

**PALMER, LYNN [POSTER]**

*Toward transformative change to support community-based forest management in the Northeast Superior region of Ontario, Canada*

Co-authors: Colin Lachance, Northeast Superior Regional Chief's Forum; Peggy Smith, Faculty of Natural Resources Management, Lakehead University; Chander Shahi, Faculty of Natural Resources Management, Lakehead University

Forest tenure reform that led to new forest policy in Ontario, Canada for public forests followed a recent "crisis" in the forestry sector. The forestry system has historically functioned on the basis of centralized control, industrial timber extraction through concessions licensed by the province to forestry corporations for the export of commodities (pulp, paper, lumber) and the exclusion of communities (municipalities and Aboriginal) from decision-making. The tenure reform process saw widespread demands from below for new institutions to support community decision-making but equally strong pressure from forestry corporations that survived the downturn to maintain the status quo.

Drawing upon a case study of a developing forest governance model, this study analyzes the new forest tenure policy and associated institutions through an access lens that considers power relations among all involved actors. A qualitative community-based research approach is utilized involving interviews with a range of actors as well as participation in community meetings and workshops between 2011 and 2014. The study illustrates how, although some new rights have been transferred to communities and new mechanisms have been created in the form of forest management institutions that increase community participation, the new policy continues to primarily serve corporate interests to which forest-dependent communities are bound if they are to generate significant forest-related benefits. Municipalities have limited recourse regarding this outcome in the current policy environment. However as the study further indicates, given the increasing acknowledgement of constitutionally-recognized Aboriginal and treaty rights in Canada, First Nation (Aboriginal) communities in the study area are leveraging power from historical treaties and the Canadian constitution to challenge the structural asymmetries that are maintained in the new forest tenure policy.

Led by an informal organization of elected chiefs, several First Nations are undertaking a cross-cultural, adaptive and collaborative process aligned with traditional Aboriginal values focused on relationship-building to develop a principle-based forest governance approach in conjunction with municipalities and forestry companies in the region. The model aims to develop a "conservation economy" (Ecotrust 1991) for all stakeholders who share forests based on: generating increased wealth from the land while leaving more economic benefits at the local/regional levels, rebuilding ecological integrity that has been lost through historical forestry activities, promoting social equity, and better balancing scientific and traditional Aboriginal knowledge in forest management. The study demonstrates how this approach fosters social learning among participants thus contributing to resilience in the region. At the same time, the First Nations are asserting claims over forests in their traditional territories using a rights-based approach through negotiations in parallel government-to-government processes that are separate from but related to forest tenure policy. The study concludes that these simultaneous approaches both internal and external to the forest policy process are working to counterbalance state resistance to progressive forest tenure policy change and promote transformative change in the region's political economy to better support communities that depend on forests.