

MS. REEVES: That's part of it. But what I'm saying is, if we had this room, for example, and this is your cut, in order to meet the definition of a non-clear-cut, I have to leave a spot as big as this table area. But because the trees in this table area - I need to take some of those out as much as I do the outside fringes or vice versa, and I need to take all of this out.

If the openings in that cut are bigger than a described area - and I don't want to get too technical, but it provides a basal area of 10. If I have a basal area of nine, I'm a clear-cut. If I have a basal area of 10, I'm not a clear-cut. That's half a tree or something. It's not a workable tool to do good forest management. Dave can probably explain it better than I can.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sutherland.

MR. SUTHERLAND: A couple of the very positive things that the Department of Natural Resources has accomplished in the last few years is the production of the Forest Ecosystem Classification for Nova Scotia, which helps foresters and forest technicians make prescriptions on forest stands. They also produced a biodiversity guidebook.

I'll just give you an example of how that has helped woodland owners manage their properties. One weekend last summer, I was hiking through the Gully Lake Wilderness Area, which is in Colchester County. Of course, this is a protected wilderness area with a fair amount of old trees - a very wilderness-looking place. I was hiking along, and I heard an owl hoot. Being the nature nut that I am, I had to go and see it. I did find the owl, and there were actually four or five young owls with the parent. It was a nice sight to see.

Then the following week, I was on a woodlot that had had a selection management prescription on it, and the selection harvesting had been done. On that woodlot, which was nowhere near the Gully Lake Wilderness Area, there was another family of owls of the same species.

The fact that I saw the same species of owl in both locations means that selection management works. That type of forest management and silviculture actually provides and continues to provide habitat for many species. I just wanted to underline that as a positive aspect of some of the work that DNR has been doing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: For the businesses in your group, viewing the management by DNR of Crown land in your area, do you see how that Crown land is managed and is being harvested as an example for how you would want to manage your land? Or is it problematic in that it's competing for the small demand for biomass? How are you judging how we are doing on the land that we own?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Who would like to answer that? Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: They elected me. I guess how I would start is one of the things that we see with Crown lands is that the actual cuts are done all by prescription, all applying the Forest Ecosystem Classification, the pre-treatment assessments. They are double-checked. So that process works.

It's a large land base, so obviously the larger land base you have, the way you manage a little differently, as far as the sizes of the stands that you may harvest and treat at one time, but the science and everything that's there is all being applied on Crown land.

The one issue that we're starting to have is some of the protected areas because with the protected areas, next to our private areas at least, and what the Crown does with theirs next to the protected areas is kind of public business but for us, especially where we're looking at the probability of infestations of spruce budworm again and having been

around in the 1980s when that went through the last time and knowing the devastation there was, our business personally we're trying to deal with some of those mature fir stands ahead of the balsam fir infestation, hopefully, by protecting areas and allowing some of those areas to become infested, I mean it migrated into the private lands before and vice versa. Private lands are trying to manage their issues with this particular pest but we don't see the Crown doing management in those areas, to try to mitigate the effects of pests, for example.

I understand why people want protected areas for various values but that's why, like when Darcy mentioned about us wanting another category, we see being able to take another category and we don't necessarily want to commit it forever to a nature trust or a long-term easement or something, what we see is being able to rotate sites around through over time and longer periods where we could manage for those same values as a site on even private land, but move them around and make sure we keep that land healthy as well as the rest.

MS. ROBERTS: Can I just say you didn't address the question that I asked about demand and the market in terms of trying to sell your low-grade stuff.

MS. REEVES: For me in the west the low-grade market issue is that we're too far from the market. We have virtually no low-grade market in the west and with the lower value of that product, for the trucking distance the less there is for the roadside product. The main issue is the value of it isn't as high and the distances it has to go now make it not feasible to be able to sell it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll go on to Mr. Porter.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: A couple of things. I want to go back to the clear-cut definition bit. A few minutes ago, you gave your definition, Debbie's methodology around the clear-cut, which is fine. But I know, because I was there, I sat in the House of Assembly and Minister John MacDonell at the time stood in his place and gave a definition of what he believed, as minister, a clear-cut was. Can you tell me what that was? You have somewhat described it. What are you following as a definition, I guess, is my question?

MS. REEVES: The only thing I recall is the requirement for it to be 50 per cent non-clear-cut, without a particular definition at the time that the directive was released.

