



# Community-Based Forest Management for Northern Ontario: BACKGROUND

Prepared by the Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership  
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The Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership (NOSCP) is an inclusive ad hoc group that came together in a proactive initiative in November 2006 in response to the forest industry crisis in northern Ontario. Participants are a range of individuals and organizations, including northern municipalities, non-governmental organizations, academics and Aboriginal organizations. NOSCP sees the current crisis in the industry as an opportunity to re-evaluate the structure of the current forest sector in Ontario and to focus on solutions to achieve long-term sustainability for forest ecosystems and communities in Northern Ontario.

The current forestry crisis and lack of economic development in Northern Ontario is commonly blamed on the high Canadian dollar, high energy costs, and global competition. However the fundamental problem is the existing Crown forest tenure system (including the wood allocation system) that does not support community development. This approach has systematically failed to generate progressive, forest-based development in Northern Ontario. Wood-based value-added industry is concentrated in southern Ontario and outside of Canada. The existing tenure system is not capable of producing social and economic development in Northern Ontario because the people of the region have no control of the resource. There will be no change in the forestry situation until there is a shift to a tenure system that is more supportive of local economic development.

The issues of community-based management and community engagement have been highlighted at the international forest policy level as key to the development of any strategy for sustainable development. Working community forests across Canada and around the world have shown that a wide range of benefits are possible including: greater economic benefits, economic diversification, consistent levels of local employment, wildlife conservation, habitat protection, educational and research opportunities, aid in flood and erosion control, scenic and aesthetic benefits, stabilization of local water supply, recreational/eco-tourism opportunities, enhancement of local quality of life.

NOSCP has developed a Northern Ontario Community Forest Charter outlining the rights and responsibilities of northern residents, communities and Aboriginal peoples. This Charter will necessitate the formation of new governance mechanisms, such as legally-established community forest boards who will work with the provincial government to ensure sustainable management of northern forests for the benefit of local communities, with an emphasis on diversified, local bio-economies. These boards would set broad policy, ensure compliance with forest management regulations, ensure communications and engagement strategies for the range of



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groups in the area, ensure the economic viability of the management structure; develop a code of conduct for the board, determining a governance structure and manage specific subcommittees for various tasks such as silviculture, tourism, and forest management.

The development of community forest tenures in Northern Ontario will require the province of Ontario to establish new institutions. There are lessons to be learned about how to support community forests from jurisdictions across Canada and around the world, such as British Columbia and Quebec. To move beyond the theory of community-based forest management, several requirements need to be met by the provincial government, including consultation, facilitation, capacity-building, planning, and funding. Consultation by the provincial government with local communities, including the special requirements of consultation with Aboriginal communities to uphold Aboriginal and treaty rights, need to take place from the beginning of development of community forest tenures.

An intention of community forestry is to strengthen the partnership between OMNR and communities which have many valuable human and technical resources. The regulatory, policy monitoring, and supporting function provided by the OMNR would be supported and strengthened by community forestry.

To facilitate the movement to community-based forestry in Ontario, a joint Community-Based Forest Management Committee would be useful to encourage communications, engagement and oversight while this process is unfolding.

Government investments to forestry to be directed to community forests; government needs to invest in forests, recognizing that forests are an asset that goes beyond their value for timber. There are a number of options to pay for the establishment of community forests. Funds currently available for forest management in the existing system (obtained from levying a royalty on harvested timber) could be shifted to the new community-based structure. A portion of all stumpage could be directed back to community forests instead of going to the provincial consolidated revenue fund.