

# A critical assessment of ten years of on-the-ground sustainable forestry in eastern Ontario's settled landscape

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Over the past 10 years, the Eastern Ontario Model Forest has been developed by partners and the local community as a means of involving a large and varied group of people in achieving sustainable forestry. In this settled landscape, with over one million residents and 88% private land ownership, involvement of local communities is a given. This critical assessment looks at outstanding issues, dynamics of the operating environment, key accomplishments and unexpected outcomes that have resulted, all in the context of Naturalized Knowledge Systems.

**Key words:** Sustainable forestry, partnerships, criteria and indicators, state of the forest reporting, First Nations Forestry, naturalized knowledge systems, eastern Ontario

Au cours des dix dernières années, la Forêt modèle de l'Est de l'Ontario a été élaborée par ses partenaires et la communauté locale en tant qu'un moyen d'impliquer un important groupe diversifié de personnes pour atteindre la foresterie durable. Dans cet environnement aménagé, comprenant plus d'un million de résidents et un territoire privé à 88 %, l'implication des communautés locales va de soi. Cette évaluation objective examine les enjeux prioritaires, la dynamique de l'environnement sous aménagement, les principales réalisations et les retombées inattendues qui proviennent du projet, le tout selon le contexte des Systèmes adaptés de connaissance.

**Mots-clés :** Foresterie durable, partenariats, critères et indicateurs, rapport sur l'état des forêts, foresterie autochtone, systèmes de connaissances adaptées est de l'Ontario

## Introduction and Background

As one of 11 Model Forests in the Canadian Model Forest Network, the Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) represents the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest Region. The EOMF is comprised of dedicated individuals who work with government, landowners, industry, First Nations, and other stakeholders to develop new ways to sustain and manage our forests. Among Canada's Model Forests, the EOMF is uniquely characterized as having a complex range of land uses, social and economic attributes and ecosystems. Extending over an area of 1.5 million hectares, it is bound by the province of Quebec to the north and east, and New York State to the south. It extends west to include the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, and Lanark County. It also includes the territories of the Mohawk Community of Akwesasne. The forest is a mosaic of forested land, urban centres, and agricultural land, and includes thousands of landowners. The area is 34% forested.

Over one million people inhabit the Model Forest Area and 88% of the land base is privately owned. Forest products harvesting, agriculture and other forestry activities have always played an important role in the region, especially in the last two



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centuries when the vast stands of maple, oak, pine, and spruce were felled to supply demands in Canada and abroad, as well as to provide land for settlement. The forest of today is generally young in age and predominately deciduous species (64%). Local communities still rely on the forest for traditional economic benefits such as forest products, maple syrup production and recreational activities. There has also been an increased awareness of the importance of the forest for a much broader range of values including medicinal plants and materials for traditional plants.

In the EOMF the vision provides the working definition of sustainable forestry. The vision was recently re-affirmed by the many individuals and organizations that make up the membership and partners of the model forest:

“Our vision of forests for seven generations is a mosaic of healthy ecosystems within a landscape of rural and urban areas throughout eastern Ontario, providing long-term economic, social and spiritual benefits, while ensuring a healthy environment that is valued by all.” (EOMF 2002)

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In a partnership-based organization, the vision is important in rallying the partnership together for a common purpose. Over time, it will become clearer, more refined and more strongly supported and shared by the partners. The vision and the processes associated with working towards it must be owned well beyond the core of staff and directors. Consensus-based decision making at the boardroom table is important, but equally if not more important is how partners work together on the ground.

The EOMF, now in its tenth year, has been highly successful in gaining respect and credibility as an organization devoted to the people and the forests of eastern Ontario. Much of this respect is founded on the adoption of the principles of respect, equity and empowerment, espoused by our friends from the Mohawk Community of Akwesasne. The Mohawk concept of “forests for seven generations,” adopted by the Model Forest partnership, encourages communities to live in harmony with the forest environment by considering the past, the present, and the future. It requires everyone to think beyond their own needs, learn from past experiences and consider the impacts of decisions on others both now and in the future. As each successive generation adopts this philosophy, the sustainability of the forest is assured. The Naturalized Knowledge System provides a useful structure for understanding the ingredients necessary to have productive partnerships. It also provides an analytical framework that can be used to examine what has worked well and what has not been so successful.