MR. PORTER: You referred a moment ago about certain tree heights, if it was this high it was this or it was that. I recall, and I would have to go back to Hansard and I will because I'm curious now, he stood and in my opinion defined what a clear-cut was in his opinion as the minister at the time, and he talked about a tree being this big or that big and of course people were going, where did that come from? So, my question was really going to be, where did that come from? You're telling me it's a number of 6 per cent - 6 per cent of what? I'm not understanding what you're saying. Did you say 6 per cent of something?

[11:15 a.m.]

MS. REEVES: No, I didn't say 6 per cent.

MR. PORTER: What did you say? My hearing is not the greatest. That's why I'm asking.

MS. REEVES: What I said was that the guidelines for some of the treatments, if you have a basal area of a certain amount that's required to be a non-clear-cut, if you have one point of basal area less, then it becomes a clear-cut. That's what I was trying to demonstrate. The definition we're going by is one that was released by DNR. A number of years ago, DNR released a definition, and it's actually on their website. It shows different pictures and this is a clear-cut or this is not a clear-cut. It's based on either so many short stems or so many bigger trees.

MR. PORTER: How long ago did that come in? You said a number of years ago - five, 10, 25 - any idea? I don't care who answers. I'm just curious. (Interruption) I don't know. That's why I'm asking the people in the business.

MS. REEVES: I would say about five years ago, I think.

MR. PORTER: Five years? Interesting.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I kind of liked when we started talking about protected lands there. We had a presentation from the mining association yesterday, and we were talking about when Environment went and designated what's protected and what's not. There were a number of instances in their resource that the protected lands sort of took chunks of and didn't quite identify what's important to them.

Now you're bringing up the issue of protected space and not really managing that forest stand, and it's actually going to impact your forest stands because they are adjacent in some cases. The whole western land thing is a whole other problem on top of that.

I'm just wondering, what's your feeling on protected lands? How should we be managing those properties as we go forward? How will they impact your land? We're protecting 13 per cent of our forest now. The government continues to bring in more area. Should there be an end to how much we're protecting because of these challenges that we're going to run into with your properties and of course in mining as well?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: I can't speak for the exact amount. I'm not well versed in how much the province should set aside. Debbie mentioned how it potentially impacts with diseases or insects. For us, it impacts the value of our land. Our example would be we have a woodlot that's in the middle of a proposed protected area. We're left with the

question of whether we can even access that land. Are we going to continue to be able to use the road across the Crown? If so, great. If not, then that drastically changes the value of our land.

In a previous question, we were asked what the province could do to help landowners. One of the things that I would suggest is to work with landowners to exchange land. I have tried that in the past, and I haven't had a lot of success. I tried both with the Department of Natural Resources and with the Department of Environment, but there are a number of bureaucracy policies that inhibit that. One that seems strikingly odd is in a proposal that I had given to the Department of Natural Resources. I had done up a proposal for a land exchange that had equal value. It didn't go anywhere because the folks in DNR weren't able to put a dollar value on timber.

There are a lot of opportunities to work with landowners to exchange land to get what we need for the protected areas, but there are just some problems getting there.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I would think maybe part of the problem, too, is that when you have a protected area, that falls under the Department of Environment. They're trying to deal with it in their silo. Then you have DNR, which is supposed to be responsible for the wood supply in one way or another, and they just don't talk anymore. I guess there's maybe a challenge for government there to try to find ways to allow that to happen.

I think a land swap process should be a reasonable one, especially when we talk about access. As you're exchanging like for like or better, in some cases, or larger area versus what you're trying to get to, so okay, I thank you for that answer.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: In September Nova Scotia listed an additional 11 species as part of the species at risk legislation. We added another 11 species, either as species of concern or species that are now considered endangered. That was a 15 per cent increase from the last time that species were added to the list in 2013.

I recognize that this is big picture but I'm hearing you say that forested land that is actively managed can also be playing an important role for habitat and yet at a provincial level, we're seeing more species being listed as vulnerable or at risk.

Can you give a big-picture answer to where you see the loss of habitat or what is out of balance? That was the whole goal with the Natural Resources Strategy, to figure out a balance. Clearly, we're not at balance or we wouldn't be seeing new additions to that list.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Who wants to take that one on? I'll give it to Ms. Reeves.

MR. JESSOME: It's not a clear-cut answer. (Laughter)

MS. REEVES: There truly isn't a clear-cut answer. I think one of the things is that so much of the management and development of land in Nova Scotia is done in silos. For example, in one area of HRM that I'm familiar with where a housing development took place, they actually filled in wetlands to build apartments or condominiums. To appease the requirements, they got a contractor to dig holes and make wetlands out in another piece of private property they bought, in order to meet the guideline. That seems a little out of sync with how we try to manage our land, at least.

