

## S.O. 29

industry is a major component in the economy of New Brunswick. I congratulate the Hon. Member for having brought this debate forward in this forum at this time since it gives the House an opportunity to consider fully the ramifications of what is happening in the Atlantic provinces at the moment.

Most people probably would not think of my province of Prince Edward Island as being a forestry province. However, approximately 48 per cent of the Island's land area, some 700,000 acres, is in fact covered by woodland. That is significant because, not only is roughly half the land area covered by woodland but almost all of that woodland is owned by individuals. That is a quite different situation from that in most regions in Canada where most of the woodland is owned by the Crown. Very little is owned by the private sector.

● (2210)

The history of the development of Prince Edward Island is one of small farms being carved out across the Island of anywhere from 50 to 100 acres. Generally speaking, half of the area of those farms has remained in woodland. The back half of each farm is in fact a significant woodlot which is part of the economic viability of a particular farm unit. The woodlot has always been a very important part of the farm in Prince Edward Island. The annual harvest on the Island is approximately 333,000 cubic metres of wood. We have excellent tree growth simply because of the climate. We have very fertile soil and an excellent environment for growing trees to produce lumber. Our growth rate of tree fibre is among the highest in Canada. I suppose British Columbia is ahead of us, but by silvacultural practices of thinning and cleaning and so on we have seen very significant stand development.

The forest sector on the Island currently employs about 400 people in logging, sawmilling and forest management. It will come as a surprise to many that we have 50 sawmills in operation presently. They are generally family-owned and concentrate on custom production. The woodland is of course very important to sustaining that industry which is in production at present. Sawmills produce 16 million board feet annually. Of the annual forest harvest on the Island, 20 per cent is exported to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick as pulpwood. Fuel wood is another large part of the annual harvest and many Islanders burn fuel wood to heat their homes in winter. In fact, there have been major conversions to fuel wood by industry over the last few years, so I would not be surprised if somewhere in the vicinity of 70 per cent or 80 per cent of heating requirements are now met by woodlots on the Island. A survey in 1983 indicated there was an annual consumption of 264,000 cubic metres of fuel wood. That is just a little bit of background to indicate to the House how significant the forest industry is in Prince Edward Island.

At the present time our province is something like a matchbox and at any time another fire can start. We have had over 50 fires this year to date and some 333 hectares have been burned. There have been four major fires which burned 200

hectares, roughly 50 hectares each, of mainly woodland. To date we have been somewhat fortunate that there has been no loss of life but we have lost some buildings, relatively few because many were saved. We have lost four cottages and some barns with a total value of approximately \$150,000. This is the first time we have had any structural loss from woodland fires since 1978. It was only yesterday that there was a major fire in my constituency. A dairy farmer was tending to his cows in his barn and it just happened that the local fire chief in the St. Peter's area was passing by the farm and noticed smoke in the woodland behind the farm. He stopped to see where the owner was and they quickly went out to see what was happening. By the time they got to this fire it was no longer a small bit of smoke, it was exploding into a fairly major fire. Four fire departments, including the department of forestry, responded relatively quickly and they were able to contain the fire to about 100 acres of woodland. Of course, that woodland was lost in a relatively short period of time. If it had not been for the tremendous effort made by the local fire departments, provincial forestry department and concerned citizens, certainly my constituent and his family stood to lose their whole farm. As I pointed out, because the woodlots in our province run parallel to each other, next door to each other in fact, with farms very close together, the possibility existed that the whole community would have been cleaned out. It was of course very much appreciated by that family and its neighbours that the fire was contained. Therefore I think I have to join with others this evening who have already commended the valiant efforts of volunteer firemen and fire departments and those communities in general who have responded to this crisis. I know that something in the order of six or seven hundred people have been actively involved in fighting those 50 fires on the Island which have developed over the last week or so.

There has been some suggestion here this evening that woodlots and forests are under provincial jurisdiction. While I would be the first to agree that this is the case, I have mentioned that many of our woodlots are privately-owned. I think the federal Government, along with the provincial Governments and municipalities, have some responsibility to ensure that the needs of people who have suffered major losses are met. There are things we can do. For instance, I think Governments can help those private woodlot owners with things like stand replanting, and perhaps programs to help clean up the burnt-out areas. I would think that our federal-provincial forestry programs, perhaps under the job creation category with the sponsorship of the Department of Employment and Immigration, can offer some assistance to woodlot owners who have suffered losses.

I could go into more detail on other fires but I know some of my friends have been amazed that they or their neighbours have not lost their homes and other buildings because of these fires. Recently a friend of mine was trying to get home from Charlottetown only to discover that the road was blocked by fire equipment while fire-fighters and some of his neighbours were trying to put the fire out. He took a back road to get to his farm. By the time he got there, all he could see was smoke.