

15 July 2024

The Forestry Commission of PEI
Mr. Jean-Paul Arsenault, and
Members of the Commission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations to the PEI Forestry Commission. We own a small parcel of land (17 acres) in the eastern part of the Island, where our summer cottage is located. Prior to Fiona, I knew very little about forest health and the need to protect this important resource. I still know very little, but at least now I am becoming more aware. I would credit Macphail Woods for helping us become more informed and, as a consequence, better positioned to restore the Acadian/Wabanaki Forest on our property. I offer my support to the many environmentally-focused submissions, but will confine my comments to my personal experience.

The State of the Forest Report 2020 indicates that more than 85% of the Island's forest is privately owned, 46% by private small landowners, and 39% by private large landowners. The new policy needs to recognize and reflect this fact. I have been unable to determine how much forest is owned by people who are not looking to make money from that land, but I'm thinking it's a significant number. Perhaps many, like us, just want to enjoy their woodlots, and potentially pass them along to their children and grandchildren. Recent weather events (e.g. Fiona), together with advice and information we have received in the interim, now have us committed to doing everything we can to make our woodlot as healthy as possible. Of course, we would like to see the new provincial forest policy reflect and support these goals.

We did attend the Charlottetown public session. The presentations were interesting and informative, but perhaps not necessarily reflective of the average small landholder. I am not sure whether many small landowners (or the public at large) would necessarily see themselves as having a role to play in the development of a new forest policy, or indeed even be aware of the invitation to provide feedback. As such, I hope the feedback thus far is not overly skewed towards the forest industry.

From what I have read, the province already has much of the research and information needed to develop an 'evidence-based' forest policy and has had that knowledge for some time. Despite that, very little appears to have been done. Perhaps, along with the Commission's report, the Fiona experience will be the catalyst to move policy enhancements forward. We have seen the devastation from Fiona firsthand as we love to hike the Island's woodland trails. Evidence suggests these woodlands would have fared much better with a more diversified approach to forest management.

I wish I had known more about the importance of forest stewardship, and doing our small part, long before now. While I am clearly new to the game, from where I sit it has been extremely difficult to find people to help us "do the right thing", notwithstanding the supporting research. In particular, there are very few individuals available to assist with the more hands-on, work-intensive aspects of caring for a forest, such as selective thinning, even when we are willing to fully pay for the service.

So, from the perspective of one small forest owner who probably reflects the views of others, I offer the following recommendations:

- 1) Increase awareness of the importance of good forest stewardship. I believe the more people know, the more supportive and influential they will be.
- 2) Help support projects such as Macphail Woods in their work to promote enhanced forest management. They have known about, practiced, and taught these principles for years.
- 3) Make it easier for people to find help in their efforts to be good forest stewards, perhaps by training more forest practitioners and facilitating access to them (even on a fee-for-service basis, if necessary).
- 4) Increase access to 'Acadian Forest' seedlings, particularly hardwood species.

In closing, I would like to thank the Commission for your work to date, and I wish you every success in effecting positive change.

Deborah Gallant