Private blueberry patch on public land irks northern New Brunswickers

The government of New Brunswick and Oxford Frozen Foods announced a deal to develop wild blueberry fields and a processing plant in upper St. Andrews, N.B., to be farmed from fields leased from right to left: Nepsiugit MLA Ryan Riordon; Tracadie-Sheila MLA Claude Landry; Premier David Alward; Agriculture, Forestry and Affairs Minister Ray Fragala; co-chief executive officer and president of Oxford Frozen Foods; Natural Resources Minister Paul Hincks; and Fisheries, Aquaculture and Natuashuan Affairs Minister Alanna Losier; and Miramichi Bay-Neguac MLA Serge Robichaud. Photo from the Government of New Brunswick.

By RANDY LeBOUTHILLIER

Tracadie - InvestNB and Oxford Frozen Foods, a multinational corporation based in Nova Scotia, have forged a deal that is not setting well with blueberry growers and locals in New Brunswick’s northeast region.

"Oxford Frozen Foods, the world’s largest supplier of wild blueberries, plans to develop a crop of wild blueberries in between the Tamaroa and Tracadie Rivers near St. Sauveur in Gloucester County after receiving government approval to swap their private land for 10,712 acres of Crown forest land.

Invest NB, a provincial Crown corporation, has agreed to provide Oxford Frozen Foods a $375 million interest-bearing repayable loan to construct a blueberry processing plant for processing the wild blueberries. The company will also invest $184 million in the plant. Construction of the new plant is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2014.

Jean Maurice Landry, president of the Northeast Association of Wild Blueberry Growers, is concerned that the company’s plans will disrupt his business and the work about the development.

"The cooperation of different community organizations and municipalities across Gloucester County are trying to find out basic information about the project like the exact impact on the local economy, which companies are involved, and who is cutting the logs and where they are going,

He is little about the nature and working conditions of these 300 jobs and what the company will gain versus the impact it will have on our region,” said Premier David Alward, Natural Resources Minister Paul Robichaud and Oxford Frozen Foods founder and CEO John L. Bragg.

"Our company is committed to working with the local communities in the region. Oxford Frozen Foods know the blueberry sector throughout our province and achieve that level of support from local communities,“ said Premier Alward.

"Our government is fully committed to doing the right thing in terms of developing and preserving the blueberry sector in New Brunswick Wild Blueberry Sector Strategy,“ said Premier Alward.

A heavy air of frustration was felt at a public meeting, held by Danny Comeau, Chair of the Local Services District, in St. Sauveur on February 17. Truck loads of logs are going through the communities of Port-Latifice, St. Sauveur, and adjacent areas. People are asking whether they know who is cutting the logs and where they are going.

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