

Alberta Woodlot Association Speech – October 5, 2005
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I'm going to start with a confession:

I get asked to make a lot of speeches. On the one hand, any chance for me to get our message out is always happily embraced.

On the other hand, it can mean... an awful lot of speeches. On an awful lot of topics.

So when the Woodlot Association asked me to speak, my first thought was: What do I know about woodlots?

I know what a woodshed is; it's where my dad used to threaten to take me if I didn't toe the line.

But as much as I knew about the *existence* of private timber reserves, I needed to know a lot more about the issues.

So I did a little research...

And frankly, I was bowled over.

Because in so many ways, in so many aspects, the Woodlot Association and the Liberal Caucus are pushing for many common things; we *believe* in many of the same things. We share many of the same values. And we're both pushing for new and innovative ways to tackle the issues.

When people can't see beyond the small problems to see the big picture, we often say:

They can't see the forest for the trees.

Which is probably a good theme for the Woodlot Association.

And which always reminds me of my most memorable experience with forests and trees.

It happened on our honeymoon.

When Jeanette and I got married, we both shared a dream of Deep Powder Skiing. After all; Why go to Hawaii when you could try a new adventure...?

So we booked ourselves our high country paradise; Cat-Skiing in the Selkirks. Ironically, Jeanette's ex-boyfriend recommended the place. Said it was "the most romantic place he'd ever been". That alone should have made me suspicious.

Now: neither of us had ever attempted deep powder skiing, so when we got to the lodge, we wondered who'd be sharing our adventure. When Jeanette spied a few shorter skis, she relaxed knowing there'd be other females. Turns out? The short skis belonged to shorter men.

Yup. Jeanette and I spent our honeymoon in a back country ski lodge with 9... Other... Men.

And then we discovered that a lodge catering mainly to men only had rooms with two single beds. But we were there for the skiing. Right?

The next morning we grabbed a coffee and our skis - mine were 210s; Jeanette's were 190s (for you non-skiers... that's rather long) - and headed out to the snow-cat.

But riding up we couldn't help but notice... all the trees.

Where were the big bowls of powder?... we wondered.

Finally, Mark, the guide, announced that with the high avalanche risk, we'd have to... *ski the trees.*

Ski the trees.

Oh well; A few trees; how hard could it be?

After an hour, the CAT came to a shuddering stop... in the trees. We clambered out of the snowcat and sank instantly to our waist in snow. Jeanette and I struggled just to get our equipment on.

And then, like magic... *the other skiers* were gone, the *Cat* was gone, and apparently... our *confidence* had gone with them.

We pushed off... and barely made it to the first tree when Jeanette hit a snow snake - a branch under the snow that stops you cold. Or at least your feet; the rest of you tries to keep going.

The second run, we both slid into tree wells. Skis off, waist deep powder.

And no way to get out. Hard as we tried we were... completely immersed. The beach was looking better and better.

By the end of run # 2, I'd wiped out so many times I'd had enough. My face was so red, Jeanette was afraid I'd have a heart attack.

It's your honeymoon; if you're going to die of a heart attack, it's not supposed to be from skiing.

But Jeanette was still determined: Third trip, on her own...she hit a third tree. Wasn't going that fast, but... it hurt. Somehow she got down on her own, but that was *her* last run that day.

And that pretty well sums up the first day of our honeymoon.

Jeanette and I are fairly upbeat people. But here we were at the start of our married lives together... and we... were... miserable.

We'd spent so much money, yet were dreading the remaining runs. And if that wasn't bad enough... EVERYTHING started to ache.

That night... in our single beds... Jeanette, with her raw feet - *SNOW SNAKES* - aching shoulders - *TREE WELLS* - and sore everything else - *TREE; FACE FIRST* - said those three little famous newlywed words: Don't. Touch. Me.

We prayed that night for it to stop snowing. So we could ski the bowls...

Next morning it was snowing even harder... and there we were: once again in the Snow Cat... surrounded by trees. All we could think was: We. Can't. Do. This.

However... That morning we *had* rented the right equipment.

And when Mark, the guide heard me say... *there are just so many trees...* he suddenly turned and said words which have since proven so insightful... and in so many other ways: He said:

You keep talking about the trees. But there are spaces between the trees: Don't look for the trees, look for the spaces.

I waited for the punch-line. There was none. Instead, he repeated;
Look for the spaces.

... and he was right.

We hopped out, and onto our wider shorter skis... we pushed off... and we looked for the spaces.

And we went for a space... And the equipment... *worked*. Skis floated. Like little toboggans.

And we made it through the first few spaces... and suddenly... we shared a feeling of "Wow.... *This is possible*".

And by the end of the week... we were... *mastering* it. Because... we were *looking for the spaces*.

And deep in that powder, we finally felt we belonged, even with the other 9 men... *And we never did let on it was our honeymoon.*

That's a true story.

And a true lesson.

And what on earth does it have to do with us being here today?

Well; I've never held it against the trees. They had every right to be there. And though I wouldn't have minded a little selective harvesting of a few of those trees that first day, that's not the reason for the story.

No: I guess I'm really talking about our two organizations, and a shared philosophy and outlook.

Because; we saw those trees as obstacles. But if we're going to fully grasp the unparalleled opportunities this province has, we need a government that's able to... see the spaces. Your organization is actively pursuing a new way of doing things, a new path - as it were - *through* the trees. You can see the spaces; you just need help getting everyone *else* to see them.

That's why I was so impressed with what you've done so far. Here's a group of private landowners, with a comprehensive and far-reaching philosophy that resonates with a different way of doing things, a different way of exploiting a natural resource – even redefining it!

