US sawmill buying adds insult to reman injury

IWPA chief says BC indies being “decimated” by big lumber

BY ROBIN BRUNET

Canadian companies buying US sawmills undeniably makes sense on a corporate level, given the decline in available harvest in BC. But some insiders view it as a further erosion of how the industry works in the province.

Russ Cameron, president of the IWPA, told The Working Forest on April 17 that BC’s non-tenured, family owned, value added wood processors are being decimated by lack of supply combined with the border tax and log exports. “In 2002 the group of independents that I’m president of had 107 producing members, but as of today, 54 of them have gone out of business,” he says. “Plus, after having consolidated control of most of the BC Public’s non-competitive timber harvest, Interfor Corp, West Fraser Timber Co, and Canfor are now on a buying spree of US sawmills.”

Cameron says he’s dismayed that “despite the outcry over so many job losses over the years and strategies on how to resurrect the industry, I don’t see any effort on the part of government to save what’s left of the independents and encourage value-added wood processing in BC.”

According to the International WOOD MARKETS Group Inc., West Fraser, Canfor and Interfor collectively own more mills in the US than Canada. West Fraser has 12 SPF mills in BC (40 per cent of the company’s total capacity) and Alberta (23 per cent), and 15 southern yellow pine (SYP) mills in the US South (37 per cent of capacity), including two mills acquired in 2014 in Arkansas.

Canfor, which produced 4.3 billion board feet in 2014, operates 23 mills: 10 in the US South (23 per cent of its capacity) and 13 SPF mills in Western Canada.

Interfor this year acquired four more US mills for a total mill count of 18, 67 per cent of its total capacity comes from its sawmilling operations south of the border.

Compared to 2004, when only two US sawmills were owned by a Canadian company (West Fraser), over 35 mills have now been purchased by these three Canadian firms in the US South and West.

But given that almost 60 per cent of the BC Interior’s harvestable pine timber has been lost to the mountain pine beetle, the big three companies’ stateside investments are a remarkable gambit and seem to be paying off: Interfor posted record sales of $1.4 billion in 2014 along with record production of 2.2 billion board feet; its share prices have skyrocketed 410 per cent since the end of 2011, while Canfor and West Fraser’s shares have jumped 10 per cent and 220 per cent respectively over the same time period.

Moreover, owning American sawmills not only gives access to good log supplies, it provides lower shipping costs and unlimited destinations (since the US and not offshore is still the biggest market for BC timber) and may be a buffer against new tariffs or export restrictions that could be imposed after the current Canada/US softwood lumber agreement expires later this year. But that still doesn’t take the sting out of a rapidly-changing BC industry whose workforce is aging and that is in dire need of reinvestment. “It’s ironic that after the Canadian companies received $5-billion in softwood lumber refunds in 2006 they began their US buying spree,” says Cameron. “I agree there’s no more growth for commodity wood products in the Interior, and acquisition seems to be the only solution for these big producers.”

“Nonetheless, having locked up most of the BC public’s non-competitive timber harvest, these giant public companies are moving south. In Interfor’s case, the company is even planning to feed US mills with BC logs, and I’m not keen on that, especially considering that lumber produced in BC from these logs is subject to a Canadian imposed border tax but these same logs can be shipped to the US free of the border tax.”

Cameron adds, “The way things are going, it’s extremely difficult to do business in BC and we’ll see even more independents leave the industry. This is most unfortunate, as these family owned and operated BC companies are the ones who return the greatest socio-economic benefit per cubic meter harvested by IWPA chief says BC indies being “decimated” by big lumber

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Mapping tree genomes

Genome Canada is making historic strides in genome sequencing

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The return of prescribed burns

The once common management technique is making a comeback in Ontario

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ON ESFL change slow and steady

Broad involvement comes at the cost of a slow pace of transformation

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New Brunswick forestry keeps allocation

Premier says previous government’s forestry agreements will stand

BY BRETT HANSON

New Brunswick Premier Brian Gallant’s March announcement that he will honour the previous government’s wood allocation agreement has the forest industry breathing a sigh of relief.

The industry had been left wondering how Gallant would follow through on election promises that he would seek changes to the David Alward government’s forestry contracts.

The controversial plan introduced by the previous government was roundly criticized for being unsustainable by granting access to an additional 3.9 million cubic metres of timber largely derived from a five per cent reduction in conservation areas. Under the plan harvest levels would increase 20 per cent allowing the forestry industry to harvest an additional 660,000 cubic metres per year. New access would be granted to conservation areas yet; protected natural areas would be doubled.

Forest NB executive director Mike Legere says the announcement is definitely good news for the industry. In the last ten years New Brunswick has lost 25 per cent of its forestry jobs and currently 50 per cent of the provinces sawmills have closed.

“One of the public’s major points of contention with the New Brunswick forestry industry is that there has been few investors looking at the BC coast in terms of sawmilling, so those excess logs will continue to go elsewhere.”

So logging jobs have benefitted from increased exports, and this has allowed more logging to occur and preferred species like Douglas fir and Western red cedar to be directed local sawmills. But the harsh truth is that there has been few investors looking at the BC coast in terms of sawmilling, so those excess logs will continue to go elsewhere.”

Legere says it would be very difficult to find the additional allocation with changing the designation of those conservation areas.

“People are still waiting to see if there will be any additional commentary on how the management of non-timber objective lands is going to unfold,” Legere said.

Despite the recent political volatility in the province Legere says there seems to be a lot of optimism within the New Brunswick forestry industry.

“I just attended the Canadian woodlands forum spring meeting and they had a great turnout, a lot of participation by harvesting contractors,” Legere said. “Silvicon, which for years was a premiere event in New Brunswick, had been on hiatus for six years. We resurrected it this year and had over 300 registrations. It’s very encouraging to see that much participation. We look at that as a leading indicator of things to come. It suggests optimism in the sector.”

Taylor prefers to focus on the good news of the BC industry in 2015. “Thanks to the remarkably gutsy strategies taken by Interfor, Canfor and West Fraser to grow their companies, we now have some of the biggest lumber firms in the world right here in Vancouver, with more head office jobs and other benefits,” he says. “Let’s not forget these things come in cycles: it wasn’t too long ago when US companies were buying our mills and consolidating their fortunes.”

