

Commercial logging has been conducted on the peninsula since the 1920s, for lumber, pit props, timbers, and pulpwood, but the volume of extraction has varied widely in irregular boom and bust cycles. Logging technology, however, has changed irreversibly from horse and bucksaw to large diesel skidders, articulated forwarders, and roadside slashers, which delimb and chunk the logs and load them onto "b-train" (double trailer) trucks. Feller-bunchers, also called mechanical harvesters, have recently been tried in western Newfoundland and might further increase yield but will reduce employment.

After its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, pulpwood extraction declined on the peninsula to a complete halt in 1992 because transport costs were high and mills were using more recycled material. It has since recovered modestly. In 1995, a modernized paper plant opened in Stephenville, in southwest Newfoundland. The new plant possesses insufficient licenses for timber land to operate efficiently, so it has been placing large orders for pulpwood from the peninsula Crown land, keeping numerous small independent contractors and trucking companies busy.

Production of lumber and chips for fuel has also expanded in the 1990s, further increasing demands for local timber. The cod moratorium led to an upsurge in local house starts and domestic construction projects, because fishermen and plant workers found themselves with discretionary time and a guaranteed income for a few years. Sawmills of all sizes, from small domestic pushbenches to large commercial operations, proliferated. Prime trees for sawlogs—never numerous and becoming scarcer—were in great demand. The U.S. import market for Newfoundland lumber opened as other Canadian provinces reached their import quota limits. From 1991 to 1996, chips for fuel became a profitable business when a large electricity generating plant operated in Roddickton. The plant purchased byproducts from sawmills and cutovers for chipping into fuel, but its capacity was great enough that it also commissioned loggers to chip some of the region's standing timber.

This increase in logging and lumber production doubled employment in the peninsula's woods industry between 1980 and 1996, but employment is still lower than in the days of the fisher-logger. Mechanization and unionization since 1960 have reduced the workforce. The employment increase is mostly in the small local logging firms and sawmills, which are not unionized. These workers sometimes have difficulty finding enough weeks of work a year to become eligible for unemployment insurance.

While extraction was increasing dramatically, changes were also underway in forest management. The Newfoundland Forest Service (henceforth, "Forestry" or "foresters"), currently a branch of the provincial Ministry of Forest Resources and Agrifoods, developed a twenty-year planning cycle using improved inventory data to assess the timber supply (Flight and Peters 1992). The inventory determined that Newfoundland's timber supply is under heavy demand, that demand for sawlogs on