

Opinion/Letters

Professional foresters must redefine their role



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**
by Larry Sanders



The Ontario Professional Foresters Association (OPFA) is trying to become a self-regulating disciplinary body for foresters, just like the College of Physicians and Surgeons is for doctors.

But for years, successive governments have resisted foresters' lobbying efforts to pass legislation enabling foresters to regulate themselves.

Thus, while it waits for governments to legislate Ontario's foresters are caught in professional dilemma. On the one hand, they're seeking the right to enforce their own professional standards so they spend a lot of time defining exactly what a professional forester's code of conduct.

On the other hand, its membership is split among foresters employed by private industry, those working for governments, and those working as self-employed consultants. Foresters have yet to resolve tricky ethical questions such as: Is a forester's first allegiance to the good of the forest, or to the good of the employer?

While that debate rages on, the OPFA remains somewhat powerless to clearly specify what it means to put R.P.F. (Registered Professional Forester) after your name.

This debate is coming to Thunder Bay at the end of February as over 120 professional foresters. This meeting will add one more level of complication to the questions about what constitutes professional forestry practice.

The OPFA is studying the protocol for conducting forest AUDITS—spending one day of their two day session on the technical details of audits and the second day on protocols for reporting these audits to the public.

Mother nature's bank balances

This is an important discussion for those of us who care about the state of the forests. People lobbying for increased emphasis on public accountability by the forest industry and its regulators have been pressing for more audits—independent reviews of how our forest managers are doing.

Like an auditor from the accounting profession, the forest auditor is supposed to report Mother Nature's "bank balances" out there in the woods, and blow the whistle if there's any hanky-panky going on.

But there's a credibility problem facing the forestry profession, and the forest industry in general. Polls show that the public does not trust the forest industry. One set of numbers produced by Decima research show that public confidence in the forest industry declined steadily over the last decade, reaching a low of zero by 1989.

Thus, the OPFA members who will be doing forest audits run the risk of not being believed. If an audit of a company or crown management unit finds that the forest is improving or being managed well, the skeptical public is likely to dismiss the audit as just another press release from a self-interested party.

On the other hand, if an audit uncovers deficiencies in forest practices, or blows the whistle on incorrect figures, the forest industry representatives paying for these audits will not be pleased, and won't want audits done again.

In both cases, the credibility of the auditor will become the issue, rather than the important questions an audit could raise about the health of our forest management practices.

A political profession

To overcome this problem, I suggest professional foresters redefine their role and come down off their high-horse attempt to define themselves as some kind of self-regulating profession. Forestry, because it is dealing with a public resource is, by definition, a political profession.

Decisions such as whether one level or another of timber harvest is economically and environmentally sound are *political*, not *scientific* decisions.

If the foresters accepted the truly political nature of their profession, they might be more prepared to accept political standards of accountability—not just for audits, but also for day-to-day forest management activities.

The Ministry of Natural Resources is already leaning towards the idea of more local-based co-management systems—ones that create a committee of local interest groups. Two examples from northwestern Ontario I'm familiar with are the Lac Seul Public Advisory committee, and the Rosport Islands Management Board.

In both cases, day-to-day as well as long-range decisions about management are left largely in the hands of a politically accountable management committee, made up of interested non-professionals.

The staff from the MNR, instead of taking management decisions onto themselves, take on the role of technical advisors—leaving the actual alloca-

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Proposed labour law reforms have Progressive Conservatives worried

The labour law reforms introduced by the NDP will do nothing to create jobs in Ontario, do nothing to make us more competitive and attract investment, and do nothing to renew or strengthen the economy.

What they will do is increase the political and economic power of the union bosses—and cement their support of the NDP for the future.

That's great news for union leaders and New Democrat politicians, but more bad news for everyone else.

Do you believe that someone looking for work cares whether a union's leadership can brag of ten new members?

Do you believe that someone hit by 14 tax increases in the NDP budget cares about whether or not Bob Rae gets a bigger union donation next election?

Whose interests are they representing, if not their own?

The people looking for work want jobs—and the people with jobs want their government to tax fairly and spend wisely.

Where are the government plans to accomplish those aims?

The time for developing those plans and changing government priorities is running out. If taxes go any higher, the flow of employment and investment out

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Letters to the editor

Don't compare skiing with snowmobiling

I am writing concerning the story in the Terrace Bay Schreiber paper today about snowmobiling (Intrepid Snowmobiler, Feb. 25).

I found this story quite interesting, except when it said "You can snowmobile for the entire OFSC winter for a mere \$65 (GST included, \$55 if purchased prior to Dec. 15, 1991). Compare that to a day of downhill skiing. What about a whole season's cost?"

Well, I will say that if you think about it, how much does a snowmobile cost to buy? And how about general maintenance and the upkeep of your machine?

Downhill skiing isn't expensive—your skis, poles, boots, are a one time buy if you have stopped growing, and a season's pass isn't bad at all, when you think of how much exercise and fresh air you get.

Don't compare snowmobiling to down hill skiing. We breath fresh air, not pollute it.

The Terrace Bay Ski Club

Snowmobilers should keep to their own trails

In recent weeks Craig Nicholson has had articles in *The News* concerning various aspects of snowmobiling. One of these articles dealt with the poor reputation that snowmobilers have amongst non snowmobilers. While I agree that most snowmobilers are responsible people who respect private property, stay on groomed trails, etc., I would like to point out a situation that has angered many local cross country skiers this winter. Perhaps Mr. Nicholson could make it the topic of a future article.

The cross country ski trails at Rainbow Falls Provincial Park are groomed weekly by the Ministry of Natural Resources. These trails are unquestionably the best in the area for skiers who prefer more hilly terrain than the Nordic trails offer. The Ministry has an excellent grooming machine that restores the trails each week to pristine condition.

The problem is that at least three times this year—and probably there's more times I'm not aware of—the trails have been completely destroyed by snow machines. When this occurs, it seems that the snowmobilers run over every inch of groomed ski trails—even in places where the trail is wide enough that the machine could run beside the ski trail. The delicate ski trails are completely ruined by snow machine tracks. The trails are marked with signs forbidding the use of snow machines, but these are disregarded.

The most frustrating thing is that there is an established and marked snow machine trail that starts at the entrance of the park, as do the ski trails, and goes around by the west beach, through the narrows, and across White Sands Lake. The snow machine trails is probably shorter than the ski trail, as there are less twists and turns. Also, the trail is faster, is well groomed and goes to the same points reached by the ski trails. There is simply no reason for snowmobilers to use—and thereby ruin—the ski trails that the Ministry works so hard to maintain.

I would like to see a reply from Mr. Nicholson or a future article addressing this topic. In the interim, I would like to say to snow machine users: at Rainbow Falls Park, skiers have at most, eight km of groomed trails, but there are literally hundreds of km of snowmachine trails in this area, many of them well groomed. Please keep your machine off the ski trails so that we can enjoy our winter also.

Sincerely,
Mike Scott,
Schreiber