## The Naturalized Knowledge System as an Analytical Framework

The Naturalized Knowledge System (NKS) extends beyond the generally accepted elements of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). TEK is the basic human understanding of flora and fauna whereas NKS is a broader encompassing of grass-roots experiences, technical expertise, ecological proficiency, socio-political competence and appreciation for the spiritual dimensions. NKS is not exclusive to first nations communities and elements can be found in segments of society that have a prolonged close relationship to the natural environment. For example, the multi-generation family ownerships of woodlots would meet many of these characteristics.

The seven fundamentals of NKS are:

- Earth is our mother.
- The spiritual world is close to us.
- Cooperation is the key to survival.
- Responsibility is the best practice.
- Knowledge is powerful only when shared.
- Everything is connected to everything else.
- Place is important.

The Zeal to Deal is a close coupling of respect, equity and empowerment (Lickers and Story 1997). Associated with these components are a number of tools that can be used in balance to generate the Zeal to Deal (Fig. 1). The Zeal to Deal is not so much what is being done as it is the enthusiasm that is generated when people come together to work on an activity. It is this enthusiasm that results in the desire to continue to do more good work together and face future challenges.

### Respect Component

Respect is the appreciation and regard we have for one another in a partnership. The partnership develops respect by

| Respect       | Equity       | Empowerment    |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| Understanding | Finances     | Application    |
| Communication | Knowledge    | Authorship     |
| Consensus     | Networks     | Credibility    |
| Mediation     | Personnel    | Partnership    |
| Honour        | Social Power | Responsibility |
| Tools         |              |                |

Fig. 1. Naturalized Knowledge Systems

Source: Henry Lickers, personal communication, 1994

understanding the worth of the partner and communicating this information. In the EOMF, a period of time is spent analyzing the strength, skills and understanding of new partners. In other words, the organization does its homework about the new partner. At the same time, open lines of communication are established and evaluated to see that the communicated information is received and interpreted in a manner that is supportive of the partnership. As the communication is established, a consensus is formed between the new partner and the EOMF. Sometimes misconceptions or misunderstandings can cause friction between the partners but keeping the “Good Mind” or a mind that is respectful helps to mediate problems and establish more respect. If the mediation cannot establish the respect then the partnership will fail. The tenacity of the EOMF to establish partnerships and the enthusiasm leads the partners and other people to see the honour of the organization. The Respect component of the partnership equation would seem to be hard to do but is actually quite easy given enough time.

### Equity Component

The term equity is used by the EOMF in both its legal sense—“being impartial and fair” and its business sense—“the values left after liability is removed.” The equity of the partnership must be shared if the zeal or enthusiasm of the partnership is to be maintained. The equity must be transparent to the partners. One partner’s equity must be valued by the total partnership, so the knowledge of the landowners must be valued against the knowledge of the forester. In the business sense, finances brought to the partnership are important, but knowledge has value as well. Networks of the partners prove the adage: “it’s not what you know but who you know that’s important.” Sometimes donations of staff and volunteer time can be just the thing that proves the partnership exists. There are many examples within the EOMF where these contributions have proven to be the successful factor. Lastly, the ability to use the political or social power of the partnership to accomplish a task must not be underestimated. Social concern for the forest will drive partners and people in our area to undertake a great task that seems to be hopeless. Equity questions in a partnership are continuously visited and discussed and some of the most acrimonious discussion can be had over equity or fairness issues. The Mohawk believe that if these questions are discussed in a respectful and peaceful way then equity issues can be resolved.

