

# **PEI Woodlot Owners Association**

## **Presentation to**

### **Legislative Committee on Agriculture, Environment and Forestry**

**March 5, 2013**

On March 5, 2013 representatives from the PEI Woodlot Owners Association made a presentation to the Legislative Committee on Agriculture, Environment and Forestry related to buffer zones and a number of restrictions the government has imposed on woodlot owners.

We are concerned that recent press coverage does not accurately reflect our views on buffer zones and our recommended changes.

To start, we want to make it clear that we support the need for buffer zones and the need for restrictions on the activities that are permitted in these zones.

However, recent regulatory activity has been directed at simply stopping all activity near a water course. In our view the regulatory regime should be a much more a balance. It should

- Respect the ownership interest that our members have in these properties.
- Encourage proper woodlot management and
- Protect the environment

Our presentation to the committee included two important concepts.

Firstly, that a distinction should be made between buffer zones next to farm land where there is a risk of chemicals and sediment being washed into the water and forested areas where this risk is much lower. For the Forest buffer zone we recommended that:

- It not be as wide a buffer zone as one next farm land
- Owners allowed to do pre commercial thinning

- ❑ Owners allowed to harvest 30% of the mature trees during any 5 year period.
- ❑ Restrict use of heavy equipment within 20 feet of the water.
- ❑ Owners allowed to repair or remove bridges across small brooks or streams

All of the above without having to obtain government approval or pay fees to the government.

The second concept was that the buffer zones need to be managed. In this regard we recommend that the government allow some low risk/beneficial activities to take place without having to seek regulatory approval.

- ❑ Cut trees that are dying but not yet completely dead.
- ❑ Cut deciduous trees where the roots have been exposed to salt water.
- ❑ Cut trees that have been damaged – tops broken off.
- ❑ Cut diseased trees (For example trees with black knot)

In addition we had three technical areas where we requested changes.

1. Wooded Swamp – Pursuant to the Watercourse and Wetlands Regulations a woodlot owner is allowed to cut trees in a wooded swamp. However, the definition of wooded swamp basically negates this provision in that no commercial size trees would grow in a wooded swamp as defined in the regulations. In our view, if the ground is dry enough to grow commercial size trees it should be considered a wooded swamp and the owner should be allowed to harvest the trees.
2. Landlocked Pond – We see no need for buffer zones around holes that a landowner may dig on their land or where the government or their contractors remove soil to build roads or other purposes.
3. Drainage Ditch – We see no benefit to having environmental officials visit a property to advise on the need for buffer zones around drainage ditches.

Finally, we recommended that the woodlot owner be allowed to use their Forest Management Plans to obtain approval for a number of low risk activities within the buffer zone and wetlands without a separate application to environment and without extra fees.