

Proposed Medway Community Forest Co-operative

The Medway Community Forest Cooperative offers a compelling model for Nova Scotia in response to the drastic upheaval in traditional forest industries in the province. Through a collaborative governance structure and “forest first” approach to management, the community forest can generate long-term rural economic development, environmental stewardship, social innovation, and a sustainable wood supply to support existing and new wood product industries.

This expression of interest for establishing and managing a community working forest in the Medway District of the former Bowater lands comes out of over two years of public engagement. Initially these efforts were focused on a smaller demonstration and research forest. However, with the proposed sale of the Bowater lands this past year the opportunity to develop a much broader vision captured the imagination of the community – looking to use these lands to shape a new future of truly sustainable prosperity. Diverse stakeholders and many individuals rallied around the concept of community forestry and momentum built quickly. It was the Medway group that successfully advocated to government throughout the fall of 2012 to consider this opportunity and there has continued to be an incredible level of community engagement in shaping the proposal. With over 300 people showing up through a series of public meetings, at least 20 different stakeholders meeting regularly, and significant effort by a core development team, the proposed Medway Community Forest Cooperative has quickly become an exciting new venture for Western Nova Scotia.

The Medway Community Forest Cooperative is being proposed for the purpose of directly managing a viable and fixed landbase over a long term in order to achieve stable economic benefits to the community, a land base that is managed for multiple values, and a forest that is vibrant and healthy. This new entity will be developed from a membership of engaged stakeholders who will then elect a representative board of volunteer directors. This board of directors will be responsible for the hiring of a professional forestry management team and for ensuring financial accountability and transparency. All revenues from the community forest will be directed to covering forest management expenses and investment opportunities. A small fund of surplus revenue will also be created as a “Community Investment Fund” that will be accessible to the community at large for special projects of direct community benefit. Broad level management planning and design of the community forest will occur on a periodic basis through a robust process of community engagement, with the professional management team responsible to deliver on the community’s objectives within principles of strong environmental stewardship and economic viability.

The area of land covered in this proposal includes 61,877 hectares in the southern and eastern portions of the former Bowater Medway District. The boundaries for the proposed community forest have been delineated by a working group based on public input and the identification of multiple management criteria. It is critical that the community forest area is of sufficient size to provide a sustainable volume of wood that will be economically viable in the long term.

It is clear that significant economic development potential exists in applying the community forest model to address core challenges in transitioning Nova Scotia’s forest industry. The community forest will generate a wood supply that is not locked in by any one mill, which alone creates tremendous opportunity for business innovation. The significant public engagement that has already been demonstrated in the development of this proposal also points to incredible social value. The community is once again working together to shape a vibrant and sustainable future.