

Nova Scotia forestry transition team to spend \$7M on silviculture

10 January 2020



Nova Scotia's forestry transition team will spend \$7 million on silviculture work and forest road building, a move Premier Stephen McNeil says should keep up to 300 people working in the woods as usual for the next year.

The money will be for programs on Crown and private land in central and western Nova Scotia and is on top of what the province already spends.

"We want to make sure that all of those lands continue to be maintained and supported," McNeil told reporters following the team's inaugural meeting.

"Whether [Northern Pulp] reopens or not, we need the expertise of those who have been working on the ground and private woodlot owners who have been, in some cases for generations, nurturing hundreds of acres of land in our province and making a living off it and handing a better piece of land over to the next generation."

Silviculture is the practice of managing forests to help them grow and improve their quality for timber production. The work can include thinning and planting trees.

The transition team was announced by the premier last month, on the same day he denied a request from Northern Pulp to be able to continue using Boat Harbour to treat its effluent beyond the end of January. At the time, McNeil also announced a \$50-million transition fund that's intended to help the industry in the short term while also looking at a long-term shift away from relying so heavily on a single player, as it has with Northern Pulp.



The team will meet every Tuesday for the foreseeable future and McNeil said all suggestions would be evaluated to ensure they don't risk violating the Canada-U.S. softwood lumber agreement.

"We have to put them through the test of whether or not they would be seen as a subsidy," he said.

The meeting went ahead a few days after the team dropped one of its members. Robin Wilber was axed after talking publicly about ways to potentially preserve Northern Pulp. On Thursday, the company announced it wants to remain in the province for the long-term.

Kelliann Dean, the deputy minister of intergovernmental affairs and transition team chair, said industry continues to have a voice at the table through Jeff Bishop, the executive director of Forest Nova Scotia. But Dean said the team will also call on subject matter experts as necessary for planning and discussions.

"Whether we actually need to add another committee member or not, we'll look at that, certainly, in the future. But we do have access to expertise that we may want to pull in at any time."

The premier said he understands why so much focus to this point has been on helping sawmills and people who worked at Northern Pulp, but he said the transition team felt it was important to get help to people who work in the woods as soon as possible.

Protecting landowners' investments

While there are short-term benefits to Thursday's funding, there are also long-term benefits because silviculture ultimately leads to less pulpwood, something Northern Pulp was the largest consumer of in the province. Without the mill there to purchase low-grade wood, the economics of many people's operations have changed drastically.

Dean said Labour and Advanced Education officials met with mill employees earlier this week to provide information about support options for things such as retraining. Similar sessions are scheduled for later this month throughout the province for people who work in the industry.

McNeil said the government is keeping watch to ensure mill workers are paid the severance to which they're entitled and they're talking with the company to get an update on the status of the pension plan, which he believes is in good shape.

"We're still working through that, but there's been no alarm bells set off at this point regarding that," he said.

Trying to get sawmills more access to logs

McNeil said all of the team's work is intended to be in step with the [Lahey Report](#), which advocates for a more sustainable approach to forestry and less clearcutting. It's one of the reasons they want to make sure private woodlot owners have the services they need — and the people with the skills to provide them remain in the province — as land values fluctuate in the wake of the mill shutdown.

"We need to make sure that we protect the value of their asset the best we can, at the same time not allowing it to continue to fall backwards after the investments they've made," he said.

The team is also working toward getting access for sawmills in the central part of the province to the Crown land holdings Northern Pulp was working, to ensure continued access to saw logs. Northern Pulp has a timber licence agreement with the province through to the end of July, as well as an agreement through Westfor for access through to the end of September.

'They need to start engaging'

Matthew MacGillivray, who operates L.G. MacGillivray and Son Lumbering in Parrsboro, N.S., said \$50 million might seem like a lot of money, but it's tiny when considered against what the forestry industry generates for the province's economy.

MacGillivray, who has 30 employees split between Tatamagouche and Parrsboro, said it's vital for the transition team to hear from as many people in the industry as possible, including contractors, landowners and anyone else making a living off the woods, to get a sense of how they're affected by the Northern Pulp shutdown.

"They have a huge task here to represent the province, the forestry sector in Nova Scotia, and that can't be taken lightly. They're going to be criticized for a lot of things, because you're not going to please everybody, but they need to start engaging a lot of people in this sector and there's a lot of us out there," he said.

Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nothern-pulp-forestry-transition-team-government-funding-1.5421448>