### Empowerment Component

The term empowerment in a partnership is perhaps the hardest component to describe. Empowerment is the act of enabling or permitting. It is the risk-taking aspect of all partnerships. As

a group, it is hard to trust the stranger or the people who are different—we must permit ourselves to work together. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail, but in either case, the partnership learns. When the EOMF applied itself to the problems of sustainable forestry, it faced a great risk of failure. Proposals, business plans, work plans and meetings were all applications to provide the partnership with credible outcomes that we believed could be accomplished. The partnerships that had been established continuously reinvented the partnerships and accepted responsibility for our actions and our “deals.” Responsibility does not mean to place blame, but rather to find absolution and solution to problems. Authorship is an issue that communities have specifically with university and research groups. In a partnership, all of the partners are the authors of the partnership. The Mohawk people believe that the “Good Mind” and “the Peace” will always lead people to do good works.

As empowerment is enabled and we do good works, we learn more respect for one another. The partnership, by trusting one another, generates more equity which in turn generates more empowerment. The Mohawk believe that the cycle of Peace is forever increasing and that, by extension, the EOMF will last for seven generations and beyond.

### **Applying the Framework – Example 1: Information Base for Integrated Resource Management Planning**

One of the first project areas identified at the beginning of the EOMF program was the establishment of a large information base in support of integrated resource management planning. The size and complexity of the task quickly became so large that it was no longer possible to meet the original project goal of providing information needed for planning. The effort did provide a number of useful independent deliverables and important lessons were learned. In analyzing the effort, there were evident problems of balance between the components and a lack of knowledge of the various tools and how to use them. At its early stage of development, the EOMF was not sufficiently experienced to handle the processes needed for such a sophisticated undertaking.

In this complex activity involving the application of geographic information systems (GIS) technology there were two distinct groups of participants involved. The technically skilled and literate felt that they knew what needed to be done and wanted to get on with the job. They were frustrated and felt held back by those with little knowledge who saw the activity as a learning opportunity and expected help from their more advanced associates. This group was less confident in moving rapidly ahead and needed more understanding before they could support the desire of the other more advanced group members to start working. Without respect and trust, the less confident members of the group were not willing to empower the others to act. Without consensus, progress was replaced by process as demonstrated by the group’s attempt to use detailed majority voting schemes to make what should have been simple decisions. Without progress and results, the group saw less and less honour in its work. Potential partners drifted away from the activity, and new partners who may have contributed equity to the work were discouraged from joining in.

In terms of equity, the resources available were inadequate relative to what the project was expected to deliver. Requests for additional financial resources were not viewed favourably

by partners engaged on other projects funded at significantly lower levels. Although some partners offered their existing Geographic Information Systems and staff to help with the effort, differences in the software operating systems or “platforms” limited the effectiveness of this contribution and led to other problems of data compatibility. Others seeing the high level of funding for the activity were tempted to view it as a “cash cow,” and tried to receive a portion of the finances with little genuine interest in becoming a true partner.

Towards the end of the project a number of conclusions were reached and some valuable deliverables provided. While there was great enthusiasm for a large project at the beginning, it was realized that the focus needed to be on forest themes if anything was to be accomplished. During the last five years efforts focused on developing a set of data in collaboration with partners, based on a set of criteria and local level indicators for sustainable forestry. This information in turn was reported on in a *State of the Forest Report*, which, while preliminary in nature, has been used as an example nationally and internationally. A procedure for enhanced forest resource inventory that took into account a broader range of forest values (e.g., canopy gaps and important species with a scattered distribution such as butternut *Juglans cinerea* L.) was developed in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and successfully implemented on a portion of the model forest area. This approach has since been used on selected inventory projects elsewhere in southern Ontario. Work on the development of standard statements for addressing sustainable forestry in official municipal plans was completed and the results used by one municipality in eastern Ontario. Most importantly, many of the partners—including the key founding partners Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Domtar, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources—have learned from this experience and have gone on to work in many other successful partnership ventures. There is also a more conscious effort made to use the tools available to create the Zeal to Deal.

### **Applying the Framework – Example 2: Sustainable Forest Certification for Small Woodlots**

In 1999 it was realized by a number of partners that sustainable forest certification could have a significant impact on private woodlots. A specific concern was the lack of a certification system that could be applied to small woodlots, with the result that these owners would be unable to participate in future markets where certified products were a requirement. The EOMF moved quickly to establish a broad-based working group whose task was to address this issue. The result is a true success story in generating the Zeal to Deal.