Taylor adds, “in terms of coastal production, the historic bane of the coastal forests – hemlock – is now coveted by China.”
Forestry’s future is it’s people

It goes without saying that Canada’s forest sector is changing. A common thread throughout this Forest Management and New Technology issue of The Working Forest is change. Whether it be changes happening right now in B.C. with Canadian companies buying U.S. sawmills and the ongoing transformation of Ontario’s forest tenure or future changes in technology such as LiDAR and tree genomics.

Whether change is good or bad is all in the eye of the beholder. For remanufacturers in B.C.’s interior the U.S. buying spree poses considerable challenges to their business, yet the Canadian owned companies making the purchases have significantly improved their bottom line.

Technological advancement will keep the industry on the leading edge and while there is always a danger of eliminating jobs in favour of new more economical ways of doing things there is always the prospect of creating new and unexpected positions.

For years now Canadian forestry has been in a transformative state. When we look back on this period there will be winners and losers, but the Canadian industry will always prevail as long as it remembers and values that which has created and sustained it; its people. The individual contractors and forest communities of this country are the backbone of the industry and in the rush to adapt to a new reality they must not be left behind.

Letters to the editor

RE: Declining moose populations

Moose in our area are over abundant. We have been logging private land around Monetville and with the new growth the moose and deer are multiplying even with the heavy hunting pressure from permitted and Aboriginal hunters. We have had hunt clubs contacting us to log their hunting properties just to improve the moose habitat and are reporting great success so much so we can’t keep up with the work. All from word of mouth, no advertising.

Our own experience hunting a property cut five years ago; between myself and 2 other members of our hunting group we were able to photograph twelve moose at exactly the same time in a half square mile of cut over bush. - Mark Fryer

I read the article on moose population, and it does make some good points, however, predation by bears is not mentioned. The explosion of the bear population since the cancellation of the spring bear hunt has put tremendous pressure on moose, particularly calves. Until we get that population under control, by having a province wide spring hunt, we are fighting a losing battle. Anyone who would deny this fact simply has not spent much time in the bush. - Don Preston

I am 65 years old and we have more moose around now than when I was a child. In the 50’s and 60’s it was very rare for anyone to see a moose, but as logging began to spread in our area the moose moved in as logged blocks revegated and the brush came in. This new food supply provided a good source of food for the moose and they multiplied accordingly. Anyone that says logging is having a negative impact on a moose population has not spent any time in the woods. Poaching is a problem but that is not a result of logging, but rather man’s stupidity and greed. Yours truly, George Delisle

NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

In the last few weeks I have been testing the quality of maple syrup from many different producers around my hometown North Bay – for scientific purposes of course! One very common result is the happiness of others who are also completing scientific research of their own. While on a hike with my family on the Bruce Peninsula my daughter informed me that “Trees steps further she went over to a tree stump and told me “It’s OK dad, trees grow back.” It was a humbling moment knowing that my beautiful three year old understands our forests the way she does. If you have pictures or stories you would like to share please send them to me. David@workingforest.com Happy Spring Everyone!

ON THE COVER

Haliburton Forest worker standing with balsam stockpile. Photo courtesy The Haliburton Forest. See page 20 for more
The Canadian forest products industry can rightfully show some swagger these days when it comes to discourse about its environmental record. For a sector that was admittedly once an environmental offender, the past few decades have seen a remarkable journey of progress.

You don’t have to believe me, but simply look at the facts. Global statistics show that Canada’s forest product sector is by far the world leader in forest certification with 161 million hectares of certified forests—that’s 43% of the global total or four times more than any other country. Certification means that companies follow progressive social and environmental forest management practices as assessed by an independent third body.

A Yale University study has concluded that Canada’s forestry regulations and laws are among the most stringent in the world. Canada’s forest products industry is also getting the gold medal from international customers. A Leger international market survey completed last year found the Canadian forest sector had the best environmental reputation of any country in the world.

Of course you will occasionally hear negative noise about the forest industry—for example the recent reports about forest destruction and deforestation in Canada. Yet when you look at the facts of the matter, Canada actually has virtually zero deforestation—a negligible 0.02% per year. The public misconception stems from a misunderstanding of the word deforestation which means the permanent conversion of forest land—in cases of urbanization for example. However in Canada tree cover loss is almost entirely temporary—forest land disturbed by fire grows back and harvested land must be regenerated by law. The deforestation rate in Canada has actually been declining for the past 25 years with 64,000 hectares lost to deforestation in 1990 and just 45,800 hectares in 2012.

There are several other measures about the progress that the Canadian industry has made in reducing its environmental footprint. This includes a 70% reduction in greenhouse gases since 1990. Air pollutants are down 52% and water pollutants have been reduced by 70% since 2005. Toxins such as PCBs and dioxins have been eliminated; Canadian pulp and paper mills now produce enough green energy to power more than nine cities the size of Thunder Bay. Canada also recycles about 70% of its paper and cardboard, making Canada among the top global performers.

So there is no doubt the sector has made dramatic headway. However the industry knows it can and should do more. That’s why under Vision2020, the Canadian forest products industry is aiming to further reduce its environmental footprint by 35% by the end of the decade. This is not just rhetoric but is instead based firmly on measuring progress on 12 parameters including greenhouse gas emissions, energy and water use, caribou action plans and forest management.

As we move toward the major United Nations conference on climate change later this year, you will also be hearing more about the role the forest products industry can play to sequester carbon and help mitigate climate change. The forest products industry is “growing a greener tomorrow” by using wood fibre in new innovative ways—in everything from car parts to clothing to cosmetics to green chemicals that can replace products made from materials with a more intense carbon footprint. From this perspective, the move to taller wood frame buildings will also be a big plus from an environmental perspective.

The Canadian sector has come a long way in both its practices and its approach. The sector realizes that being responsible stewards of the land is an essential part of its social license to operate. The industry has also recognized that it needs to work with partners including environmental groups to collectively find ways to integrate both economic and environmental values. Companies have a new focus and ambitious to follow progressive eco-friendly practices. The result—when it comes to the environment, the Canadian industry is now an example to the world.
Designer trees? It’s an over-simplification but yes, trees that are more resistant to disease, pests and climate change are on the way thanks to Genome Canada, its provincial chapters and historic strides in genome sequencing and data interpretation that didn’t exist two decades ago. Twenty years ago, Canada was lagging in forest genomic research; now it’s a global leader. Who would have thunk it?