It's the same with species at risk. If we cut down some trees and somebody says, oh well, there was something there, we never saw it - well you endangered a species. But if someone buys a piece of land and does cottage development or a big subdivision, sometimes those same requirements are not in place to investigate that site prior to the development because it's municipal versus province versus federal, and it's different departments.

Some of the developments with the wind farms do take into account species at risk - wildlife and moose corridors, all that stuff has to be assessed for those kinds of developments. But with housing developments, the requirements are different across the province, I think because of the different planning strategies for the various municipalities.

That's where I think we're probably missing the boat a little bit on identifying places where there could be species that then become at risk because of that habitat being gone.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts, do you have a supplementary?

MS. ROBERTS: I'd like to take advantage, just because I am the Natural Resources spokesperson for the NDP and it is quite confusing to figure out where all these different groups fit and what all voices they're representing.

Debbie, you and I spoke a number of weeks ago, which I found quite helpful, and I know that you're also on the board of Forest Nova Scotia. Mr. Sutherland, I know this is the first time I've heard of the Association for Sustainable Forestry and I'm kind of left wondering how that relates to the service areas under DNR, some of which are promoting forest certification standards.

I guess the question is, I understand who you are representing, where do you see the voices that we need to be listening to? Can you comment on sort of the fractured nature of the forest industry, in terms of for us, as political figures, trying to understand which direction we should be going in? At least I'm getting a nod from Mr. Merryweather, which I appreciate, because I recognize that question was a bit all over the place.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do you want to take it, Mr. Merryweather?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: I could certainly try. I certainly recognize that there's many different organizations when you start looking in the forestry world. Today I'd like to hear the large private landowners' concerns, that's who we represent. Generally, we're family-owned businesses that have managed lands sustainably for a long time but there's a number of other voices out there, a number of landowner groups - some more legitimate than others, I find. I guess at the end of the day I would suggest you listen to the people who have dollars invested in the ground, the people who actually own the land and manage the land and derive income, so we can continue to live in rural Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sutherland, did you have anything to add to that?

MR. SUTHERLAND: Sure. The Association for Sustainable Forestry has actually been around since the year 2000, so we've been in place for 17 years. We act as a liaison between the Department of Natural Resources and private landowners. We administer silviculture funding and technical advice for landowners who want to do silviculture work, forest improvement work, on their woodlots.

We also sort of administer several streams of silviculture funding to different groups and believe me, it can get confusing, the number of different organizations out there, especially for private woodland owners.

We administer technical advice and funding for not only small, private landowners that have woodlot certification but also private landowners who do not have that certification. We administer funding and advice to the non-industrial large landowners and also to some of the, shall we call them regional service areas, that have been put in place; firstly, the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership, that was one of the first regional service areas put in place a couple of years ago and now there's another one in the west called - I believe it's the Western Woodlot Services Cooperative. We sort of administer and take care of all the funding streams of silviculture that these regional service areas undertake.

I understand the fact that yes, it can get a little bit bewildering and convoluted but we try to stay on top of it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Porter.

MR. PORTER: I want to come back to the clear-cut issue. I know some days my memory is a little off but today we dug back a bit. I just want to read a little bit about this and then ask a question. "In Nova Scotia, a clearcut is now defined as a forest harvest where less than 60% of the area is sufficiently occupied with trees taller than 1.3 meters." Continuing on with the clear-cut definition, below are images and the website of Nova Scotia's forests that demonstrate what is and what is not a clear-cut, according to the new clear-cut definition announced by the province on August 15, 2012.

There is a variety of pictures that show what is, in percentages and figures, how they were derived at, a figure. I don't know but I would ask this question, given that you all are in the business and I think have been for some time, or your families, when this was brought in, was there consultation by the government of the day with private woodlot owners, as you are or that you represent, to come to a conclusion about what a clear-cut is and how it is defined as it is today, or was it in that strategy introduced in 2012 and put into place?

MS. REEVES: To my knowledge and to our collective knowledge, we're not aware that there was any consultation done around the definition prior to it being released. We have made comments to it since then. As you have the pictures there, just because the definition shows it as being a clear-cut doesn't mean it's bad forestry.

[11:30 a.m.]

That's the point we're trying to make: just because it may be a clear-cut, it's still done under good forest management. That's my point.