The working group was formed by engaging government, industry, first nations and landowners at the “table.” This forum encouraged an exchange of ideas from different viewpoints and resulted in a consensus on how to proceed. A set of principles was created and shared in terms of how the group would function and what it would do. The EOMF was asked to continue to facilitate this activity since it was felt that it was the group trusted by the broadest range of partners and would have the greatest success in engaging landowners, operators, wood processors and those interested in other values in the forest—indicating a high degree of respect for the organization.

A significant step forward occurred when the EOMF worked in partnership with the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists to hold an information session on certification. This helped to inform the public and enlisted a broader range of participants. The broad base of partners contributed significant levels of knowledge and expertise in developing the project. This included the Forest Stewardship Council of Canada, with its interest in certification and mutual interest in having a system that could be used by small woodlot owners. Other forms of equity that were shared included funds from several organizations and eventually a significant grant from the Ivey Foundation. The project work was supported by a high level of equity.

The broad partnership involved in the project gave it a good degree of credibility. The work was not seen to be “industry-driven.” In fact, a significant proportion of landowners who applied to participate in the pilot project stated conservation values and wildlife habitat as their most important objectives for their properties. A group of landowners has now formed its own organization as a means of more effectively sharing information, working together with on the ground activities and taking more responsibility for achieving and maintaining sustainable forestry certification. Even further evidence of a high level of empowerment has been the interest expressed by other groups to follow this example and become involved in forest certification.

The test of this project was the on-the-ground audit conducted by a forest certifier in November of 2001. The audit report identified one pre-condition that must be addressed before certification is granted and several conditions that need to be addressed in the next few years. It is anticipated that the pre-condition will be successfully addressed by October of 2002, clearing the way for certification according to the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Forest standards of the Forest Stewardship Council of Canada. The project is proceeding well and, more significantly, the “Zeal to Deal” is alive and well as the landowners proudly share their experiences and encourage others to become involved. The landowner group formed in June of 2002 has identified a target membership level of 200.

### **Applying the Framework – Example 3: Community-Level Application to Re-establish the Ferguson Forest Centre**

In 1995, the Province of Ontario announced plans to close several provincial tree nurseries, including the G. Howard Ferguson Forest Station in Kemptonville, which served the EOMF and adjacent areas. Concerned about losing this valuable asset, individuals and organizations used the EOMF to facilitate a forum to discuss their concerns, to express their views to the government officials responsible for operating the station and to develop options for re-defining the mission and retaining the facility. By providing an approach to addressing the future of the forest station, considerable energy and enthusiasm in the community was positively directed to a successful end result.

A key characteristic was the effort to bring all partners around the table as solutions for saving the forest station were being explored. Groups included customers who bought seedlings, scientists, current and past employees, forest enthusiasts, users of the trails on the property and local education groups. Initially there was anger and great indignation over the announced closure and potential for considerable conflict. Rather than adopting a confrontational mode with the officials

responsible for the pending closure, efforts were made to share information with them and jointly explore opportunities. The advantage of this approach is that it provided for rapid feedback on ideas under consideration and brought considerable additional expertise to bear on the problem—in this case, the specialists within the province who had operated the facility. Part of the effort involved coordinating volunteers who worked to save the remaining tree seedlings in the ground and protect the facilities from vandalism until the station could be re-opened.

By defining a new mission for the facility that extended beyond the parameters normally associated with the province of Ontario as the owner, the group was able to demonstrate a viable future for a re-structured forest station. The partnership base was broadened when the local municipality assumed a greater role and ultimately raised the funds and acquired the facility. A not-for-profit corporation was established with a governance structure representing the community of interest that values and relies on the forest station. Community groups, first nations, industry and others play a direct role in governance of the Ferguson Forest Centre. The centre has operated successfully for five years and annually supplies 2.5 million trees for planting in southern Ontario. Perhaps more significant to note is that of all the facilities identified for closure in 1995, the Kemptonville location is the only one which continues to operate successfully.