“Genomics is a tool. It’s a tool for discovering things,” says Gabe Kalmar, Vice President of Sector Development at Genome British Columbia, the provincial chapter which receives funding from Genome Canada but determines its own projects. “You can use that information to facilitate breeding for seeds that have better characteristics to survive better,” he says. “You start looking for things like volume. You start looking for fibre structure and you do literally hundreds of thousands of crosses and you end up with seeds that hopefully have better properties. You look for the best of complex traits,” says Kalmar. And genomics, he reminds us, is the tool which takes you down that path. “This is not GMO; this is a more efficient way of tree breeding,” he adds.

The idea is not to alter seeds but to assess the naturally occurring variation in the natural population and use it in tree breeding programs. A tool called marker assisted selection identifies the desired characteristics. “Think of little indicators,” says Kalmar. “Call them green lights, indicators that have been associated with better traits and you’re looking for trees that have several of those green lights. From the perspective of a seed company, that would be exactly the kind of read-out they would get. Which ones light up green and which ones light up red? You’re looking for those markers inside the genome of the tree.”

Fast forward to Smart Forests, a five-year collaboration between Genome British Columbia, Genome Quebec, the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and Universite Laval, among others. Academics across the country have been working with tree breeders to produce faster growing, insect-resistant trees which will ultimately result in larger yields and make forest management more efficient. (Tackling the MPB problem is a separate program).

The project focuses on white spruce because white spruce is so pervasive; it can be found throughout Canada. Moreover, the lessons learned from the white spruce can be passed onto other species such as sitka spruce on the west coast or black spruce which is more relevant to eastern Canada.

Plant biologist Dr. Joerg Bohlmann is a project leader with the Smart Forests program. “One of the key parts of our research was to develop a genomic resource for spruce, in essence the key
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forest genomics

information about the genome of the tree,” he says.

But conifers are very difficult to work with. White spruce has an extremely large genome, up to ten times larger than the human genome. Twenty years ago when genetic sequencing was costly and time-consuming, identifying the white spruce genome would have been almost impossible but thanks to faster and cheaper machines the breakthrough came in 2013 when the Smart Forests program and a separate Swedish project simultaneously cracked the code.

So far so good but there’s another problem. Since you have to chop the genome into millions of pieces in order to analyze it, you need a powerful tool to put the puzzle back together. That’s when the Smart Forests team came up with another eureka moment, a bio-informatics tool – a computational process- to assemble pieces of the puzzle into more continuous, DNA-sequence strands.

“That tool development has been a major catalytic part of our success in the Smart Forests project,” says Bohlmann. “It was a eureka moment for sure,” he laughs, “a very long stretched moment. It’s been a continuous process.”

Professor Gary Bull is an economist with the Department of Forest Resources Management at the University of British Columbia. He’s been working on forest genomics for the past seven years, charged with assessing the economic value of the scientific data.

“We try to figure out the link to all this lab work so I can tell whether it’s worth investing in or not.” He’s instigated a number of programs in an effort to bridge the gap between science and application. He set up a technology transfer committee between industry and government - “so now everybody is aware they have to be thinking carefully about how this technology can yield a significant economic benefit” – and he’s compiled his research, to date, into a report for the Canadian Forest Service. “I’ve linked all the industrial facilities and transportation networks in the country with growing trees, using genomics to figure out the economics of the picture.”

“We’re seeing a 20 to 25 percent genetic gain as a result of employing newer technology,” he continues. When asked how genomics can help forest management, Bull refers to the interplay of volume and transportation.

“The closer I can grow those trees to my facility the better, so suddenly if I can add 25 percent more growth to those trees around that facility, it means I’ve got to haul less distance. Therefore my costs are going to go down.”

He admits it’s an expensive technology. “That’s one of our challenges. Can we put forward a business case for this like our competitors have done?”

Meanwhile, the current phase of the Smart Forests project wraps up the end of June and the lessons learned will be transferred into research programs on Douglas fir and western red cedar.

“In cedar, we’re specifically interested in markers and traits that confirm hardwood durability and resistance to deer browsing,” says Bohlmann. It costs six dollars per seedling to create a cage to keep deer from eating it and he’ll be turning to genomics to address the problem. “Six dollars is huge. It’s way too much,” he says.

Gabe Kalmar

Genomic scientists at work, Genome BC
Natural Resources Canada responds to deforestation myths with new fact versus fiction publication

BY FORESTS ONTARIO

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion surrounding forest destruction and deforestation in Canada. While these issues are certainly important, there has also been considerable misinformation circulating on the subject. In response, Natural Resources Canada has released a fact versus fiction discussion on their website.

The discussion, entitled Deforestation in Canada: Key myths and facts outlines several myths and misrepresentations associated with deforestation and uses scientific, fact-based knowledge to disprove inaccuracies.

Among the myths being debunked are that deforestation in Canada is increasing, that modern harvesting practices are a significant contributor to the loss of forested area, and that Canada has the world’s worst record when it comes to deforestation. While current attitudes often reflect a general belief in these myths, the reality of Canada’s forest management demonstrates a stellar record of sustainable forest management.

Deforestation, in the true sense, means the conversion of forest to some other permanent or semi-permanent land use. Major factors contributing to deforestation include agriculture, transportation and utility corridors, or urban development. Deforestation does not occur from natural events such as forest fires or wind storm damage. In progressive jurisdictions such as Ontario, where forests are effectively managed, sustainable harvesting does not contribute to deforestation.

In Ontario, government legislation ensures effective reforestation practices following harvesting in a highly controlled and managed environment to protect against deforestation. In fact, each year less than 0.3% of Crown forests are harvested, and the government mandates that harvested areas have to be renewed by law. While it is acknowledged that forest access roads can have an impact, it is correctly noted by Natural Resources Canada that these impacts are minimal. In Ontario, it further recognized that there is an increasing trend toward access control and road abandonment, both of which have benefits for the conservation of biodiversity.

“Canada, and particularly Ontario’s forests, are among the best, most sustainably managed forests in the world,” says Rob Keen, CEO Forests Ontario. “We are pleased with Natural Resource Canada’s move to actively disprove ongoing myths surrounding deforestation across the country. Forests Ontario looks forward to working alongside our partners to implement solutions to protect our natural resources and to share the great work being done by those in our forestry sector.”

