



NOVA FOREST ALLIANCE

Non-Timber Forest Products: Challenges and Opportunities

Proceedings from the February 16, 2006 workshop.
Best Western Glengarry, Truro, Nova Scotia

By Kelly MacDonald

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

This was a very full day with a lot of useful information. It seemed to give the woodlot owners present lots to think about and many new possibilities for their woodland. I'm sure they will look at their forests in a whole new light.

The main theme from the day was to know yourself and what you like to do. The presenters gave us many ideas of things to do with woodlots without cutting. However, they all agreed that these things take work and some involve capitol expenses, so if you don't enjoy doing it, don't do it.

Another theme that relates to the first one was to use what you have and what you know. There are uses for just about everything on a woodlot so using what comes naturally and what you know about is the logical thing to do. Of course, you can always learn about new things but the general idea was not to get involved in something without first researching and learning about it, no matter how large of an industry it seemed to be or how much money you could make doing it.

The final theme of the day was that there are many benefits to using NTFPs. Some of the presenters do what they do for economic reasons, some do it for environmental reasons and some do it because they like the lifestyle it allows them to lead. For many it was a combination of these reasons.

Similarly, there are many uses for NTFPs. From decorating and landscaping, to food, to medicinal uses and beyond. You're limited only by your imagination and if you can find a niche market you can fill you will be successful.

Kelly MacDonald

OPENING REMARKS

Moderator: Dave Sutherland, Nova Forest Alliance

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) include plants, animals, fungi, it doesn't include wood but it does include specialty products made from wood. Nova Forest Alliance has brought in speakers from across the Maritimes and Maine to give broad view of the possibilities in this area.

PRESENTATIONS

General Info on Non-Timber Forest Products in the Maritimes

Sid Watts, Market Development Officer for Added Value Forest Products PEI Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry

The title of the workshop is good way to look at NTFPs -- challenges and opportunities.

What are NTFPs?

- NTFPs are goods derived from forests of both plant and animal origin, other than timber and firewood. Some examples are fauna, medicinal products, food, and essential oils.

Why are NTFPs important?

- NTFPs are important but do not get enough attention in our area. However, improving our knowledge of NTFPs and how they can be used will benefit us. Economically, if landowners can increase their income from NTFPs it may reduce the need for a large timber harvest. In some cases NTFPs may be more valuable than trees and trees may be needed to support the growth of NTFPs. Culturally and socially there are people and groups who have a close connection to growing, harvesting and using NTFPs, such as First Nations communities. If NTFPs create a reduction in trees harvested, the public at large benefits. NTFPs are usually easier to harvest as well, therefore an aging population can still harvest on their own. Environmentally there are many NTFPs that can be grown and/or harvested in sensitive areas. There are many opportunities to find products that can be grown in these places. While harvesting these products there is generally less physical disturbance, it is mostly harvested by hand.

Guidelines for starting an NTFP business

- Before starting a NTFP business decide where you want to fit in, develop small niche markets, add as much value as you can to the product, love what you do, become an expert in the field and be patient.
- There are many challenges and opportunities with NTFPs. The biggest challenges are a lack of knowledge and understanding though the forest community including industry, government and woodlot owners. The opportunities include the chance to enhance the economic, social and environmental benefits of NTFPs.

Questions

Q: Any market research? Where?

A: You're going to spend a lot of time researching. The Internet is a great tool for research. The National Agri Forestry Centre website is a great resource. The focus in this area is more on the environmental aspect, but there are many economic factors woodlot owners should consider. No one person can tell you what your market is, you have to find that out for yourself.

Q: Can you tell us more about ground hemlock?

A: Demand seems to have gone away. It was a bumpy ride on the Island – a number of companies wanted the product, many people set up as buyers and gatherers. But people gathered anywhere they wanted, including other people's woodlots. It's better to develop small niche markets than to try to cash in on a large industry. We also have to think of the environment when we get involved in a high demand industry. (Bob Bancroft) White tailed deer love hemlock so that is a caution about over harvesting.

Balsam Fir Tipping

Mary van den Heuvel

- There are many financial opportunities involved in this endeavor but for her it is a way to be creative. This is a seasonal income for many, it's sustainable income. 400,000 wreaths and 1000 tons of boughs are sold from NS each year.
- The most common tree used is the native balsam she also uses other species and is interested in using exotics.
- A good place to harvest is along trails and at openings in woodlots. She harvests from slow growing, dark green, well-spaced trees. Harvest from your own land, get permission for privately owned land and get permits for crown land.
- The NFA mandate is sustainable forestry. In this industry sustainable forestry = sustainable supply. She suggests leaving some foliage on tree and not going to the same place for three or four years.
- The products she makes are wreaths, sprays, kissing balls, garlands and table arrangements.

Straight from the Tap: Maple Products and Business

Quita Gray, Sugar Moon Farm

- They learned the trade and bought the farm from the original owner. They eventually expanded the operation to be a maple syrup farm and restaurant. They operate weekends year round and in July and August daily. They have a licensed restaurant, maple store and hiking trails. They offer the traditional maple experience, educational tours, winter recreation and private parties.
- Went from being a pancake house to having gourmet chefs' nights using maple. This has given them lots of exposure and "free press."

Questions:

Q: Are you going to do more catering?