### **Applying the Framework – Example 4: Community-Level Application to Respond to the 1998 Ice Storm**

The role and response of the EOMF to the 1998 Ice Storm has been documented in some detail by Barkley and McVey (2001). Once again, the community used the EOMF as a forum to raise questions, share information and knowledge and to consider how to respond. An indication of the high degree of trust and empowerment in the EOMF was that the Board of Directors was confident enough to take action in responding to the call of its partners to assist without fully consulting all of the remaining members of the board. At this time, systems damaged by the ice storm had still not been repaired, making communications very difficult. At a subsequent board meeting, as is standard practice, the decision was reviewed and confirmed as being most appropriate.

Providing a safe table allowed innovative ideas, including policy options, to be explored without concern or obligation. As an example, after several months of work at the request of the partners the EOMF hosted an information session to allow everyone to share their experiences, report on their progress and discuss remaining challenges. A direct outcome of this meeting was the realization that not enough was being done to assist municipalities with small communities to repair damage to their “urban” trees and replace those that had to be removed. Feedback from this session played a key role in defining the parameters for the “Tree Replacement and Management Strategy” to provide important support to communities and their staff and volunteers. As a result, trees that had to be removed were replaced and the health of damaged trees greatly improved. Many groups for the first time also completed detailed inventories of their community trees.

Building on the strong sense of community and people helping one another, this table allowed for pooling of effort and resources (equity) leading to a more effective response to the

situation. This contributed greatly to ensuring that clean-up activities and the response by communities contributed to forest sustainability.

### **Applying the Framework – Example 5: Network-Level Application to Canadian Model Forest Network Communications and Outreach Efforts**

It is possible to apply the framework to network level activities that the EOMF has been engaged with over the last five years. The communications effort made significant progress in raising awareness of the network to the forestry community at the national level. Model forests came together to establish a presence at a series of national and international forestry events and to communicate the diverse results of the program to a broad audience. Individual model forests contributed ideas, assisted in developing content and participated in delivering the information at the events. The highest degree of success occurred when individual model forest personnel presented themselves as representatives of the network as a whole and were empowered to communicate accordingly. The development of specific materials such as the Local Level Users Guide provided value products that became the focus for outreach activities. The end result has been a heightened awareness of Canadian Model Forest Network activities and an increased demand for, and use of, the products it has created.

The EOMF was able to contribute equity to this partnership with its *State of the Forest Report*. The report was useful for its information but, more importantly, it served as an example that it could be done and suggested an approach on how to accomplish it. The EOMF recognized that the report was a work in progress but realized it could contribute by sharing what had been done to date while continuing to work towards improving future editions.

It is noted that working at levels above that of the community is more challenging. For example, communications beyond the community become more complex and more time is required. The success in mobilizing a team of model forest people to work together, however, shows that it is possible. Respect was increased as individuals were able to increasingly communicate and work with individuals from other model forests. Equity flowed as model forests helped one another to get their messages out. Participants felt responsible for properly representing the network and not just their own model forest—resulting in an increased level of empowerment. A careful examination of these results could offer further insight into strengthening future networking efforts.

### **Conclusions**

The EOMF strives to balance respect, equity and empowerment. The experience and insight gained over the last ten years gives confidence to our approach. While the cases described

in the paper are the best-documented examples, the EOMF has used the Zeal to Deal in all of our works from large multi-partner projects to small individual projects—and, in most cases, we have been successful. Part of this success can be attributed to the establishment of an Equity Committee, which continues to develop approaches to increasing equity in its various forms—from fund-raising and friend-raising to the building of new partnerships. The projects that have faltered or failed have usually done so because they have not been true to the principles. Those ideas generated by the community are now owned by the community, and as the community becomes empowered, the projects begin to operate on their own for the benefit of the community.

As the EOMF has adopted the Zeal to Deal, other people and projects in the community have begun to explore this process. We believe that the adoption of the process leads to stronger and more responsible communities. The Zeal to Deal is based upon the Great Way of Peace as practised by the Haudenosaunee People. While the Haudenosaunee people have used the Great Way for hundred of years, they say that they are still learning about it. There are many issues, problems and concerns that require the attention of the EOMF and we continue to use and learn about the Great Way and the Zeal to Deal.

### **Acknowledgement**

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