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Applauding Integrated Decision-Making in our Province

Earlier this month the New Brunswick Government released its new **Community Energy Policy**. The policy aims to encourage community-based groups to establish, maintain, and operate renewable energy generation projects which would feed clean energy into the provincial grid. In its current form, the policy will allocate up to 75 megawatts of energy production to community groups throughout the province, with each group allowed to provide a maximum of 15 megawatts.

Although the policy's proponents and opponents are debating the strengths and weaknesses of policy details, there is an interesting characteristic of its format which to date has been overlooked. The Community Energy Policy is neither a community development policy, an environmental policy, nor an energy policy, but rather it is a policy which aggregates these three sectors within an integrated management approach. This particular policy is one of the few, and perhaps the first of its kind in the province, and as such, any weaknesses within its details may at first glance overshadow the strengths contained within.

Integrated management approaches internalize a more holistic perspective of the world. They are designed on the premise that no single system, be it environmental, political, cultural or economic, operates in isolation. An integrated approach seeks to overcome the challenges of traditional single-system policies in which the intended benefits in one system are often undermined by unintended consequences in other systems. In the recent past many economic policies have prospered at the detriment of environmental sustainability; and vice versa, if we look at the potential economic impacts of many proposed environmental policies.

In this case, the Community Energy Policy acknowledges the interdependencies of environmental sustainability, community development, and economically-achievable energy security, and cannot be analyzed and judged as simply the sum of its parts. The Community Energy Policy is perhaps not an optimal policy when broken down into separate elements. For example, to maximize environmental sustainability the policy should perhaps increase the 75 MW ceiling and offer community groups a larger incentive than \$0.10/kwh. Yet from an economic perspective, perhaps it would be more appropriate if the policy did not guarantee participants an above-market price in the first place. This is a good example of why an integrated approach does not seek to maximize any particular set of single-system benefits but rather seeks to optimize a set of collective benefits.

Although I have been discussing the Community Energy Policy, integrated management approaches are not confined to provincial politics; this same integrated approach can be utilized at all levels of decision-making, including that of an individual. As an increasing number of decisions and policies are made following an integrated approach the small benefits spread across all systems will coalesce to ensure the prosperity of all those involved.

History has shown us the often detrimental consequences of single-system approaches and their impact on multiple systems. This should give us proof and support for the use of integrated management approaches as we make our way into the future. So perhaps the Community Energy Policy is precisely what is needed at this juncture in order to establish a long-term sustainable balance between the lived and the natural environments.

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