The forest is not yours to give away, Premier Alward

By TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton - Premier David Alward confirmed the fears of many in late January when he spoke of a forest strategy that will guarantee more timber from the province’s public lands for the forest industry in his State of the Province Address. The tone was one of course that the strategy would create jobs. Again, we are told that giving up more of our forest to J.D. Irving and a handful of other big forestry players is the only option for job creation in our province.

Premier Alward, how exactly do you propose to free up more of our forest?

Will you redefine a watercourse as you redefined wetlands so forestry companies can cut in buffer zones that protect our streams and rivers? Do you propose slashing wildlife habitat zones meant to provide critical habitat for our forest species? Will you open up deer yards to cutting with the notion that they are now vacated, a result of forest mismanagement if there ever was one?

Must your government be reminded of its treaty obligations to consult with Indigenous peoples of this province on forest management? How can you give away something that is not yours to give away?

And how does your government propose to mandate to give away more of our forest. Some of your MLAs were around ten years ago when it became known to the public that the forest industry was demanding - a double in the rate of cut on public lands. Surely they must recall the verification of First Nations’ right to fish for food, culture and recreation. In the context of forest strategy. The survey found that New Brunswickers, rural and urban, wanted water and biodiversity protected first and then they would consider forest management for economic benefit.

A second survey found our government is under intense pressure from J.D. Irving and other forestry companies to open up our forest lands. In this same survey, 57% want the forest industry to move away from our deer yards, buffer zones along streams and rivers, wildlife habitat zones and old forest. Department of Natural Resources and Environment survey of New Brunswick conservation forest below 28%, anything less would not be sustainable, according to the wildlife biologists and forest ecologists.

Our forest management is stuck in the twentieth century when clearingcutting and herbicide spraying were permitted but were never really socially acceptable or ecologically sustainable. The new forest management scenario that would mean a more resilient forest in a post-industrial era is full of options for communities to be stewards of their forest resources and generate sources of revenue and jobs. Handing over the key to the province that the government is poised to allow forestry companies access to previous non-access is clear to see. If we don’t act now, the recklessness and lack of imagination shown by previous governments on forest management, will we deny ourselves resilient communities, meaningful employment and the awe that comes from a healthy and diverse forest ecosystem?

For a decade now, we have seen a doubling in the area of the forest around New Brunswick that are herbicide sprayed and smaller stream buffers. For what? According to annual reports from the Department of Natural Resources, perhaps so we can use our forests generating net loss.

Forest dependent communities are often told to stand like in an old forest of evergreens, maples, ashes, birches and beech reflect the olden days of forestry. Without mentioning the flying squirrel, hear the song of a yellow warbler or catch a brook trout in a sheltered stream? This is why we fight forest mismanagement and so should too.

The Maya Glam and Mama Sipakapan people of Guatemala, mostly peasant farmers, living near the Guatemalan gold fields agree. They are concerned that the mine is depleting and contaminating their water supplies, deforesting their land and destroying the natural world. Photo by Tracy Glynn

Indigenous inmates need spiritual advisors

(continued from page 1) ...that Elders/Spiritual Advisors are afforded the same status as Chaplains...[and] ensure that all inmates are provided with access to a recognized Indigenous Spiritual Advisor, in consultation with the Regional First Nations Health Authority or other Indigenous spiritual authority. Inmates have been identified, in some cases, as being spiritual advisors, however, they are often not employed or paid. If the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety made a concentrated effort to hire qualified Indigenous spiritual advisors, they could receive federal funding to provide rectify their own spiritual needs...Inmates are entitled to and deserve a voice and are recognized as having the right to receive spiritual support and counsel. Inmates can be spiritual advisors for other inmates, and they offer guidance, support, and help with spiritual issues.