

Opportunities at our new Community

Forest

Elliott Payzant, who sits on the board of the new Medway Community Forest Cooperative, grew up about half a kilometre from one of the gates marking the new pilot project lands of the province's only community forest.

Elliott told a meeting in Caledonia the other night that he spent a good part of his growing up years canoeing, fishing and hunting in this whole area that used to be Bowater land. In his high school years, he worked for the company that later became Bowater. When the idea of a community forest came up, he thought to himself that there is all that land there, and with a community forest,

there are many things that can be happening along with the harvesting of wood.

The harvesting needs to be done, he said, but much can be done in terms of recreation and other ways to utilize that forest land. "There are all kinds of opportunities to do all kinds of things there," he said, "and that is why I got involved."

The meeting was one of a series of three public meetings held to plan the progress of the Medway Community Forest, which has three years in which to prove itself. The meeting - which had been postponed twice because of winter storms - was opened by Jane Barker, who introduced board members sitting on the forest's interim board.

Barker, who is the forest stewardship coordinator at the Mersey Tobetic Research Institute, also introduced the board's acting chair, Will Martin, who is a forestry consultant and president of the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association. He said that when he heard about the possibility of setting up a community forest he was really interested in it as a way to explore a different model for crown land management.

He said he saw the disruption caused by the closing of Bowater and thought that we might want to test some other models of managing land. He said it had been two years to this point and that he had

Also introduced was Mary Jane Rodger, the community forest's new manager, who has a Master's degree in forest conservation from the University of Toronto. She has previously worked in silviculture in various parts of Canada and in university did research at Haliburton Forest, a large multi-use private forest in Ontario. She also worked with the Nature Trust in New Brunswick.

She told the meeting that community forestry operated under four principles - it is directly governed by the community, it generates local economic benefits, it involves managing the forest for multiple values such as logging, recreation, the production of non-timber forest products, and it is committed to environmental stewardship.

She posed the question of how the community forest would be of benefit to the area. She said the cooperative thinks the

forest will be an opportunity for community members to participate in forest management. She said it would provide a wood supply for various economic opportunities. It wants to develop a management system based on local values, and finally, to demonstrate a high level of environmental stewardship to develop and maintain our Acadian forest.

Mary Jane said that when Bowater closed in 2012 a campaign to "Buy Back the Mersey" developed and the province made

a commitment to acquire over 500,000 hectares of the former Bowater land. At this point the Department of Natural Resources made a clear commitment to the concept of community forests.

In 2013 a local group submitted a proposal for Nova Scotia's first community forest and an agreement was signed to create the first community forest cooperative.

The group is operating as a three-year pilot project, with the indicators of its suc-

cess already negotiated with DNR. There are 52 items on that checklist, and Will Martin believes that the group will be successful in gaining long-term community control of the forest lands, which are located in Annapolis county, some bordering Kejimikujik and the Tobetic.

Those at the meeting were given

There were questions about where the capital was coming from to develop the forest, how the forest would be managed in terms of the competing demands that will be made on it, what benefits there would be for private

landowners (who control more than seventy per cent of the province's forests), and how people would go about accessing the wood in the forest, or arrange to use it for recreation.

Answers to these questions will be developed by the MCFC as it progresses. Those at the meeting were encouraged to take out memberships in the

community forest co-op, which cost \$25 per share, and which can be had either by contacting Ms Rodger at MTRI, or by going to the Medway Community Forest Cooperative website.

Members and non-members alike are being urged to attend the upcoming annual general meeting, which will be held at the Masonic Hall in Caledonia

on April 18. The community forest concept has been a leap of faith by the government, and it is up to us - the members of the communities in Queens and adjoining counties - to make it work.

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