

Good Afternoon

I am Daniel Keathley, current chair of the Great Lakes Forest Alliance, and on behalf of the entire Board of Trustees I welcome you to the opening session of: “Crisis of Opportunity: Sustaining and Strengthening Forest-Based Industries in the Great Lakes Region.”

The objective of the conference is to raise awareness and identify actions to enhance forest-based industries and the role they play in sustaining the region’s economy, environment, and quality of life.

We have arranged a very strong slate of speakers and panelists, have a phenomenal facility, and have incorporated opportunities for everyone to contribute their best thinking and specialized knowledge to the process. Over the next two days we hope that you will experience engaging talks and learn new information, but more importantly that you will engage with us in the start of the process of identifying a path to a sustainable future for the forest-based industries, and the forest resources of this region.

If we look at the forest resource base in the Great Lakes region, it is expanding, but so is the demand for wood products, as well as the demand for other goods and services that come from the forest. Similarly on the national and global scales there are increasing demands for use of the forest for wood products, paper, and recreation, as well increasing pressures to preserve wild ecosystems. The vast global forest resource base is confronted by seemingly insatiable and expanding societal demands for both utilization and preservation.

Forest industries are also changing. Globalization has caused changes such as corporate mergers. We also see that countries in southeast Asia fully entering the market and growing societal pressure for green certification are altering the structure of the wood supply and marketplace. Along with this, we have an increased understanding of ecological principles and more clearly see the significance of forests as biological systems that are intimately linked to the protection of our watershed and wildlife populations.

Additionally, the increasing fragmentation of our forested lands compounds the dilemma of dealing with these issues. Moreover, sustainable utilization cannot be attained by shifting use to non-renewable resources. We must rely on our forest resources, and it is essential that we give heed to all of the elements necessary for their sustainable management. We face a very complex set of issues.

In 1914 Gifford Pinchot very eloquently captured this concept in the book *The Training of a Forester*. He wrote:

“The Forest is a national necessity. Without the material, the protection, and the assistance it supplies, no nation can long succeed. Many regions of the old world, such as Palestine, Greece, Northern Africa, and Central India, offer in themselves the most impressive object lessons of the effect upon national prosperity and national character of the neglect of the forest and its consequent destruction.”

This region has some of the most magnificent forest in the world. We are blessed with over 200 million acres of forest land that contains a wondrous diversity of hardwood and softwood species. An array of forest types that enrich our lives aesthetically, protect our watersheds, provide wildlife habitat, and which provides the resource base that sustains our nearly 100 billion dollar forest products industry, an industry that provides the economic foundation for many communities and the quality of life enjoyed by the citizens in the region.

During the past 20 years the Alliance has focused on issues that are of paramount importance in sustaining the forests of this region, such as leading efforts to do a resource assessment in the late 80's and early 90's, as well as working toward defining the social, economic and ecological criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management.

Two years ago the Alliance began a strategic planning process to identify the most pressing issues in the region. Clearly today the most pressing issue, the greatest threat to sustainable management of this regions forests is the escalating loss of the forest products industry: the possible deterioration of the economic pillar of sustainability. In this region. There are other threats as well: issues with invasive species, such as emerald ash borer, the expanding urban/rural interface and fragmentation of forest lands that accompanies it, and so on. But without question the ongoing loss of forest industry from this region, which undercuts the economic base of communities in the region, cripples the social capital needed for sustainable solutions, and destroys the capacity for sustainable forest management activities, was identified as the top issue.

We had many questions: Is it possible to reverse this trend? Does the brightest future rest in the current industries, new industries, such as ligno-cellulosic biorefineries, or some combination of the two? How do we strike the proper balance? What types of new products can the resource base sustain? How should new industries be structured and what state and provincial policies are needed to enable them to be successful?

Clearly more information was needed and so this conference was identified as a first step. We hope you came to work, because the success of this event rests on your input and your commitment to continuing action following the conference.

We thank you all for making the commitment to attend and participate in this conference and hope you will find it a productive and worthwhile two days.

Welcome!