

Nova Scotia's Forests under Assault

Written by the Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides and the Green Web

General Situation

With guns and an imposed “legality”, the forests in Nova Scotia were taken by European settlers from the original indigenous MicMac people. The forests, considered sacred by the MicMac, have become secularized, and their contemporary exploitation is market-driven and ethic-free. (A recent Master's thesis by Paul Webster shows the resistance against forest destruction by the MicMac people and those of non-native ancestry. See, Pining for Trees: The History of Dissent against Forest Destruction in Nova Scotia 1749-1991, August 1991.)

Resistance against contemporary industrial forest exploitation continues. Forest activists and the public in Nova Scotia increasingly debate an alternative green forestry vision, rooted in the belief that the natural world has to be valued in its own right, irrespective of its utility to the human species, and that economics has to be subordinate to ecology. This alternative vision opposes the current doctrines of “sustainable development”, the orthodoxy governing national forestry policy. Sustainable development has replaced the failed former forestry doctrine of “sustained yield”. Forest ecosystems cannot possibly satisfy continued sustained “development” which, called for by the Brundtland report Our Common Future, is premised on unending economic growth and consumerism – along with further population growth.

The forests of Nova Scotia, part of the Acadian Forest Region, span Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, and two national boundaries. Hosie's Native Trees of Canada, describes the Acadian Forest as “closely related to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest and, to a lesser extent, to the Boreal forest”. Nova Scotia has about 30 indigenous tree species. If exotic introduced species are included with foreign and native shrubs that attain tree size, then there are about sixty species present, according to a provincial government publication, The Trees of Nova Scotia: A Guide to the Native and Exotic Species.

Species favoured for forest regeneration by government and the forest industry are only a few softwood species, to feed the pulp and paper industry in the province. Some recent indication of this is shown in data produced by the federal government agency, Forestry Canada-Maritimes Region, see Technical Note No. 267. (The Maritimes Region includes Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.) For 1991, Maritime forest nurseries shipped 70.5 million seedlings, and 88% of the seedlings were made up of only 4 species: black spruce (54%), white spruce (12%), jack pine (12%), and Norway spruce (10%) – an introduced species. This clearly documents how a very few softwood species are favoured at the expense of the natural biodiversity of the Acadian Forest Region. Within Nova Scotia, commercial thinning favours a narrow range of softwood pulp species, with no hardwoods available for reforestation programs. However, planting programs lag far behind cutting programs in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland, and are not compensated for by natural regeneration. Clearcutting, used for about 90% of felling in Canada, means reliance on replanting programs. Yet, in 1988, 42,000 hectares of forest were harvested in Nova Scotia, with 11,480 hectares replanted, according to

the 1991 publication by Statistics Canada, Human Activity and the Environment. The general situation described here is the same for New Brunswick and Newfoundland, and the data is given in the Statistics Canada publication. It should also be remembered, that not all replanting is successful. Rather than replanting, environmentalists working on forestry issues favour natural reseeding and cutting practices which would facilitate such reseeding **and** maintain the original diversity of species in the Acadian Forest Region.

Nova Scotia has embraced a **pulpwood forestry policy**, seen as necessary to feed the pulp and paper industry in the province. In a Forestry Policy announced in 1986, the provincial government announced the goal of “A doubling of forest production by the year 2025.” Currently, about 80% of production is in pulpwood, the lowest common economic denominator for the human use of the forests. Trees grown in plantations or through natural regeneration are optimistically projected to be ready for cutting in 35-45 years. For the provincial and federal governments and the forest industry, Nova Scotia is considered a “showcase for reforestation and forest management”. Considerable government and industry money is spent to disseminate this mythology to the public, and, through programs such as “Project Learning Tree”, to the children in the school systems. The provincial press is also a conduit for government and forest industry views. But the reality for anyone who lives in the countryside or who walks in the forest or who drives the logging roads, and increasingly the main roads, is uncaring forest destruction, often to be followed by forest spraying. The official forestry policy in Nova Scotia has to be characterized as “ecological heresy”. This policy is directed at increasing the supply of pulpwood, not maintaining the biological diversity and options for the Acadian forest.

