

## **The value of value-added forest products.**

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There has been much debate lately about clearcutting in Nova Scotia especially on crown land. Westfor, a consortium of ten or so forest industries have been granted sole right to profit from managing Crown land, that is, public land, in the Western half of the province. Environmental groups including many small private woodlot owners are upset because of clearcutting practices and the give-away of a public resource.

Both sides, Westfor and environmental groups, present convincing science based arguments about their positions. There are many reasons backed by science why clearcutting is detrimental to forest and soil ecology. On the other hand, the forestry industry including the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) argue that their management is based on the latest science and advanced modelling.

However, science cannot answer the question of whether to clearcut or not. This is a question of values. The forestry industry values making the most money from the forest resources; people against clearcutting value intact older growth forests for a variety of reasons.

The way to maximize the economic output of the forest is to cut as much as possible, employ the fewest number of people and sell the resource as fast as possible. Thus, we see fewer but larger saw mills, increase in companies that specialize in chipping everything down to the smallest branch, a clearcutting rotation of less than 50 years and decreasing number of people working in the forestry industry in Nova Scotia.

Increasing numbers of people are against clearcutting. They are concerned about the impact to the ecology of the forest and the soil and increasingly see the inhumanity of clearcutting. What is the solution? In part, creating more protected areas to “pacify the environmentalists” only exacerbates the intensity of management on the rest of the landscape. Is there a sensible solution?

Currently, forest resources are either turned into lumber, chips or pulp and paper mostly for export. There is largely no value added wood product industries in Nova Scotia. Back in the 1800’s and early 1900’s there was a dominant value added industry, the building of wooden ships with a huge employment. There is no demand for large wooden ships anymore and true enough, the building of wooden ships is partly to blame for the degradation of Nova Scotia woodlands. However, with proper management we could have older growth forests with a mix of tree species of the right size and “shape” to support modern value added wood industries. Just imagine, a single large maple tree and a single large spruce tree could be used to build maybe a hundred violins each sold for many hundreds of dollars. Nova Scotia tree species are diverse and with the right management could be used to in hundreds of other value added wood products. These trees would be individually harvested leaving intact forests. So instead of fewer people (corporations) making a lot of money based on the lowest value of the trees (chips) more people could be employed showing their talent turning out innovative wood products with single trees providing the same monetary value as a whole stand of trees under current practices.

The provincial government must create an atmosphere to foster employment opportunities in Nova Scotia. They must encourage and promote value added wood industries with the potential to employ many more Nova Scotians than are currently employed. DNR should be challenged to manage all Crown land to support emerging value added industries in the province for the benefit of many and not just the few. Chipping the whole forest leads to management of “toothpicks” for chipping. Managing forests for value added wood products results in diversity within forest with endless possibilities and who knows what the future will hold?