



Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership

May 19, 2011

PRESS RELEASE

ONTARIO'S FOREST TENURE MODERNIZATION ACT: A TIMID BEGINNING WITH TONS OF POTENTIAL

The Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership (NOSCP) is adopting a wait-and-see attitude to changes to Ontario's forest tenure system outlined in the recently passed Forest Tenure Modernization Act. NOSCP characterizes the legislation as a timid beginning, recognizing that the new legislation provides some tools for communities to move closer to a community forest model. However, the legislation does not provide for community forests in which local northern Ontario communities would have decision-making authority over the use and future of northern forests. The legislation also failed to acknowledge and provide for Aboriginal and treaty rights, a key component in improving the situation of northern communities.

Opportunities and some flexibility have opened up in the two models adopted by the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry: Enhanced Shareholder Sustainable Forest Licences, which encourage broader representation from local forestry businesses, including local harvesters, and Local Forest Management Corporations. Two pilot Local Forest Management Corporations will be established, providing for limited Aboriginal and community representation. Both models will be assessed over a five-year period, time during which local communities pursuing community-based initiatives can continue planning and organizing for greater changes in the tenure system to enable community forests.

Minister Michael Gravelle pointed out that during the reform process there were interests that wanted the status quo and others who feared changes. In the beginning of the tenure reform process, there was a general consensus that it was time for a change. NOSCP has lobbied for more diversity in the tenure system with community forests as part of this diversity. Convinced that the status quo will not support sustainable communities in northern Ontario, NOSCP has encouraged communities—Aboriginal and municipalities—to be creative, innovative and courageous in promoting local control of forests. The minor changes in the tenure system will hardly affect the status quo.

NOSCP will continue to promote the community forest model. Their workshop, held on May 17, 2011 at Lakehead University, was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. This workshop brought together people from across northern Ontario involved in community-based initiatives to discuss opportunities, challenges, relationships between Aboriginal communities and municipalities and future direction. Presenters from British Columbia shared their experiences with community forests. The workshop was web-streamed by KNET and will be archived on the NOSCP website at <http://noscp.greenstone.ca>

NOSCP will follow the tenure reform process over the next five years, promoting community sustainability and local control as key indicators of success of the reform models. NOSCP, like the province, is interested in “putting our wood back to work” and thinks that this can best be achieved by promoting local decision-making.

For further information contact Peggy Smith at pasmith@lakeheadu.ca, (807)343-8672; 346-4704, David Robinson at drobenson@laurentianu.ca, (705)675-1151, ext. 4285; or Lynn Palmer at clpalme1@lakeheadu.ca, (807) 343-8505 or 345-2475.