MR. PORTER: Right, and I'm not arguing that point. It was just discussion around how there was no definition of a "clear-cut." But I remember the minister at that time standing up and talking about it and describing - showing what he thought was an opinion about a 1.3-metre tree, I guess, if you will. With everybody sitting here and a very knowledgeable group who have been in the industry forever thinking that we should be very aware that this actually exists, obviously.

I'm not saying it's a bad practice in the way that you're contributing or doing it or that practice. I'm saying that there's a lot of discussion out there about clear-cut, as you have well described, Debbie. It has been lumped into one barrel and it's all bad. Let's not kid ourselves. The optic out in the public is that it's all bad, no matter who you talk to. I'm not sure how much knowledge there is.

The education point you talked about, fair enough. I also agree with that wholeheartedly. I don't think people have a good understanding. When you talk to folks in your business, they are very knowledgeable. They will tell you why some of these have to be done - old stands, dying stands, or falling stands. There's a whole variety of reasons. I'm no expert in it, but I talk to these people as well. They will tell you, with that expertise, why that should be cut. I don't argue that.

I think people driving on Highway No. 101 - I'll just use that because I live in the west, and I now see mountains without trees that were once heavily forested land. You could barely see off the highway, and now you can see for a couple of miles back there. The more you talk to the users - the ATVers, the skidooers, and the woodlovers out there walking, and so on - they're commenting on what's not there. I'm not sure that they understand why it's not there. I'm not sure that they understand the silviculture piece. I'm

not sure that they understand how long it comes back and all of these pieces around that, or that there are percentages and so on.

I wanted to clarify that for the group today and for this table. You can go to the website and you can get it all there, if it needs to be tabled. I thought it was important to raise that issue and to speak about the education piece. I think it's probably incumbent on all groups, Crown as well as private woodlot owners and government in general, to do an education piece that's worthy of this industry, because it's a big part of what we do in this province. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think, Ms. Reeves, you wanted - okay, Mr. Stewart, do you want to respond to that?

MR. STEWART: I just wanted to say something about the education piece. I know there's a very good program that's in place now, although it wouldn't educate the masses. It does educate a very important group, that being teachers. The industry supports a teachers' tour. It's through Forest Nova Scotia. It's a very good tour. If you know of any teachers who are interested in the subject, it's a very good tour, very educational. They would take that back to their classes. In my opinion, that's a very good place to start for some of this.

MR. PORTER: Thank you for that. I think they probably don't get it until they end up in places like NSCC, as an example. They might go in and take forestry and obviously are getting the required learning at that time. I'm not sure that is - like I said, there are lots of people who drive that highway, as an example, and all highways, and they see it, but is there a true understanding of what that reflects?

A good point there, though. A good idea. That's part of that reaching out. We have to be open-minded to reach that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves, you had some comments?

MS. REEVES: One of the things we have talked about a bit - taking off the example from the farms with Open Farm Day - is having an Open Forest Day. The Department of Agriculture and the federation work quite closely with farmers to do Open Farm Day. We feel we could be - some of the people, at least, could lead to help with an Open Forest Day. That would be in different parts of the province, so it would give more people access to come and actually view forestry on the ground where we do it. That was another thing that we wanted to bring up as we further our discussions on education.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: I agree that a take your child to a forest day would be fabulous to be able to see the beauty and also to see how forests are managed properly in a sustainable fashion. I think everybody should know how to do that. What is pretty well our resources here in Nova Scotia and an important resource, as you said, both financially and also mentally, spiritually, and for our own health. I think it would be very important for people to really understand that.

I wanted to ask you a couple of questions about some of the issues that the public are concerned about, for instance, when you go to Wentworth now and you see a whole mountain is cleared. The people who own Ski Wentworth are from Truro, the Wilson family. I know that they have great concerns about tourism and things like that. People go up in the ski lifts and they see nothing where there used to be beautiful Acadian forest. People are concerned and they're upset. This is happening a lot throughout the province now.

Clear-cuts have gone up, and I believe on privately-owned lands now it's about 91 per cent according to a letter that we received from the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources last year. It's 84 per cent on Crown lands, which is quite high really, especially when, as the NDP Government, we had tried to bring it down to 50 per cent, as you had mentioned. The minister at the time that Mr. Porter was mentioning, John McDonnell, may have gotten up in the House, but he didn't remain the Minister of Natural Resources. He was actually moved to a different department, and Charlie Parker took over. It was after Charlie Parker took over that they came up with that definition of a clear-cut.