Where Ontario in particular does face challenges with deforestation is on settled landscapes which, understandably, have competing land uses. Particularly in areas of southern Ontario, many forests have been converted to agriculture or lost to urban development. Programs like the 50 Million Tree Program work to combat this loss of forest by offering tree planting subsidies to landowners and connecting them with the expertise they need to help with reforestation efforts.

The program, which is administered by Forests Ontario, in conjunction with the Ontario government, is part of the Government’s pledge to plant 50 million trees by 2025 in order to sequester carbon; enhance and diversify Ontario’s landscape; increase adaptive capacity to withstand climate change; moderate local climate by providing shade, moderating temperature extremes and reducing the effects of storms; increase wildlife habitat; increase soil and water conservation, and provide local economic opportunities. To date, approximately 17 million trees have been planted under the 50 Million Tree Program.

The conversation around deforestation is a valid one. However, the greatest need for action remains in southern Ontario. Fortunately, solutions like the 50 Million Tree Program exist and provide an avenue for landowners to help in creating healthy, sustainable forests. Creating a healthy environment to support healthy communities is in the hands of all people; individuals, corporations and government can step up to make changes for a healthier tomorrow.

Forests Ontario, for its part, is continuing its mission to support and promote the sustainable management of Ontario’s forests through ongoing education and awareness efforts. For information, visit www.forestsontario.ca.

Trees Ontario, the forest restoration arm of Forests Ontario, administers the Ontario government’s 50 Million Tree Program, part of the United Nations Billion Tree Campaign. The United Nations’ goal is to plant one billion trees worldwide each year. Ontario is committed to plant 50 million trees by 2025.

The 50 Million Tree Program is designed to significantly reduce the costs to landowners of large-scale tree planting and thereby increase the number of trees planted across the province.

Forests Ontario is the voice for our forests. Working to promote a future of healthy forests sustaining healthy people, Forests Ontario is committed to the re-greening of Ontario through tree planting efforts on rural lands and in urban areas, as well as the renewal and stewardship of Ontario’s forests through restoration, education and awareness. Visit www.forestsontario.ca or follow us @Forests_Ontario.

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We are a signifi cant contributor to the loss of forested area, and that Canada has the world’s worst record when it comes to deforestation. While current attitudes often reflect a general belief in these myths, the reality of Canada’s forest management demonstrates a stellar record of sustainable forest management.

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Prescribed burning planned in Ontario throughout 2015

BY MICHAEL B. HUMBLE

Prescribed burning has been an on-going practice of Ontario’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry since the 1930s, and has continued to be used extensively throughout Ontario since the 1960s. The total area has decreased since the 1980s due to shifting trends towards mechanical site preparation for material use in the forestry industry but as Scott Wiseman, Acting Fire Behaviour and Prescribed Burning Specialist with the MNRF explained, prescribed burning still has a wide range of beneficial applications. “Prescribed burning benefits specific species like spruce and jack pine that are fire adaptive and require periodic fire to keep the ecosystems healthy and growing,” Wiseman explained. “We are realizing the ecological role that fire plays in regenerating dead, decaying, or diseased forests and that many plant and animal species are fire dependent and actually require fire on the landscape to flourish.”

Planned burning in over mature or decaying forests can help reset the clock and nurture new young forests. They are also an effective technique for combating forest fires. “The hard thing for some people to understand is that during the summer months, we sometimes light fires in front of active fires to eliminate fuel or draw the fire,” Wiseman explained. “Essentially, we are manipulating fire and trying to fight fire with fire.”

The skillful and knowledgeable application of prescribed burns in fire fighting typically involves a defined control line, either a lake or river, that serves as a boundary where officials can burn out land before the unplanned fire reaches it to prevent further growth. “It’s a strategy that we employ, but what people need to remember is that certain forest types actually require periodic burning in order to keep their ecosystems healthy and get rid of insect infestations and blow down,” Wiseman said. “Fire is a natural regenerator for forests and in the absence of fire, you end up with huge accumulations of dead, drying and dying materials that lead to increased fuel during dry seasons.”

In those situations, it can become difficult to control unexpected burns. “A couple years ago, we started looking at how to better manage prevention and management, and one way to do so is prescribed burning,” Wiseman said. A better understanding of the role fire plays in the maintenance of a healthy forest is something that the MNRF has always been focussed on. “Everyone knows Smokey the Bear and that all fires are bad and should be put out right away,” Wiseman said. “The only impact of fire is how it impedes us and we often don’t consider the value of how fire can positively impact a forest.”

Fire can also benefit certain species of plant life including lower lying at risk species like tall grass prairie and oak savannah which require periodic fires to ensure survival. As Wiseman explained, prescribed burning is an effective tool for maintaining and promoting this endangered ecosystem. “It’s a very distinct ecosystem and with tall grass prairie, we have found that it thrives with fire and in the absence of fire, it will totally disappear. With such a unique and endangered ecosystem, if we don’t look after it, it will disappear,” Wiseman said. Wiseman admits that there are many factors that have contributed to the increased focus on prescribed burning in Ontario this year.

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by fighting fire with fire

“Prescribed burns are planned across Ontario in varying degrees of complexity and with multiple resource objectives,” Wiseman explained. “Forest sustainability, ensuring healthy growth for the future, and effective resource management are a few of our objectives.”

Prescribed burning is a common practice throughout the world and according to Wiseman there are many benefits including ecosystem renewal, sustainability, forest health, insect and disease control, protection of endangered or threatened habitats, fire fighter safety, elimination of hazardous fuels, promotion of regeneration, and overall cost efficiency with forest management.

Prescribed burning practices are also being used to mitigate the intrusion of aggressive invasive species like phragmites australis, a reed like plant that crowds out natural vegetation and reduces natural plant biodiversity.

“Prescribed burning is one of many effective tools for resource management as a cost effective means of delivering good results and achieving the stated objectives of a project,” Wiseman said.

The issue remains when and where to use prescribed burning. The planning process is very detailed and requires a timeframe to deliver. It is a process that is very weather dependent, and can also sometimes involve considerations for urban burns.

“When you look at a burn in downtown Windsor for example, you have to make sure that on the day that you burn you have looked at all the parameters, that you understand everything that is going on, and that you have all the resources in place. When you put a burn area in place, that’s it – there’s no room for error, where there might be a little more flexibility in more remote areas,” Wiseman explained.