And while calling for a reasoned and considered new way of dealing with this land, you've managed to set out a comprehensive and – dare-I-say – *holistic* approach to Sustainable Resource Development.

Frankly; *you* folks should be running the government.

But if you'll allow me... well; let me try to accomplish that first.

First of all, the scope of your policy is far-reaching and laudable: considering Air, Water, Timber and Forest Management as well as fish, wildlife and their ranges, plus oil, gas, mineral resources, mining and reclamation, agriculture, grazing – on both public and private lands... is... well, it's comprehensive, it's refreshing... it's... well, it's *fantastic*.

But secondly, your determination to see 50 to 100 years out... is exactly the kind of planning that we have been so adamant about... and something that the current regime seems so indifferent to.

So though you've only been around 10 years, your research *will* – or at least *needs to* – become the standard for sustainable forest management in Alberta... and the whole country. Your fully integrated approach is exactly in line with what we have been arguing for in the legislature.

The U.N. has called for sustainable forest management, and everything you're putting forward reflects that noble aspiration. You recognize what so many of us know in our hearts:

We are not *divorced* from the land - even in our cities and towns - we are all truly *of* the land.

And it is critical that our governments - Provincial and Federal - be brought up to speed, so that the tax code gets modified to allow you to do what needs to be done. It's critical that your very valuable and specialized form of agriculture be treated as such; that governments distinguish

between *non*-renewable resources and *renewable* resources... even when that *renewing* is numbered in years and decades, rather than seasons.

None of us wants the continued wholesale destruction of forests – private OR public – just because of the capital gains tax. It doesn't make sense.

We all want the same thing; sustained forest management. We all want long-term, perpetual forests, and your contribution needs to be supported. There is an opportunity here... to do something right; a new way of looking at the trees... AND the forest.

Just a few years ago, trees were too often nothing but a nuisance to many farmers; something to be torn up and burned. Then, a few years ago, that “nuisance” changed into a resource, an asset... an opportunity. And along with that came the financial pressures to *exploit* that resource. And in the wake of that change, we can all agree; there was a certain amount of damage done to our private natural areas.

So: I'm heartened to discover just how committed you all are to a different way, a different route... well... through the trees.

What was once considered Canada's most *virgin* forest of 20 years ago - the forests of Alberta - are now considered the most logged out, broken up, cut up in the country. Without a group like yours... where will we be 20 years from now?

Climate change is *regulated* by forests... so we need other options besides cutting it all down to deal with the unresolved tax issues.

Cities are ever-expanding, but cities still view forests as expendable as they move ever outward.

Oil and Gas is feeding this thundering economy, yet seismic, and exploration, and recovery, transporting... the full exploitation of *that* resource is seriously threatening another; our forests.

Pine beetles aren't likely to show any signs of acknowledging the boundaries of our provincial border... as the forests in BC are reeling from the pine beetle outbreak. I know of one timber businessman who says that pine beetle could do to forestry what BSE did to cattle.

So I congratulate you on recognizing that your resource is *more* than a resource; that forests are more than the sum of their timber, their carbon load, their dollar value. Clearly, you appreciate that there are other more... *intangible* aspects to the world of forests that defy anyone's attempt to quantify and qualify the price tag of your forest reserves. A forest is far more than the dollar value of its timber.

I went to university in England, and spent time there and in Western Europe. As great as these ancient and formidable civilizations may be, as you travel about you understand part of what it is that brings the people of those countries... to visit *ours*.

When you're in a western Canadian forest, and you encounter British, or German, or Dutch or Asian tourists... we don't need to remind ourselves; they haven't flown all the way here just for brunch at the Banff Springs.

As they walk and hike and boat and climb and *experience*... they are savouring something over *here*, which is long lost... over *there*. They are celebrating something almost unknown to them... and which we too often take for granted; the *wilderness, the wonder* of the forest. With almost no genuine forest wilderness to savour, to walk through, to... *be* in... They flock here.

But your organization has formally recognized that for forests to survive all this non-stop economic activity... that it's just too much to ask... to "let nature take its course". That philosophy may have worked a hundred years ago, but it's no longer enough: You recognize the fragility, and the level of intervention required to make sure that 20 years from now... we aren't all travelling to remote parts of northern Finland just to see what forest life was once like *here*.

The EU now spends billions and billions of dollars a year to conserve the value - the *real* value - of the Ecological Goods And Services of their dwindling forests. *Our* governments spend huge amounts every year supporting agribusinesses that ship wheat and beef to others around the globe; it's time to spend a part of that preserving the Public Goods and Services of our private forests; to preserve value of something of benefit to *every Canadian*.

There are amazing side effects of maintaining the public values inherent in what you are trying to achieve, and I congratulate you all.

I expect that there are some here today who may not be life-long supporters of the Alberta Liberal Party - or at least not *yet* - and I'm not here to campaign.

What I am here to say is this:

Though we want to form the next government in this province - regardless of the outcome of the next election - you can count on us bringing your concerns forward.

This is not a fight that this country, this province, you and I... can afford to lose. Your work is creating a new opportunity, a new path, a new future...

For our water...

For our air...

For our wildlife...

For life *itself*... And the forests that support us all...

For everything we value...

Thank you so much for inviting me here today, so that I could tell you how much I've learned... from you.

The Woodlot owners *need* to be heard, the tax laws *have to* be changed, the forests of our province *need* to be there; for *this* generation, and the *next*, and the *next*, and the *next*.

With *your* help... *we*... can help you... to help us *all*.

END OF SPEECH