Land Ownership, Small Woodlot Owners and Corruption

Current “ownership” of forest land can be approximately assigned as 27% provincial government, 3% federal government (includes two federal parks), and 70% private. The “private” ownership category is broken down into “large private” – more than 1,000 acres or 400 hectares – and “small private” – less than 1,000 acres or 400 hectares. The small woodlot owners number over 30,000 individuals and are targeted by the government for its forestry strategy. Forest companies own over two million acres of the ten million forested acres in Nova Scotia, and have approximately two million acres of provincial crown land under long-term lease – subject to more or less unrestricted exploitation. The big three transnational pulp and paper companies in the province – Stora, Scott, and Bowater – each dominate through their economic power, distinct geographical areas of the province. Stora and Scott have extensive long-term leases on crown lands. Irving, another forest giant involved in pulp and paper production, with a home base in New Brunswick, has bought in the last few years extensive areas of forest land in Nova Scotia, although this company’s ultimate plans and the total amount of land it owns in the province remain unclear.

Small woodlot owners have had their attempts to **independently** organize collectively over the years undermined by government and corporate hostility, court challenges, and the setting up of captive bargaining groups. Also, the establishment of government-financed “Venture” groups around the province, have helped to ensnare a section of the small woodlot owners through subsidized “forest management plans”, as suppliers of cheap pulpwood to the mills.

The latest assault against the small woodlot owners and yet another illustration of the industrial domination of Nova Scotia government forest policy was the forced resignation of Primary Forest Products Marketing Board Chairman Graham Langley. The Board and Langley set out to bring sane reform into the province's corrupt forest products marketing system. They ran head on into the old guard network of pulp companies, logging contractors and forest industry hacks in the bureaucracy. This cartel has steadfastly been able to maintain long-standing traditions of corruption and patronage, while at the same time collaborating to marginalize the economic position of Nova Scotia's 30,000 small private woodlot owners. During the past decade timber prices in the province have remained the lowest in North America.

The Marketing Board's investigations of one current captive forest products bargaining association revealed lavish spending and expense account abuses by its executive. The federal police force, the RCMP, was called in to investigate complaints of kickbacks, skimming on pulp sales and quota allocation payoffs. A backlash of pressure from the forest industry, led to the sacking of Langley by the provincial government in October of 1991.

A Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides study of published government records showed more than \$120,000 in stumpage rebate overpayments made to Stora over a two-year period, from 1987 to 1988. A mysterious \$1.2 million dollar grant was also given to Stora at the time of the last provincial election in 1988. The Coalition's study also showed discrepancies in the calculations used by the Department of Natural Resources to set Stora's stumpage rates for the next ten years. The "blunder" could mean additional losses of over a million dollars, depending on the volume of wood Stora purchases from the province.

Wildlife

In early 1992, the Wildlife Advisory Council, through the Chairman of the Council, circulated a discussion document called Today's Challenge – Tomorrow's Legacy, A Wildlife Strategy for Nova Scotia, and organized several public meetings based on this document. This Council is government funded, with close ties to the forest industry in the province. The discussion document was severely criticized by several naturalist and environmental groups. Criticisms centered on the Strategy document accepting existing land use patterns – namely clearcutting, softwood promotion and pesticide spraying; taking for granted the human-centered bias that nature and wildlife are "resources" for human use; adopting the "game" hunter/trapper orientation, when hunting across Canada is being undertaken by less than 10 percent of the public; and not challenging the impact of the doctrine of sustainable development on wildlife.

The Green Web environmental research group, distributed throughout the province a critique of the Wildlife Advisory Council position called, An Alternative Vision for Wildlife in Nova Scotia. Drawing from the deep ecology orientation of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, the critique pointed out the necessity to move in consciousness away from a human-centered universe. Wildlife has inherent value, independent of its usefulness to human beings. In order to protect the deteriorating situation for wildlife in Nova Scotia, An Alternative Vision argued that drastic steps to protect habitat were necessary. It advocated making all provincial crown land wildlife reserves, closed to commercial forestry, hunting, fishing, and trapping. Also, wildlife corridors for animal mobility and genetic exchange would be needed to link provincial crown

wildlife reserves with the two national parks. This would make approximately 27% of Nova Scotia a wildlife reserve. The Green Web also called for many changes in existing hunting practices, e.g. eliminating bear hunting and the trapping of wildlife; deer hunting to be reduced to a two-week from the now existing six-week season; and much tighter restrictions on small game hunting. Advocated also were, no clearcutting or spraying, or use of heavy machinery on private forested lands in the province, so as to preserve wildlife habitat.

Wilderness

Nova Scotia has less than 2.5% of its land area protected from industrial use. Virtually all this is within two federal parks, the Kejimikujik and Cape Breton Highlands national parks. Because there are no buffer zones, prevailing destructive land use patterns of forest exploitation and hunting, encircle national park perimeters. On Cape Breton, four large (5,000 to 30,000 hectare) wilderness areas remain, without protected status, on provincial crown lands.