While opportunities to use prescribed burning exist throughout the province, not every site is best served by a prescribed burn. Careful analysis and planning must be undertaken to determine the most effective treatment of a candidate site, and any planned project is always subject to the randomness of nature. Despite that, the goal is always the same.

“We want to make sure that future generations have what we have and if we don’t maintain these ecosystems and look after them to regenerate them and make sure they are healthy, then we could potentially lose whole stands of forest and countless unique ecosystems with no chance of regeneration,” Wiseman said.
As the use of LIDAR in the natural resource sector grows so do its potential applications. Although the technology still requires highly specialized analysis of its data, FPInnovations is helping to show the forestry sector just how valuable that data can be.

LIDAR uses aerial or terrestrial mounted lasers bounced off objects to produce data about the height, size and density of trees in the forest. The resulting information can be much more accurate than data gathered by traditional means.

Francis Charrette, researcher in FPInnovations’ Value Maximization and decision support group says the most common way to present the vast amount of information gathered from a LIDAR is in 20 metre by 20 metre ‘pixels’.

“With terrestrial LIDAR, instead of scanning from an airplane, someone is on the ground laser scanning the forest in 360 degrees,” Charrette said. “We are able to rebuild, in an informatics platform all the individual trees. We know exactly the shape of each tree, how many branches it has and the curves of the tree. It’s another way to build a ground plot.”

While the scanning of the forest may be easy, processing the data is not. Charrette laments that there are relatively few people who can make use of the information gathered, it’s a consultant business, he says.

FPInnovations is exploring numerous methods of using the data, one of which capitalizes the very precise digital elevation models created by LIDAR.

“When it comes to building forest roads it is very useful to have these maps. You know where all the streams are, where to find gravel, you know the topography of your land. You can save a lot of money by finding the optimal path for a road network,” Charrette said. “You can also have a very precise map of your existing roads. We have...
developed tools to analyze the security of forest roads.

“If a road is designed for 80km per hour we can build a 3D model and examine if there is enough visibility to drive at the speed safely. If a slope is too big a driver can’t see far enough ahead to travel at the designated speed. We can highlight that this should be corrected. We can analyze whether vegetation has regrown and reduced visibility by employing aerial or vehicle mounted LIDAR.”

Perhaps one of the most economically valuable use of the technology is the potential for modeling the dollar value of a forest.

From the data, the net revenue of each 20 x 20 metre pixel can be calculated. Using FPInnovations’ supply cost model, FPInterface, harvesting cost can be calculated based on the size of the wood, and transportation cost can be calculated based on the pixel’s proximity to the mill.

“At the mill we have a sawmill simulator and use the data that comes from terrestrial LIDAR. We have a tree sample already scanned with all the curves, branches and knots. We send this sample stem to the simulator and with the appropriate sawing pattern we know many pieces of lumber we can get out of this tree as well as the volume of chips,” Charrette said. “By knowing the market price of all those we can say how much that log is worth. We can bring that price back to the pixel level, and create a map that shows the net value of each pixel in the forest.”

The map uses a gradient of colours to indicate a pixel’s value, so if a pixel is green it has profitable net revenue. Red indicates a deficit where an operation would lose money by harvesting that pixel. By having this level of accuracy models can be used to create harvesting scenarios and analyze the value of the forest at a certain point in time.

Charrette says that while these are the most practical applications for the technology at this time, there are even more potential uses for LIDAR that FPInnovations continues to explore.◊
After a fairly tame forest fire season in 2014, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is gearing up for a difficult to predict 2015 in Northeastern Ontario. Shayne McCool, Fire Information Officer for the Northeast region explained that despite the economic benefits of a low burn season like last year for the province, it is important to remember that balance is essential to healthy forest maintenance.

“We missed out a little bit on the ecological benefits of fire last year, however, the province was able to save some money as far as forest firefighting and emergency funds was concerned, but it does go both ways,” McCool explained.

The Northeastern Ontario firefighting crews are currently re-staffing and training their seasonal workforce and have most of their compliment back, according to McCool. Between now and June, staff will be busy completing mandatory training to ensure that they are prepared for the season ahead. At the same time, there is a great deal of cooperation throughout the province.

“The snow cover will start to remove itself in the south and as you move further north there will be more snow later in the season. In sector 1, areas like Haliburton, there is already some early risk, whereas in areas like Cochrane, there is still significant snow coverage and reduced risk which allows our duty officers to assign resources to areas where the hazard has climbed more,” McCool said.

By looking at what areas need resources most, the MNRF is able to ensure that coverage is available in the most at-risk areas. An analytical approach to management based on current conditions and a five-day weather forecast that is reviewed daily, ensures that the most effective management of resources can be applied, McCool explained.

“We generally prepare based on a five-day forecast for weather patterns,” McCool said. “Anything beyond that is unpredictable so we use a five-day forecast and reassess every day to address changes throughout the five-day window to ensure the most accurate forecast.”

While the overall cause of fires can be unpredictable, especially those started by humans or lightning strikes, the spring season remains the most unpredictable one that can be hard to manage.

“We tend to get a lot more human caused fires in the spring due to debris and grass burning. Spring fires can be very volatile because it doesn’t take long for grass and fields to dry out – you can have a dry field where it rained the night before – so these are factors that can escalate quickly, especially on a windy day,” McCool said.

Due to the unpredictable volatility inherent in spring fires, McCool stressed that it is important to always have a source of water on hand, and that an awareness of both the strength of the wind as well as potential shifts.
Preparation under way for fire season in North Eastern Ontario

in wind direction can have a huge impact on effective fire prevention.

Because the scope of a fire season is very difficult to predict and is based on weather cycles, it is nearly impossible to predict, at this time of year, what the fire cycle could be for the coming season.

“If there is still snow on the ground in northern Ontario then that will hinder the start of the season, or slow it down at the very least, but once you get two or three sunny days in a row, all of a sudden your grassy fuels are available to burn,” McCool said.

McCool stressed that all it takes is a day or two of the snow cover being removed before a fire season can begin.

“It’s something that we have to assess on a daily basis and we reassess our predictions within a very fine timeline. Assessing allocations, snow cover, and weather patterns on a daily basis is the best way to manage any potential fire situations,” McCool said.

MNRF response staff work diligently to identify areas where there has been minimal rain, high wind or lightning storms and they assess those areas to determine staff allocations.

