

Community forest taking root

By Nick Moase
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A community forest is about creating a long-term, sustainable forestry economy, and a group is looking to create one in Southwest Nova Scotia.

Will Martin, director of Forestry and Forest Products at Windhorse Woods, made a presentation to Region of Queens council on Jan. 31 on the progress of creating a community forest.

Martin is specifically involved with the group looking to create the Medway Community Forest Co-op.

"The reason we are using a co-operative model is because it is basically open membership," he said.

Anyone can buy in to the co-op and create a plan for part of it.

"This is a working forest that we are proposing. It is going to be generating a wood supply to meet the existing demand of mills."

Uses for the land go beyond just forestry, and include recreation and stewardship.

The idea for community forests in Nova Scotia gained momentum after Resolute announced it was selling all of its lands and assets in the province in June 2012. Groups from around the province asked the government to buy the lands to keep them in Nova Scotian hands.

In December of that year, the provincial government announced it was buying the land and most of the assets, and would be taking proposals on community forests.

The Medway group is looking at a piece of land about 60,000 hectares in size, located in southern Annapolis County and northern Queens County.

Though Martin said it sounds large, in terms of forestry it is a small area. Not all of it is usable either. About 22,000 hectares is usable right now, he said, with another 14,000 hectares that has long term potential.

Some of the land will be used for the provincial goal of protecting 12 per cent of Nova Scotian land. Other parts are environmentally sensitive, such as watersheds

and wetlands.

The group is starting with four key principles to guide them in the creation of the co-op.

The lands will be managed by an elected group of community directors.

"The community has direct control and governance of the land," said Martin.

The lands will be managed with multiple values in mind, such as forestry, recreation, non-timbre forest products and more.

The community will share the benefits of the lands.

Finally, there is a strong commitment to environmental stewardship of the lands.

The group has held several public meetings over the past month, including the most recent one in Caledonia that brought out over 100 people.

The elected board would have a fixed number of seats for different organizations, representing environmental, forestry, social interests and economic interests. Others may be looked at in the future if needed, but Martin said the key thing is to have a balanced board.

"No one interest group would have control over the board," he said.

To create the model, Martin said they have drawn on groups that have created community forests in other provinces.

"We have a lot to work with in terms of existing resources and existing knowledge," he said.

They have also worked with provincial woodlot owner associations to help design their plan.

The land would not be owned by the co-op, but rather leased from the crown as is done in other provinces. Harvesters will still pay the crown stumpage fees, and the co-op is responsible for maintaining roads and bridges into the woodlands.

"It's a very significant cost. It accounts for half of our total operating budget," he said.

After the meeting last Thursday, Martin headed to Halifax to present their expression of interest to the province. If accepted, the next step will be to create a full proposal.