Topographical constraints and the absence of reliable timber markets in the past, have left extensive areas of undisturbed old growth forests still occupying steep slopes and remote areas around highland plateau areas on Cape Breton. Provincial government officials and timber interests intent on exploiting these areas, have to date been reluctant to recognize the extent and significance of these unique ecological sites. Forests along the upper slopes of the Cape Breton Highlands Plateau represent the largest remnant of native old growth hardwood forest left in eastern North America. Only token remnants of old growth in the area have protected status, placing the continued survival of old growth-dependent plant and animal species in jeopardy.

Government-authorized harvesting methods in Nova Scotia rely almost exclusively on various forms of clearcutting. (In 1989, the provincial government introduced the Forest/Wildlife Guidelines and Standards for Nova Scotia, stating that for crown land and for forest management on private lands obtaining money from federal/provincial agreements, clearcuts were to be limited to 50 hectares (125 acres) in size. Areas larger than this had to have a 50 metre (165 feet) belt of uncut trees as a wildlife travel lane.) Extensive areas of primary regeneration are then defoliated with herbicides after clearcut logging. These practices result in altered stream flows, increased erosion, loss of nutrients, blowdown of adjacent stands, long-term loss of wildlife, reductions in biological diversity, and reduced aesthetic values. Poorly planned logging and road construction have already devastated the productivity of many streams, while providing marginal economic benefit. These factors continue to seriously compromise the increased recreational opportunities and long-term sustainability of the province's forests. Pulp and paper companies have continued to cut large portions of provincial "game" reserve areas – e.g. Liscomb, Chignecto and Tobeatic – during the past decade. Herbicides are then used to convert cut-over native forests to softwood monoculture pulpwood plantations. Alterations and reductions in various wildlife populations have been dramatic with the composition of remaining populations fundamentally changed.

Subsidized forest management programs favouring even-aged softwood dominated forests will be more prone to future insect and disease attack, most notably by the eastern spruce budworm. Extensive insecticide spraying will then be demanded to "protect" silviculture investments, now

averaging more than \$1,500 per hectare. There is obviously a pressing need for long-term ecosystem planning, with full cost accounting, in the province's forests.

The Regulatory Illusion

William Sinclair, in the 1990 Environment Canada publication, Controlling Pollution from Canadian Pulp and Paper Manufacturers: A Federal Perspective, states:

Both industry and governments want to foster an atmosphere consistent with the ideals of the free enterprise system, which allows industry to grow and create wealth over time with minimal government intervention

The Canadian government showing its traditional bias towards the pulp and paper industry has provided substantive extensions for new regulatory changes under the Fisheries Act, enabling companies like Stora in Nova Scotia to cite "extraordinary circumstances", which amounts to pleading poverty, to delay their implementation. The changes can be delayed from July 1, 1992 until December 31, 1995.

What forestry activists have discovered through their experience in Nova Scotia, is that there is a fundamental convergence of interests and basic values between the regulated and regulatory bodies in the forestry sector. So, for example, where a basic belief is held that pesticides have to be used in "forest management", and the impact of the "legal" discharge of pesticide poisons on forestry ecosystems cannot be fully known; where, with the pulp and paper mills, the nature and quantities of toxins being "legally" discharged through stack gasses, effluent, sludge and industrial waste disposal are only partially known, as is the impact on receiving ecosystems; and where, whatever data that is gathered on the pulp and paper industry, mainly comes from the companies themselves; then it is an illusion to believe that ecosystems are, or can be, protected by governments and their regulatory agencies.

A growing public environmental consciousness in Canada, as in other countries, which is partly fed by environmental activism, is demanding change in the forest industry's assault on Nature. Because such demands have a marketplace reflection – e.g. chlorine-free pulp, use of recycled content in newsprint – the forest industry and government regulatory agencies are "going through the motions" of displaying environmental concern. However, leaving aside the green-washing and false claims (e.g. the use of chlorine dioxide instead of chlorine makes a pulp batch "chlorine-free" according to Scott in Nova Scotia), the "concern" is driven by the desire to retain or increase market share. In many ways, it becomes more difficult to see through the government and industry green-wash and assess the actual situation. The basic environmental problems remain, as does the totally human-centered "grow or die" mentality, that feeds the forest industry's deadly assault on forest ecosystems in Nova Scotia, as across Canada.

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This composite account of the forestry situation in Nova Scotia was written, on the invitation of Colleen McCrory of Canada's Future Forest Alliance, as part of a national portrait of Canada's

forests, for a conference “The Boreal Forests Of The World”, to be held in Sweden, September 30-October 4, 1992. Some parts of this article have appeared in different form in other publications.

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