“It is up to our duty officers to move the people around and use them where they are needed which is why our fire rangers are considered provincial resources,” McCool said. “They could be in Sudbury one day and end up in Cochrane or Dryden the same day.”

Knowing that resources are able to be dispersed throughout the province and across Canada is comforting to McCool.

“If you look at last season, it was the slowest season on record since 1960 in Ontario so we wound up in the Northwest Territories, Alberta, and B.C, and we were able to help out there from July onward which gave our staff some valuable experience in different terrain that they may or may not have seen before,” McCool said.

He added that having exposure to different techniques can be a benefit. In Western Canada, a common approach to fire fighting is to attack the fire from the ground with hand tools to dig a hole around the fire. In the Northwest Territories, fire is often used to fight fire. In Northern Ontario, the most common approach is fire suppression and containment.

These approaches can all be beneficial, depending on the nature and terrain of the fire, McCool said. He added that when it comes to the spring season in Ontario, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Spring fires can be very dangerous and McCool asked that people in northern Ontario check with their local municipal fire departments for burning regulations or refer to the forest fire prevention act online.

“If it’s windy, be sure not to light a fire because at this time of year, those are the types of fires that get people killed,” McCool said. “If you are planning to light a campfire, be aware of wind conditions and be sure to light your fire only 2 hours before sun set and have it extinguished two hours after sun rise.”

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Paul Galliazzo remembers the sights, sounds and smells of his ravaged woodlot during the height of the mountain pine beetle infestation. The rolling hills outside Quesnel in BC’s scenic Cariboo Country were a sea of red, dying pine trees. “There were so many beetles, you could almost hear them working away in the bark,” says Paul.

When he acquired WL#1520 in 1998 there were scattered patches of red, infested trees. The focus was ‘salvage logging’. “We called it ‘snip and skid’,” Paul continues. “You’d go into the bush with a can of spray paint, mark maybe 20 or 30 trees, build a long skid trail – sometimes as long as two kilometres – and pull out the dead wood selectively.”

He and his fellow woodlotters thought they’d be able to stop the beetle tide with their efforts, while still recovering some value from the timber. “By 2002 it became obvious we weren’t making an impact, and we were cutting bigger and bigger blocks,” he recalls. By 2005 Paul and his counterparts in the Cariboo had lost the pine beetle war, their woodlots turned into “stump farms”. He was fortunate: only one third of his 600 hectare parcel was wiped out – he had a good proportion of fir and spruce on his lot, along with aspen – and he managed to salvage most of the timber for a modest gain. But that wasn’t a given in the early days.

“It was a bit of a struggle at first, but local mills made the effort to take the beetle-kill timber over the more appealing, green wood,” according to Paul. “We’ve come a long, long way since then, it’s remarkable what the mills can turn into lumber now,” he says, “they’re working with timber that’s been dead for over 10 years.”

Mills at ‘pine beetle ground zero’ have made adaptations to their equipment to accommodate the drier wood, finding ways to maximize the value from this degraded timber. And a thriving bioenergy industry has risen from the ashes of the pine beetle destruction. Foresters in the region are now in “regeneration mode” – trying to get their woodlots back to the government-mandated “free to grow” conditions: the point at which a forest would return to its original, pre-harvest state without continued man-made intervention or silviculture measures.

For Paul, this means waging a new war, against the weed-like aspen on his woodlot. Through a great deal of trial-and-error, he’s learned how to stop the aspen from choking out his spruce, pine and fir seedlings. Hiking through the forest with a specialized axe, Paul bends over the young aspen, making small scores in the bark. Too much damage to the tree and it sends out clones, or suckers. Not enough and the aspen grows up, dwarfing the slow-growing conifers.

Paul is optimistic about the recovery of his woodlot. To date he’s planted approximately 190,000 seedlings – 50% pine, 30% spruce and 20% Douglas fir, at a cost in excess of $85,000 (without factoring in the “sweat equity”). He projects that in two years he’ll have reached “free to grow”, and in 60 years he’ll have a healthy, thriving coniferous forest. That’s a long time to wait, but as woodlotters will tell you, virtually everything they do “is for later.”
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ON forest tenure’s slow march to modernization

A slow pace is the cost of broad involvement in ESFLs

BY SHAUN LESLIE TURRIFF

Modernization of the system Ontario uses to manage its crown forests is underway. However, progress towards modernization has been slow. The modernization of forest tenure responds to local issues that have arisen over time, with input from First Nations, industry, and local communities. The plan is designed to support growth, economic security and economic efficiency for Ontario’s forestry industry. It provides a sustainable model that better responds to and withstands economic fluctuations. It maximizes the use of Crown fibre resources, and thereby protects and creates jobs.

Speaking about forest tenure modernization in general, Kapuskasing Mayor Al Spacek said that there was a strong need for flexibility. “What works for some areas might not work for all areas in the region. The new cooperative model might work in some places, but the old model might continue to be better in others, considering the high cost of forestry operations”.

David de Geus, Acting Divisional Issues Coordinator, Forest Industry Division, with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) says that the new system of forest tenure will have plenty of flexibility. Two new models, the local forest management corporation (LFMC) and the extended sustainable forest license, ESFL, exist under the new policy. Similar in function, the LFMC differs in that it does not directly license, ESFLs, exist under the new policy. The chief and the council know what they want, they involve corporate interests on the governing board. It exists as a Crown agency, at arms length from the government. Its board of directors is to make up of representatives from local communities and First Nations. However, both the LFMC and the ESFL seek to improve local and First Nations involvement in the management of forests and the establishment of forestry plans.

The cost of such broad involvement is the slow pace of change from old models to new. One LFMC has been set up, the Nawiingnokimia Forest Management Corporation. This is the first local forest management corporation established in Ontario under the new Ontario Forest Modernization Act of 2011. It was set up in May of 2012. However, work is still continuing on the ESFLs. “There are a lot of different interests and voices coming to the table in these instances, and it takes time to make sure everything works”, says de Geus. “Progress is being made. It is a challenge, but there is lots of support”. de Geus stresses that the new plan is for the long term, aiming to support the revitalization of the industry, and that everyone is taking the time to do it right.