I have always had a problem with that definition because it seems like it leaves these little clumps, as you had mentioned, Ms. Reeves, these tiny clumps of sad-looking trees in the middle of nothing. For instance, when I visited different areas where there has been a clear-cut, it seems like it was nothing, and there's a couple of trees with maybe a sad looking eagle on top of it. I think this is the sort of thing that people see, and it really upsets them. It's sad to see.

When they are in close proximity to lakes, like Lake Mattatall - the community brought me out to see what was happening with Lake Mattatall. The lake had gone green from the clear-cut that was all around it except for this little tiny buffer around the edges of the lake, and also the glyphosate spraying. The glyphosate spraying, because of heavy rains, had pushed all of the remnants of the dead material that had been killed by the glyphosate into the lake, and it had been feeding on the phosphorous and the other nutrients that this green algae lives on. The whole lake was polluted, and you could not swim in it. You could not even boil the water to get rid of the toxic algae. It was there for the last four or five years just building up and building up. They have now assessed it, and they have come to the determination that yes, they're going to have to stop spraying around that area, and the clear-cuts did not help at all.

What do you see going forward in Nova Scotia as a way that we can all work together to try to prevent this kind of pollution happening? It's a big question, but this is what we see the public upset about. How do we move forward? How do we improve the situation and prevent this sort of thing from happening?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: Firstly, I'll say that it doesn't matter who the landowner is, the value is in the trees we grow. As private landowners, that land and those trees belong to us, as private landowners. Therefore, we use forestry as best we can to manage it, but we also have to use the economics of the revenue.

This is where our idea of the societal value of the clean air and clean water - aesthetics aside - we need to find a way where society contributes to our revenue stream if some of that wood needs to be left for a bit longer time.

Be aware that there are stands where it all becomes over-mature at one time. One, if we don't cut it, we're not going to get any revenue from it. Two, we will have a lot of fallen-down dead rotten stock that won't provide much room for the next generation of trees to come up. It's a fallacy that everything is done by planting. On our land, we plant very few trees. It's all by regeneration. The trees will come back up, but you have to deal with what you have.

The issues around clean water, again, if there has to be something done to work with the landowner to provide that, then the landowner should be compensated for a plan that would be put in place to do that over time rather than all at once or something, but a plan put in place for the landowner to be compensated by society through government funding to help mitigate that hardship on the landowner.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann, briefly because we're behind.

MS. ZANN: Yes, thank you. I know time is short.

What do you say to the Forestry Association? You're part of that. They say that they're planting softwood. After they do the clear-cuts, oftentimes they say they're planting more softwood. What a lot of environmentalists are concerned about is the fact that that's not really very sustainable, that we need the Acadian forest, that we need to have the mixed wood. We need to have different ages and different sizes. Just planting one monoculture of a species of tree is actually not sustainable, especially if you are thinking about spruce budworm and things like this. What do you have to say to that?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: Could you repeat that just briefly?

MS. ZANN: Ms. Reeves had mentioned planting. What we're hearing is that there is a number of people planting just softwood trees because they want that for the pulp. What a lot of environmentalists are concerned about is the idea of planting a monoculture, it just being one species, and taking away the Acadian forest that Nova Scotia is known for, it's natural, and it's healthy. They are concerned that just having a monoculture of softwood being replanted after clear-cuts and things like this is not sustainable and is actually not very healthy in the long run for our forests. What would you say to that?

MR. MERRYWEATHER: I think you're absolutely right. A diverse forest is a healthy forest, both to the species and age classes.

Again, that goes back to the need for resources to be available for private landowners to model their forest. It's very difficult to try to manage 1,000 different stands in your head. You need the computer software to be able to do that. To me, that's where the answers are. To Jason's point, the LIDAR would give us a definite inventory of exactly what we have, followed up by a modelling process that would allow us to investigate different opportunities to manage our lands for more than timber values and, to Debbie's point, to be compensated financially. As I mentioned before, we could add certain categories to the sustainability regulations now in place very easily. To me, that's where the answer is.

We're open for business. We have managed our lands for a long time, and we have diversified and managed for a number of different values. There's nothing to say that we can't change how we do things.

MR. STEWART: I just want to comment. There is planting going on. The red spruce is part of the Acadian forest, and that would be a species that is one example of a tree that is planted. Also, some of the silviculture follow-up treatments to planting would promote diversity. Just because you plant a tree doesn't mean every one of them is going to survive. You would have a few pass on from mortality and follow-up treatments like pre-commercial thinning.

[11:45 a.m.]