A: That was the first time to do that, and would do more. She is always interested in new opportunities.

Q: What about liability?

A: They were with Kings Mutual but grew beyond the scope of that company. They have a new policy where they pay over \$3,000 a year in insurance.

Q: Most people in that industry have a long term family investment, is it viable to start from scratch?

A: It can be, she doesn't know any who make money just on maple, all of them have other means of support. Look at your options and strengths. The model exists elsewhere and there are many people that make their living year round.

Trail Development and Recreation

Jim Vance, Nova Scotia Trails Federation

- Trails are becoming an important part of people's lives for health and recreation. Trails are a means to that end, not the end itself. Many user groups want trail use.
- Trails need a land base, money, volunteers. The community development model by community-based volunteer led groups is very efficient. Community groups can build trails for half the money it takes government.
- Landowners need to cooperate to make trails a reality. There are many concerns for landowners but NS Trails Federation has landowner agreements to help partnerships between trail groups and those who own the land.
- Some major trail initiatives that are underway are the Trans Canada Trail, the Cape to Cape Trail and the International Appalachian Trail.

Question

Q: Is the trail construction manual for the public?

A: It is available on the website to download.

Q: What about property right concerns?

A: Landowners should have no concerns for land being taken by users. Before agreeing to using your land for trails have an open discussion about land development. There is nothing that says an agreement can't be amended for review every so many years.

Herbal Traditions and Environmental Diversity

Natalia Bragg, Knot II Bragg Farm, Maine

- Figure out who you are, that will tell you what you have offer. Your background is unique to you, that's what gets people to come see you. Use what is there – don't try to re-invent something – use what makes you unique.
- She had been making herbal remedies for years but she was doing it for her family, it was handed down between generations. Once she opened her farm for tours people asked about her remedies and she began selling them
- Every landowner has a herbal apothecary in their yard and most don't know it. If you have a patch of more than five acres and some of it is allowed to be wild what you need will grow. If you are wise in your harvesting your renewable resource will renew itself.
- This area is as unique and diverse as any she's seen. The fact that we don't know that is our biggest asset and our biggest debit. Where we are now is where Maine was 10 years ago.

Questions:

Q: Are there expiry dates on your products?

A: Most of the salves last two to three years, the tincture is almost indefinite, the oils last one to two years. Bomagilian salve lasts for 50 years.

Q: You mentioned some types of viburnums, can other types be used to get the same benefits?

A: Most share those qualities, if they are hybridized they lose those qualities.

Q: In Canada herbalists are getting more manufacturing and educational standards. There are more strict regulations to meet before opening an apothecary.

A: The fact is with herbalism there must be an affinity. Can't just throw them together. It takes at least 10 years to learn enough to call yourself a herbalist.

Spreading the Word: Money Does Grow on Trees

Jim Verboom, Nova Tree Company

- Harvesting seeds mainly consists of knowing what to look for and when. Their company relies on independent collectors who can make as little as nothing and as much as \$5,000 for their seeds. The seeds on the tree are worth more than the tree itself. The season varies by species but starts in June and goes through the end of September.
- To collect you need to know where to look. Some are on the ground or low growing. Shaking, climbing communing with the squirrels, cutting (partial cutting) Not open cones, want them closed

Questions

Q: How do you get the seeds out of a berry?

A: There is equipment that break them up and use a lot of water to separate the pulp from the seeds.

Q: The seeds in cones, do people sell them to you in the cones?

A: Yes. Their company contracts it out. The hardest part is to find the material, it doesn't have to be clean.

Q: What impact this winter will have on the upcoming season?

A: The upcoming year was actually determined in August. However, trees follow the rule that if a plant thinks it will die it will reproduce, however very few trees can produce heavy crops two years in a row.

Q: When harvesting should you take all the seeds from a tree?

A: Taking seeds from the tree doesn't hurt the tree and it is used for reproducing anyway so it will not make it extinct.

Wild Mushrooms: A Natural Bounty for the Forest and Us

Nelson Poirier

- Fungi are critical for healthy forests. Mushroom is a small part all the fungi under the ground is the important bit. Mushrooms recycle the forest. He recommends the Audubon Society Book for identifying mushrooms.
- A good review of what different mushrooms look like and which are good to eat or poisonous.

Native Forest Plants

Lloyd Mapplebeck, NSAC

- He estimates that NTF resource value is worth over a billion dollars (estimate). The maritimes are about 8 – 10 years behind the rest of Canada. At the college they look at the products from the angle of discovering what there is a demand for and finding where it is, landowners look at things from the angle of what they have and where it can be sold.
 - Uses for some of the Native plants include nursery plant production for landscaping, establishing plantings for harvesting (domesticating), management of wild populations/stand, wild crafting.
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Traditional uses for Black Ash

Krista Sokabasin

- Forgotten by industry due to little commercial value. Ideal for basket making. In order to preserve the tradition of basket making black ash needs to be preserved. She did a study to determine where they grow and how to improve the numbers of the trees to save the trees and the tradition of basket making.

Questions

Q: Does it require sun?

A: It is shade tolerant.

Q: How do you identify black ash from white ash?

A: The leaves.

Q: Seed collection to restore stands?

A: Yes, the CFS provided First Nations Communities with seedlings but the community needs to know where it will grow to make it work so the research.