Kenora Mayor David Canfield urges that these processes move more quickly. “We have a lot of unused volume, and we need to use it before we lose it. It will blow down, or it will burn in a fire. There has been a 10 year reduction in volume used, and there is a growing market again.” Canfield suggests that while forest tenure reform is moving in the right direction, it needs to move much faster. “We can’t do business at this speed. If we want to do business, things need to change market more quickly.”

Canfield blames the slow pace on red tape and bureaucracy. “The red tape now is worse than it was 10 years ago, not better. Maybe we need a mechanism that allows things to move more quickly”.

One of the goals of the new system is to ensure fibre access to new companies seeking to enter the Ontario forestry industry. Recently, this problem with access to fibre was highlighted by some as a problem in the sale of the Fort Frances mill. Expera Specialty Solutions, hoping to buy the mill from Resolute Forest Products, said that part of the problem was the high cost of fibre. After the deal fell through, the community of Fort Frances was left without a working mill. Fort Frances officials and Ontario opposition parties suggest that the ESFL process is taking too long to help their community.

Mayor Canfield agrees. Canfield is also the President of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA). Canfield clearly understands that there is more to the Fort Frances story than simply fibre access. “I can’t say exactly what happened between those two companies. That’s what negotiation is. But I can say what the NOMA position would be: use the wood!”

Canfield also wonders why Ontario imports more wood products than it manufactures. “Look at the ‘Good Things Grow in Ontario’ idea. Maybe that should include trees. Maybe the government could promote local wood as well.”

Another clearly stated goal of the new tenure system is the inclusion of First Nation input in the industry. In part, the 12 year blockade of logging road by The Grassy Narrows First Nation, revolts around that community’s objection to the logging of Whiskey Jack forest. Grassy Narrows seeks to obtain the SFL and manage the forest with two other First Nations.

The chief and the council know what they want, they have a vision, and I see things moving forward”, says Canfield, who is close to the situation. “All communities have their activists, and I’m not sure the chief and the council agree completely,” says Canfield, referring to the blockade. Kenora’s forests are managed by a limited partnership, Miitigoog LP, that includes local First Nations and forestry industry companies. “The city chose to stay out of that process, but they’ve been doing a very good job with the forest.”

“Broadly speaking, the new system of LFMCs and ESFLs seek to increase the power of the local communities and the First Nations in decision making”, says de Geus. “In the case of Fort Frances, it is possible that Resolute, which both owned the mill in question and controlled the local source of fibre under the old system, had too much control. The new system seeks to balance that out with local input, local control”, says de Geus. “And one could imagine the Grassy Narrows situation being different under the new system”.

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Access to fibre, at a reasonable cost, is at least one of the reasons that a deal concerning the Fort Frances mill, between Resolute Forest Products and Expera Specialty Solutions of Wisconsin, fell through last year. Without a reasonably priced source of fibre, Expera claimed it could not operate the mill, and some blamed Resolute, who control access to the local fibre under their sustainable forestry license.

Recently, officials in Fort Frances have called on the Ontario government to step in and guarantee a provisional supply of fibre to potential buyers of the now closed mill there. There is no consensus about whether or not guaranteed access to fibre would have saved the deal, with both Resolute and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry claiming otherwise.

The issue of fibre access was recently discussed by various stakeholders at the first ever State of the North Summit, recently held in Toronto. “Fibre access was certainly mentioned at the Summit,” mentioned Al Spacek, Mayor of Kapuskasing, and president of the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities. “In Kapuskasing, the mill has access to plenty of fibre. But that is certainly not the case regionally”. Kapuskasing is home to a Tembec study and newsprint mill. “Since our incorporation in 1921, forestry has been at the heart of Kapuskasing”, says Spacek. Asked about fibre access, Mayor Spacek said that he and others “constantly speak with the Ontario government about the issue. It’s a fruitful dialogue that needs to continue.”

Nevertheless, Mayor Spacek feels that more could be done to ensure fibre access and increase the utilization of Northern Ontario’s forest resources. “The resource is definitely underutilized. The harvest could remain sustainable even with increases. We plant 2 or 3 trees for every one cut.” Spacek feels that the issue of carbon capture influences policy. “But trees that are 60 or 70 years old no longer count for that. Those are the trees we want. And the longer forests remain uncut, the more trees burn or blow down”. Spacek noted that trees in a managed forest are “a self-sustaining crop, albeit with a longer cycle than most”, and that the Tembec mill had recently harvested an area that had been harvested years ago. “That’s how it works”, he said.

Discussing the underutilization of fibre resources, David de Geus, Acting Divisional Issues Coordinator, Forest Industry Division, with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, said that the sustainable harvest level was determined by a forestry plan, and that unused volume not already allocated or recognized by the Ministry that is available for harvest are listed in a Provincial Available Wood Report publically available from the Ontario government. “I think to say that the resource is simply underutilized understates the importance of several other factors, ranging from planning decisions that are part of the forest planning process, to market forces”.

And while the Ontario forestry industry seems to be on the uptick, market forces are always a powerful issue. One of the central reasons behind the new State of the North Summit is to rally exactly those forces. “We wanted to focus on talking about opportunities in Northern Ontario for Southern Ontario communities, particularly Bay Street, and Queen’s Park. We wanted to make sure that everyone was aware of the importance of the North, and its ability to contribute to the economy of Ontario”, said Spacek. “Based on the reaction from our audience, I suspect the Summit will be an annual event. But it reinforces the need for us Northern community to spread the word in the south”.

The Summit drew speakers from the forestry and the mining industries (what Spacek called “the low hanging fruit”), as well as presenting agricultural opportunities. Representatives of the Northern First Nations were also in attendance.◊
Proving that a mill can service a forest

BY MICHAEL B. HUMBLE

While Ontario’s Haliburton Forest has been in his family for over 50 years, it wasn’t until 1988 that owner and operator Peter Schleifenbaum and his wife Elke moved to Canada from Germany. The following year, he took over the management of the forest, which at the time was primarily tailored towards the tourism industry.

“At that point, Haliburton Forest was doing a little bit of timber harvesting, but not very much and was mainly relying on recreation, mostly camping and snowmobiling,” Schleifenbaum explained. “My prime focus was the forest, but by taking over a forest like this with sub-recreational activities already ongoing, I was able to embrace those and spend the next few years waiting for the forest to be ready to transition to full scale harvesting.”

