

Steve & Barbet Mason

A former LURC commissioner and his wife talk about the changes taking place in their hometown

Steve and Barbet Mason both grew up in Greenville. Steve is a fourth-generation resident; Barbet is third-generation. To say that they love their hometown is an understatement. They met each other while attending high school here. This is the town where they bought their first home and where they raised their son.

Steve and Barbet both remember a time when their hometown was not facing so many challenges. They worry about a dwindling local economy, including recent job losses in manufacturing mills around the region.

During an interview at their dining room table, the couple gets visibly upset when asked how they feel about people in southern Maine criticizing Plum Creek's plan to create an enduring legacy for the Moosehead region.

Steve is a former LURC commissioner and says many people don't understand exactly how the Land Use Regulation Commission is supposed to work. Today, he owns and operates a family-run well drilling business. Previously, he and Barbet operated a logging business that employed roughly 50 people.

In your opinion, what does this region need most?

Steve: "The first objective has to be jobs and new employment opportunities. We have to find a way for the people living here to survive. Otherwise, we'll become nothing else than a retirement community."

But some people say Plum Creek's plan won't bring good jobs.

Barbet: "I'd like to know what those people think a 'good job' is. I think any job where you can earn money to feed your family is a good job. I don't think any of us should judge what someone else does for work. The jobs Plum Creek is talking about are good jobs, especially if you're bagging groceries for \$7 an hour."

Steve: "Overall, I think this plan is going to financially support a much larger area, but my first concern is Greenville. Still, I think we need to look at the larger picture. This plan will have a positive effect on all of Piscataquis and Somerset counties."

What do you think about some of the groups that oppose Plum Creek's plan?



BARBET & STEVE MASON want to see more families moving to the Moosehead Lake region.

Barbet: "I've listened to the NRCM (Natural Resources Council of Maine) for a long time. I've listened to them say things that are just not true. They're not saying anything new. It's the same people saying the same things."

Steve: "Groups like NRCM need the Plum Creeks of the world. They need to have an enemy in order to raise money and recruit new members. How many of those college kids collecting signatures in downtown Portland have come here?"

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— Barbet Mason

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How many of them lived here, or understand what it's like to live here?

Barbet: "Yes, I'd like to see a few of them move here and try to earn a living."

But there is also some local opposition to the plan.

Steve: "There is, but many of those people moved here from somewhere else, and now they don't want any more changes after they got their own little piece of heaven. There is part of this that is tearing at the fabric of our community."

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“But I believe Plum Creek has done a darn good job of trying to satisfy both ends of the spectrum.”

Barbet: “Yes they have. Plum Creek has compromised a lot. Just look at the differences between the first plan and the new plan.”

Is there any plan that everyone could support?

Steve: “I’m not convinced that out of 11 million acres (LURC’s jurisdiction including the islands) there isn’t room for everyone. I was a LURC commissioner for seven years, and I always worked to remember that we’re dealing with people’s livelihoods when we talk about their land. This is not going to be an easy task, but that doesn’t mean it’s wrong.”

Do you think some parts of the plan are misunderstood?

Steve: “When you’re talking about permanent, that’s a long time . . . it’s a very long time. (Smiles) Then again, this plan is not some kind of silver bullet. It’s not going to save Piscataquis County. I see it a concrete way for us to take a step toward rebuilding what was once here. How can that be a detriment?”

Barbet: “You know, some people will never be satisfied. It will never be good enough, no matter what you do, no matter how much you compromise.”

The NRCM offered their own vision for what Greenville should look like.

Steve: “If Plum Creek agreed to every single one of NRCM’s demands, they would come back and ask for more. That’s the business they’re in.”

Barbet: “NRCM describes themselves as stakeholders, without bringing anything to the table. They don’t need to live and work here. They don’t own anything here.”

Beyond new jobs, what does Greenville need?

Steve: “We need people to come here. We need to rebuild our lost population. We want permanent residents with kids. Whatever we get, it will help because we’re on a downhill slide right now. Without a plan, we don’t know what will happen here.”

But critics say a lot of the lots proposed by Plum Creek will become vacation homes.

Steve: “Vacation homes will be built in this area, regardless of what Plum Creek does.”

Barbet: “There are already little kingdom lots popping up everywhere. The first thing those people do is gate their land because they don’t want anyone else on their land.”

Steve: “That’s right, and if Plum Creek’s plan doesn’t go through, that’s what our future will likely look like. This is all we have. Plum Creek is carrying all the weight. Personally, I’ve always considered it a privilege to use their land as our own.”

Barbet: “Some people forget that landowners have rights other than the right to pay taxes.”

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— Steve Mason

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Steve: “Plum Creek has an open lands policy that is pretty unique, especially around here. Who else is steppin’ up to the plate with 400,000 acres?”

What do you like most about the revised plan?

Steve: “I’m glad to see that they pulled development off the remote ponds, and scaled back the resort at Lily Bay.”

What would you most like to say to those who don’t live in this region?

Barbet: “People just don’t know how hard it is to make a living here. When you live here, you earn your money, and it’s a tough place to live.”

Steve: “When we were growing up here, there was a lot going on. In the ‘60s, you had the railroads, Atlas Plywood, Great Northern Paper’s maintenance facility, Scott Paper. Things were bustling here.

“We need to embrace change, not fight it. That way, we can move in a positive direction. Nothing is ever going to be the same, but things can be improved if you do the right kind of planning for your future.”