

SO WHAT IS A COMMUNITY FOREST ANYWAY?

There's been a lot of talk about the fate of the 220,000 hectares of Bowater land since the mill closed back in June. Who will buy it? Will it go to some big foreign investor? Will the Province step in? And what will they do with it if they buy it?

An option that has risen to the fore over the summer is the creation of a "community forest". In the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources recent forest strategy, it committed to "explore ways to establish and operate working community forests on Crown land." But what is a community forest anyway?

There are currently over 100 community forests in Canada, each having its own unique flavour, but generally speaking, they have the following four features in common:

1. They are locally controlled by people who live in the community and have a vested interest in the forests that surround them.
2. Direct benefits are created for the community according to the community's priorities; profits generated from the forest can help to fund community infrastructure and facilities that help to make it a more attractive place to live. Examples from other areas include care facilities and recreation halls.
3. They manage for multiple values, such as lumber production, value-added wood product industries (e.g., furniture and wood turning), non-timber forest products (e.g., wild mushrooms, maple syrup, and wild herbs), many kinds of outdoor recreational use, eco-tourism, education, and research.
4. Forests are managed sustainably, using ecologically-based management plans, with the long-term health of the forest in mind.

Many organizations and individuals have come together over the past few months to explore the potential of community forests on one or more of the three main parcels of the Bowater lands, including representatives from mills, local businesses, tourism and recreation groups, forestry workers, woodlot owners, and environmental groups.

The coming together of minds is generating a feeling of optimism from what was an economic and spiritual blow to many local communities. There is much, much more to learn, but it would seem that a community forest may be something that we can all play a part in, or benefit from, at some point in the future.

Want to find out more or get involved? Call Jane Barker (Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute) at 682-2371/2021, or Don Kimball (North Queens Board of Trade) at 682-2891.