

From ships to chips: the state of Nova Scotia's forests.

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In the latter half of the 19th century Nova Scotia was known around the world for its ship building prowess; hundreds of wooden ships from schooners to four masted full riggers were built in local shipyards using local timbers. In the latter half of the 20th century Nova Scotia forests were being clear-cut for the pulp and paper industry. In the beginning of the 21st century the Provincial Government is about to hand over crown land, our land, we the people of Nova Scotia, to an industry consortium to be “sustainably managed” to produce, among other things, wood chips for burning to create “green” electricity. We have gone from forests with massive timbers to comparative matchsticks; where is the pride and the sense?



The Kings County, in drydock at Hobarts wharf, Summerville, Hants West.
From Conrad Byers Collection



Northern Fibre 2016-10-09 Sheet Harbor, Halifax Co. credit: Norris Whiston
wood chips to be shipped overseas to be burned

In Nova Scotia and in other Maritime Provinces, we all live on unceded Mi'kmaq Territory. The Mi'kmaq come from a line of peoples who have lived here for over 10,000 years surrounded by the oceans abounding with fish and largely old-growth Wapane'kati (“Acadian”) forest with massive trees and guided by the philosophy of looking forward seven generations. When Europeans first arrived they initially survived from help by the Mi'kmaq. Over time the Europeans began to use the resources, the trees and the fish on a large scale. Valleys were cleared for farming, fish were caught and salted down and timbers were cut and sent to England for the building of the wooded war ships. Who knows what the map of Europe would look like had the ship building industry in England not received timbers from what we now call Nova Scotia.

In the latter half of the 19th century shipbuilding took off around the coast. Massive full rigged three and even four masted ships were built in places like Kings Port, Canning, Hants Port, Pictou and many other places. Hants Port is said to have been the fifth most important shipyard in the world ([http://thechronicleherald.ca/thenovascotian/1297322-hantsport-deserves-to-be-](http://thechronicleherald.ca/thenovascotian/1297322-hantsport-deserves-to-be)

[better-known](#)). Hundreds of wooden ships were built around Nova Scotia. The timbers needed for the ships were local and the shipwrights were local. This was value added at its best. But the trees for the shipyards were not harvested sustainably. By the beginning of the 20th century trees for ship building were becoming scarce and the coming of steel ships ended the era of the wooden ships. The “Kings County” was one of the largest wooden ships built at Kings Port, Kings Co. a four masted barque in 1890.

Then came the pulp and paper industry. When you read a book like “In the Mersey Woods” by Mullen and Evans 1989, there is a certain sense of romance to working in the woods yet the work was hard. The men lived isolated all winter in camps, the trees were cut using cross-cut saws, the timbers were hauled to rivers by oxen and horses and in the spring the logs were floated to the mill. However, by the latter half of the 20th century increased mechanization resulted in continuously fewer people employed cutting increasingly more wood and today a single person operating modern harvesters can do the job of several dozens of men (see: <http://www.bondrup.com/blog>). Massive clear-cuts are spreading across the landscape and in the beginning of the 21st century the clear-cuts are raked for every scrap of wood to be chipped for burners or shipped over-seas to be made into long fiber chip boards.

Now we stand on the brink where the Provincial Government is about to give away all crown land between Windsor and Yarmouth to an industry consortium, WestFor Management Inc. (<http://www.westfor.org>) for them to “sustainably” manage our forests; few people will be employed and the profit will largely leave the province. Where has the pride gone? Private industry can use private land but why should they be given crown land? Sure, it’s a lease so they presumably pay for it but we the people should have a say as to how it is used.

In the spirit of the Mi’kmaq teachings to plan for seven generations forward and to honour the land, I urge the provincial government to take a sober look at forestry. Department of Natural Resources should be mandated to manage crown land for old-growth Acadian forest (see Restoring the Acadian Forest 2nd edition: A Guide to Forest Stewardship for Woodlot Owners in Eastern Canada by Jamie Simpson), use selective harvesting (section harvesting) which maintains continuous canopy cover and the province should develop incentives for value added industries using wood. This could create new jobs rather than corrode jobs and it would promote forests that we could be proud of and show to the world (see: <http://www.healthyforestcoalition.ca> and <http://nsforestnotes.ca>).