Potential Canada-EU trade barriers arising from sustainable forest bioenergy feedstock sustainability criteria

J. Murray – MFC Candidate (University of Toronto), BSc (McGill)
Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto – jessica.murray@mail.utoronto.ca

Context and Goals
The impact of biomass sustainability guidelines and possible binding extensions on Canada-EU solid biomass trade has not been examined in detail. This report explores the potential barriers to trade between Europe and Canada as a result of conflicts between the Renewable Energy Directive and existing and potential biomass supply chains. It presents an analysis of EU RED in comparison with existing forest certification systems, operational definitions, criteria, and best management practices associated with biomass harvest in Canada. These systems are compared and contrasted, and analyzed to determine whether conflicts may arise due to differences in intent or choice of terminology.

Results
National and regional certification standards, provincial policies, legal standards, and recommended management guidelines were analyzed to determine the extent to which the EU RED criteria and listed best management practices are addressed by Canadian provincial forestry policies and voluntary certification systems.

The proposed creation of sustainability criteria for certain aspects of solid bioenergy feedstock production are at times based on concepts of sustainability that conflict with current Canadian policies and practices related to primary forests and greenhouse gas accounting.

Best management practices specified in the proposed EU criteria are met or exceeded in most provinces, and provincial policies often include dimensions of sustainability not covered by proposed EU criteria.

Conclusions
Fundamentally conflicting perceptions of sustainable procurement may potentially result in barriers to solid bioenergy feedstock trade and market development between Canada and the European Union, if not addressed by the involved parties.

If the EU applies the existing Renewable Energy Directive policy on primary forest preservation to solid forest bioenergy feedstocks, it may not effectively identify Canadian intensive biomass harvesting as sustainable, due to conflicting notions of sustainability with regards to primary forest use.

As well, Canada does not currently apply a greenhouse gas accounting system to the forest bioenergy feedstock supply chain, which may prevent certification to the EU RED standard.