

Woodchip traffic by rail resumes at Groupe Lebel

GILLES GAGNÉ

NOUVELLE — Groupe Lebel's sawmill in Nouvelle resumed shipping woodchips by rail at the beginning of May, ten months after the closure of the White Birch Paper mill in Rivière-du-Loup in July 2025. That closure was initially expected to be temporary, but on December 23, the mill went bankrupt.

Since November 2009, the Nouvelle sawmill, then owned by Temrex, had been sending woodchips by rail to the Rivière-du-Loup plant. At the time, woodchips became the largest source of traffic for the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), with annual traffic ranging between 600 and 1,200 carloads. Windmill blades became the SCFG's largest source of traffic in 2017, and cement traffic also surpassed woodchips in 2018. Windmills were hauled by rail until May 2022.

Luc Lévesque, director of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, says that the Nouvelle woodchips "are now sent to the Papiers Masson mill," located on the outskirts of the city of Gatineau, in the Outaouais region. Details about the tonnage or number of railcars expected to circulate between Nouvelle



Photo: G. Gagné

SCFG woodchip cars are back in service at the Nouvelle sawmill.

and Masson are not being released for now by the SCFG.

The woodchip cars used for that traffic are owned by the SCFG. Most of them were acquired at the end of the spring of 2025. The municipally controlled company had already owned 32 such cars since 2017. A year ago, it purchased Canadian National's fleet of 256 woodchip cars, bringing its total fleet to 288 units.

The SCFG supplies most of its woodchip cars to shippers outside the Gaspé Peninsula. Those mills wanted to continue renting the cars in the same way they had used CN's woodchip fleet. CN was no longer interested in

marketing that service, but the railway company still hauls the cars, along with other railway operators such as the Quebec-Gatineau Railway, which has acquired portions of Canadian Pacific trackage.

Papiers Masson is also owned by White Birch Paper, like the former F.F. Soucy mill in Rivière-du-Loup. Following its bankruptcy, that facility was purchased by Groupe Lebel at the end of March. The company does not expect to operate the plant as a newsprint mill and has indicated that up to a year may be needed to determine a new vocation for the Lower Saint Lawrence facility.