You are able to claim a stock tree, and it doesn't have to be a planted spruce. It could be a yellow birch or a sugar maple or whatever. The follow-up treatments do promote biodiversity a lot of the time. I would just like to add that in there. Just because it might be planted or fill-planted doesn't mean it's always going to be all that one species.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Very quickly, Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: Just another point to this - and you can find this in the statistics between the private program and the registered buyers program - 20 per cent or less of the land that was cut in 2015 was actually planted. The rest is coming back in natural regeneration, which will give you multiple species, and it will also be the species that

naturally grow there. Oftentimes, the plantations are places where softwood was cut before, so the natural thing is to replace it with softwood because the land capacity probably indicates that that's the species that would best grow there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome, very quickly. We would like to wrap up the meeting.

MR. JESSOME: I did want to seek clarification on something that I heard through a constituent. I think that this question is probably best directed at Mr. Sutherland.

Mr. Sutherland, you referenced, I guess generally, some funding that is channelled to industry in a number of different categories that I believe can be accessed through the ASF website. Just in terms of understanding what funding or subsidy programs are available to industry, are there any funding streams that, no pun intended, stem from the province that go to the industry other than what can be accessed through the ASF website?

MR. SUTHERLAND: The ASF provides less than 25 per cent of the silviculture funding that goes out to private land in Nova Scotia, so we're just a small speck. The bulk of the silviculture work that gets done out in Nova Scotia's forests on private land is done through the Registry of Buyers, which are the sawmills and the pulp mills. They have their own silviculture programs that look after the bulk of silviculture work that's done in the province. I would point that out to you as the primary source of silviculture funding for private landowners.

MR. JESSOME: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would ask our guests to do closing remarks or anything left over. Ms. Reeves.

MS. REEVES: First of all, I would like to thank this committee once again for allowing us to appear. I hope that some of the conversation we had today was helpful in understanding what our group is about and how we approach forestry, but also how complicated forestry and forest management are in this province.

We do apprise ourselves of what education is available as far as forest management and the various guidelines, whether it's species at risk or the new diversity guidelines. I said on the way in today that I just had a little briefcase, but if I brought all the books that were in my office, I would have to have a half-ton truck. That's literally the case now.

More and more of our private landowners are small, and there are 30,000 now in the province, so it's a big group. More and more of them are attempting to educate themselves, especially the younger people. The older people learned it all from generation to generation and working on the land. The younger generation bought into using the science and learning how we can diversify our forest and create good productivity for our

livelihood but how we can work with society and government to help with the other values that people are looking for.

As we move forward, we have put this out to DNR, and we will put it out to the members of this committee or any of the caucuses, if you wish to continue these conversations or want to come for a tour, as we move forward, as a group we very much want to engage in working with how we move some of our forest management forward and do the right thing on the land for the right reasons at the right time. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think this has been a very informative meeting, very productive. You have answered a lot of questions that a lot of the members and their caucuses have had. If you have business cards that you would like to leave for members here who may have some follow-up questions that come up, it may be helpful.

We'll take a short recess and dismiss our guests. We will call back in two minutes to do the rest of our business.

[11:51 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:54 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Order. I would like members to take their seats please, so we can do our business and get on to our days.

We will continue with our business. Our schedules have been circulated for meetings. I just want to go over a few dates. In March, our regular meeting falls on the March break. The clerk has given you two dates, but one has already been taken off the list since we started the meeting today. The only other available day in March is the 22nd, and that is with the maple syrup producers. Do we have agreement for the clerk to have them come in on March 22nd? Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: Because I'm new at this, I have been looking at past Hansards to try to understand when the Spring session might start, and it looks to me like late March. We could be running . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Post-March break.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, but certainly in the past, at times, the House has started to sit right around that date. I wonder if there would be any flexibility to look again at March 8th or to look at very late February. I would just hate to have the committee meeting not happen because we're sitting in the House.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: There's nothing in February. (Interruptions) Okay, the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance.

I don't know - it's really hard to reschedule, Ms. Roberts, with all the other committees. People have commitments to other committees too. We do never know when the House is going to sit, right? Last year it was April. Can we go for the 22nd? Okay.

Also, April 19th is a tentative date with WestFor. That will be confirmed at a later date.

Sean Kirby has replied to our request to go to the site, the gypsum mine. That is scheduled for June, and they're delighted that we are interested in coming.

Is there any other business? Our next date will be January 18th, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. It will be the Department of Natural Resources.

Is there any other business that anyone has?

There being no business, may I have a motion for adjournment? (Interruptions) Mr. d'Entremont.

We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]