

**Abstract**

Since the cod and salmon fisheries were closed in 1992, Newfoundlanders have turned increasingly to the forest for subsistence and commercial purposes. The provincial and federal forest managers consider the residents' use to be a threat to the economic viability of the forest. The residents consider the government's management to be mercenary, political, and destructive. This collaboration of an ethnographer and professional forester working on the Great Northern Peninsula analyses these arguments and attempts to determine, who's right? What is happening to the forest, and what will be the impact on rural Newfoundlanders?

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"They're gonna destroy the forest...just like they did the fish." This view is widely held among residents of Northern Newfoundland in the 1990s. "They" refers to the commercial loggers and the provincial foresters, who work in the spruce and fir forests that cover about half the Great Northern Peninsula (see map). The residents, except for some loggers and sawyers, have repeatedly expressed alarm that clearcutting and current levels of timber harvest ("overcutting") will destroy the forest, curtailing employment and interrupting their many subsistence uses of the forest. They fear that bad management and excessive harvest of the timber will lead to the same kind of resource depletion and harvest ban that has crippled the northern cod fishery.

The senior author recalls that when he began conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the north, residents expressed similar worries that the then-current fishing techniques and catch levels would lead to the destruction of the cod stocks. Field notes from seven visits between 1980 and 1992 are filled with residents' concerns about otter trawl fleets and TAC (total allowable catch) levels. The residents' dire predictions were justified: in 1992 the Canadian government declared a five-year moratorium on the northern cod fishery, and two years later the ban was extended to the Gulf cod fishery. More than thirty thousand Newfoundlanders were directly affected. In 1997, the last year of the five-year moratorium, there are still few indications of recovery.

If residents' worries about their fish stocks were justified, perhaps their apprehension about their timber supply is also justified. Do northern Newfoundlanders have sufficient experience in the woods, or enough education or traditional ecological knowledge to be right again? If residents are right, and their data are accurate, then why aren't government officials doing the right thing? Perhaps the government's forest data are inadequate, or the government is under the sway of interested parties, or the government vision of the forest leads to different outcomes. If the residents are wrong, and clearcutting and the current levels of cutting are not in fact leading to forest destruction, then do they