

### The Great Northern Peninsula Forest

Until the late twentieth century, rural Newfoundlanders made ends meet by holding a variety of jobs, shifting work seasonally, and combining employment with subsistence production. The forests behind the coastal communities, or outports, provided fuel and building materials, food, medicines, and furs. When fishermen took up their gear and boats in the fall, many "went into the woods" to sign up at logging camps run by large international paper companies like International Paper and Bowater (Omohundro 1994). Logging was a regular and valuable component of many fishermen's annual income. Northerners may be called fisher-loggers, with divided loyalties between the sea and the forest. Most of the 24,000 residents of the 60 small communities on the Great Northern Peninsula still rely on the forest for part of their subsistence or income (Felt and Sinclair 1995).

The Great Northern Peninsula (henceforth "the north" or "the peninsula") is typical of Newfoundland in some respects. It is close to the provincial average in the proportion of land surface with productive forest (about one third), the proportion of unalienated Crown (provincial) land (about one third), and in timber harvested (about 10% of the provincial total, for 2 of 20 provincial districts (Gibbons 1991; O'Neill 1992). The province manages the northern forest districts in the same fashion as the other districts, and its residents, who are descendants of early nineteenth century Irish and English immigrants, live as people in other regions do—albeit with a little less income and a little more subsistence production. The criticism which peninsula residents level at forest practices in their region appears to be common also in other regions. Therefore, the sociocultural and managerial systems shaping northern forest issues are typical of much of the island and similar to parts of all the Atlantic provinces.

The north is atypical in a few significant respects. The climate is more severe than most of Newfoundland, so trees grow more slowly. The northern forest is relatively isolated from markets and mills, being an additional day's drive by truck. The Crown has a larger presence than the pulp and paper companies compared to western and central Newfoundland, where forest is mostly owned or controlled by three paper mills. The peninsula's economy is perhaps the least diverse of regions on the island. Fish, minerals, and timber extraction have been the only industries. Since the cod moratorium in 1992, however, the fishery, though still the biggest moneymaker, is much reduced, and the mining has ceased, but timber extraction has reached historically high levels. Recently tourism shows prospects of becoming an important supplemental industry. In sum, the northern forest, though restrained by a harsh climate, has moved by default into a leading position in an extractive economy in a marginal area.

### Recent Developments in the Forest