

# Jerry J. Ouellette, MPP Oshawa

## Unforeseen Impact of Economic Policy

There are many times when a minister of the Crown has advice presented before him by policy makers who do not always see the full impact.

As a former minister I took many opportunities to listen, question, review and research the advice of ministry advisors and policy developers. Many times I accepted that advice, but there were a significant number of exceptions where I did not agree and simply said no.

One conspicuous example still stands out to me.

An influential advisor once informed me there were far too many players in the forestry sector and that major consolidation of mills and infrastructure would not only be beneficial to the industry and the province, it was inevitable. The logic, it seems was the proposal would streamline and virtually eliminate the wood supply problems for the industry – the remaining industry that is. I could not agree with this advice and simply said no!

What came to mind was that the forest industry is the life blood for so many communities across Ontario and especially the north. From the workers and contractors in the bush, to the employees in the mills, the truckers hauling the wood, to the repair/fueling stations and restaurants, all nourishing a lifestyle dependent on the wood flow feeding the north. I saw all the mills throughout the entire region, in small towns to large centres, each supporting rich, diverse and unique communities of northerners and their families.

I am deeply concerned with the notion to consolidate the forest industry as I see a movement away from the many northern towns that are the cultural fabric of northern Ontario. The full impact on the forest industry may not have been considered as the current provincial government moves to super mills at major centres.

While some government intervention is essential to assist the industry through periods of exceptional circumstances, it is even more critical for provincial representatives to encourage and adopt policy which ensures the long-term survival of the forest and forestry in Ontario. It is paramount for government officials to recognize the true value of the forest to our provincial economy. There is an urgent need to simplify and streamline regulations and bureaucratic practices with greater concentration on forest management and inventory and to move forward progressively with industry professionals. The forest industry is adaptive and will respond accordingly with the development of new techniques, advancements and initiatives.

As former Minister of Natural Resources, I had the opportunity to explore alternative models of forest management and industry integration such as those which exist in Scandinavia. I was able to examine the concept of forest cluster analysis as a means of bringing together the community, research, forest industry and manufacturing to co-manage the forest and enhance prosperity. A cluster approach involves an expanded view of geographically concentrated and interconnected economic activities and linkages to customers and suppliers, focusing on current and prospective competitive advantages offered by a region and its networked economic activities.

It is also essential to further investigate the potential of a Sustainable Forest Licence (SFL) which recognizes the shared responsibility of all resource users. The "community model" SFL reflects the diversity of the forestry sector and incorporates the collective expertise and motivation of all stakeholders.

While elected representatives confront a multitude of options when formulating forestry policy, we must never forget the forest industry is intrinsically tied to the communities and people of northern Ontario. Only then, can we consider all the impacts of legislation and move forward with a long-term sustainable forestry strategy for the province of Ontario.



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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry J. Ouellette". The signature is stylized and cursive.

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