

Fighting Forest Spraying in Nova Scotia

David Orton

In Nova Scotia the struggle against the use of pesticides (biocides) on forests has been going on since the early 1970s. Every year, from Yarmouth to Cape Breton, depending on the declared “threat” to the forests, there are demonstrations, meetings and protests against spraying programs. Past activities by anti-spray activists have included pulling up softwood plantation seedlings, blockades, the exposure of fraudulent scientific claims, appeals to local politicians, court cases, token environmental representation on pesticide user committees, etc.

The latest development in the story is the introduction of biological controls – nematodes, bacteria, fungi, viruses, and genetically engineered organisms. We are informed by Forestry Canada, the federal forestry agency, that “environmentally acceptable pest control systems based primarily on biological systems will allow for the removal of classical pesticides from forestry practice.” Nematodes have recently been released on plantation sites to “control” the seedling debarking weevil, and they are being used against the spruce bud moth in white spruce plantations in New Brunswick. The use of biological controls is no advance in environmental consciousness, but a continued attempt to control nature for anthropocentric industrial interests, with ecological costs yet to be calculated.

It is fairly routine for some 80% of the people in a rural community to sign petitions asking that a particular spraying program be stopped. Forest spraying is being imposed without popular consent. Political or social pressure in communities has sometimes stopped particular spraying programs or brought about the “concession” of an aerial spray operation turned into ground spraying. The more natural forests are “intensive managed” for the pulp and paper industry, the more “controls” are needed to protect softwood trees growing in even-aged tree plantations. This situation invites a discussion about the fundamental nature of capitalist industrial society, and the need for alternatives for ecological and social survival.

Many rural people see their health and water supplies directly threatened, as woodlots adjacent to their homes are sprayed and the spray drifts onto their land. Others, while agreeing with human-centered concerns, also oppose spraying on biocentric grounds – that all plant and animal life in the forest has a right to a non-poisoned existence. The issues are much larger than whether a particular chemical is “safe” or not. Undermining and exposing the false claims of pesticide propaganda are crucial for gaining public support.

Agriculture Canada, the federal government agency which licenses pesticides and promotes their use in farming, has a toll-free number (800-267-6315), well publicized by the forest sprayers and their allies. The public is invited to call for reassurance on any pesticides used in Canada. The usual line is “the pesticide is registered by the federal government and if used according to label Instructions, it is safe.”

The Nova Scotia forestry-spraying program today is mainly a herbicide program. There are currently five chemical herbicides approved for use in forestry. The forestry herbicide of choice in Nova Scotia and across Canada is Vision, or glyphosate, made by Monsanto.

Any pesticide information made available to the public is promotional, company-generated, and

normally *only concerns the active ingredient*. Other information is considered confidential. For example, while the herbicide Vision has the active ingredient glyphosate, it makes up only 41% of the formula. To understand the toxicity of Vision or any other pesticide, one must consider the *full formulation*, including the inert ingredients. Inerts can be harmless fillers, but are often poisonous in their own right or enhance the toxicity of the active ingredient. There can also be contaminants from the production of a pesticide, plus break-down products and unknown added ingredients (for example defoamers in Vision).

In Pictou County in the summer of 1993, the one-sidedness of pesticide information and the opposition to clearcutting were successfully brought out. A demonstration was held against forest spraying and the forest management group, Pictou Forest Owners. A fiery and successful public meeting was organized in August in the farming and forestry community of Scotsburn, protesting pesticide use and forestry practices in local woodlands. More than 100 people attended, including a contingent from the forest industry. The local newspaper, the New Glasgow Evening News, usually a mouthpiece of the forest industry, even wrote an editorial after this meeting, under the headline, "Spraying concerns are legitimate"!

David Orton is a prolific green writer working hard and late in the far reaches of Nova Scotia. For more information, or to get involved, write to him at Green Web, R.R. #3, Saltsprings, Pictou County, Nova Scotia BOK 1PO Canada; phone/fax (902) 925-2514.

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