In his early days with the forest, Schleifenbaum arranged for subcontracted harvesting with local sawmills and focussed on building and expanding recreational activities within the forest. In the early 2000s, the primary income was recreational and tourism activities including outdoor education programs, the world’s longest canopy tour, a commercial submarine, a wolf centre, camping, mountain biking, astronomy, and the largest private snowmobile operation in the world.

“It is this diversity that makes the Haliburton Forest a truly unique entity. According to Schleifenbaum, the previous owners of the forest, Weldwood of Canada, had pretty much high graded the forest and it has taken almost 50 years to bring the forest back.

“I never lost sight of my focus, which was the forest and I used the tourism and recreation in the meantime to not only pay the bills but to build infrastructure. It allowed us to invest in roads, trails and bridges to make the forest accessible so that we could resume harvesting when the forest was ready,” he explained.

In 1998, the Haliburton Forest was designated Canada’s first FSC certified forest, thanks in part to the management systems in place there. Schleifenbaum has always embraced an adaptive approach to forest management that is guided by the natural
processes of the forest. This approach allows him and his 100+ employees and contractors to maintain a healthy, dynamic and diverse environment in the forest.

“Our primary goal has always been diversity, not so much maximizing volume or the value of our harvests,” Schleifenbaum said. “When we look at all the changes globally and the diseases that are looming, this is the right approach.”

For the Haliburton Forest, there is no prescriptive approach that targets or defines entire blocks of land, every acre is carefully assessed.

“Every acre gets its own treatment, if it’s a yellow birch stand it’s going to be shelter wood, if it’s beech or especially maple, it’s going to be single tree selection,” he explained. “There are many tools that we apply to hopefully create a healthy, dynamic, and in the process, valuable forest for the future.”

Sustainability is a key focus for all of Haliburton’s operations and it is Schleifenbaum’s goal to ensure that there is optimized growth of fibre for the long term. In some areas where the forest responds well to development, it is possible to maintain growth periods as short as every 12 years, which prevents depressions in growth where old trees can no longer grow as much. Having the infrastructure in place also helps cut costs as new roads are required less frequently.

“When we build a new road, we plan that road for our timber harvest, but at the same time if there is a nice lookout or something scenic that we can catch in the process for the tourism end, that lets us reuse that road,” Schleifenbaum said.

What makes the Haliburton Forest sawmill unique in the Ontario forestry sector is that they process all their own timber. According to Schleifenbaum, they are the only sawmill in Canada that is sustained strictly from its own private timber resources and produce 80-100,000 tonnes of product per year.

“For us, our sawmill is an ends to a means where the sawmill services the forest,” he said. “‘Anywhere else, it is the forest that services the sawmill. Our value is the private land and the forest is the jewel that we have to take care of meaning the forest is what needs to be cared for.”

Careful management techniques are the key to success with the Haliburton Forest, but diverse forest scenarios are also important, and seeing the diversity can sometimes surprise the public.

“We maintain old growth areas that are out of production and when we do tours, the public is generally disappointed with old growth because there is a lot of demise and fallen trees. A managed forest is much more appealing to the eye and produces forest fibre and economic opportunities for rural areas at the same time,” he said.

Any remaining resources are also fed back into management of the forest. The tourist facilities, which can accommodate 100 people, the mill and the kilns, are heated with wood from the forest, and many of the by products and cast off material from the mill become artisan creations, everything from hand crafted bowls and toys for children to canoe paddles that are sold worldwide.

“Everybody is amazed by what people can make from raw wood and I think it is incumbent on all of us to take some of those ideas and add some Canadian content and be creative. Wood is one of those things that we have lots of and the more we use wood, the better off our societies will be,” Schleifenbaum said. ◊
As we see more large corporations announce their plans to fight ‘deforestation’ through their purchasing practices, it falls on the same few people and organizations to provide a response on behalf of the forest sector to counter the pressures imposed on these large corporations by equally large and powerful environmental activist groups. Why is it always the same people who are relied on to advocate for the forest industry in Canada?

Take, for example, Dave Canfield, Mayor of Kenora, Ontario: a longtime vocal supporter of the industry’s sustainable forestry practices. Mayor Canfield is once again shaping up for another joust with the likes of Greenpeace and World Wildlife to provide an alternative message to the professional environmentalists who are bombarding forest products customers with misinformation on topics ranging from climate change to so-called deforestation.

As reported recently in the Kenora Daily Minor and News, “he (Canfield) didn’t mince his words in condemning the actions of the non-governmental organizations. “This has been going on for a long time. Ontario’s forest industry is held to the highest standards in the world yet it’s continually under attack by organizations that are ideologically opposed to cutting down trees,” Canfield said. “We’ve listened to their misinformation and lies long enough and now the fight back is going to start from the municipal sector across the province.”

Good luck with that one Dave as it appears the Kenora council members want an “opportunity for further review and consideration,” before they vote on any resolutions regarding forestry.

After decades and decades of forestry in the region including the development of some of the toughest sustainable forest management practices on the planet, local politicians should know the reality of environmental activism in threatening the long term survival of their communities.

If they don’t know that reality, that is surely a failure on the part of the forestry sector for not working more closely with its best advocates, their employees and communities.

However, the spectre of ‘political correctness’ looms large in the fence-sitting of these local politicians; just like provincial and federal politicians and the CEOs of many major corporations. This political correctness gives power to environmental activists to create more misinformation. The Enviros can further hamstring efforts to deliver the reality of current sustainable forestry practices.

Which brings us to today and McDonalds pledge to end deforestation across its supply chain. Political correctness on a global scale! This follows on from similar announcements by Dunkin’ Donuts, Krispy Kreme, Yum Brands and many others. I suspect that if these major food companies focused on providing products that were nutritious and non-fattening they might have more of a policy dilemma to deal with. Then after the activists have shut down the forest they will find another commodity with which to influence social policy – food!

Let’s support Mayor Canfield and other leaders across North America who continue to advocate for truth in natural resource development and rail against the forces of political correctness.

Note: An interesting treatise on this growth in anti-use campaigns can be found in a report by Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) entitled ‘Anti-use campaigns and resource communities – the consequences of political correctness.”

Former Working Forest editor Phil Hearn, after 40 years of trying to understand the Canadian forest industry, finally packed up his snow shovel and headed south for the winters and west for the summers. Where, with former Working Forest publisher Judy Skidmore, they can pontificate at their leisure about all things silvicultural.
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