

Selective Inclusiveness

A Forestry Review

By David Orton

Restoring the Acadian Forest: A Guide to Forest Stewardship for Woodlot Owners in the Maritimes, by Jamie Simpson, Gaspereau Press Limited, Kentville, Nova Scotia, 2008, 155 pages, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-9736321-2-5.

“Sound forest management, as I have learned through experience and through the UNB faculty of Forestry and Environmental Management, means managing a forest for its highest economic value while sustaining a diversity of forest values including wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and employment.” Jamie Simpson, M.Sc.F., November 19th, 2003, Jaakko Poyry report presentation, as posted on the internet.

“When implemented with care and planning, both harvesting and thinning can increase the long-term economic value of a woodlot while encouraging a healthy, productive and resilient forest. The result is a much-improved woodlot that can be passed on as a legacy of careful stewardship, bearing the signature of the woodlot owner for future generations to read.” Simpson, p. 47

“The earth does not belong to humans.” Arne Naess

INTRODUCTION

It was with some reluctance that I have decided to review **Restoring the Acadian Forest**. This is a “feel good” book, with pictures of people hugging or looking at large trees, pictures of wildlife and wild flowers, pictures of forest landscapes, etc. and pictures of woodlot owners and people cutting trees and moving them out of the woods. Being based in Nova Scotia, I know personally the four “woodlot owners” who are profiled for this province. Yet there is much about this text, after reading it, which makes me uneasy from a forest perspective and the values which I support for the forest. A close friend of mine, involved in forest education with young people over many years, feels the same way. Hence this review. When a book claims to be a “guide” for others, then those of us who care about the Acadian forest and who have battled over the years on her behalf, also have the right to make our views known.

This book of 155 pages has six chapters: Chapter 1 “Understanding the Acadian Forest”, Chapter 2 “Living in the Acadian Forest”, Chapter 3 “Working in the Woodlot”, Chapter 4 “Long-term Planning”, Chapter 5 “Ten Woodlot Profiles” (five from New Brunswick, four from Nova Scotia, and one from Prince Edward Island), and Chapter 6 “Trees of the Acadian Forest”. There are two Appendices, A is concerned with “Forest Measurements and Conversions Reference” and B with “Bird Box Dimensions.” There are also “Recommended Readings and Resources” and “Chapter Notes and References”, but no Index. We are told in internet postings by the author that there will be “later editions.”

The book cover informs us that the author, Jamie Simpson, born in 1974, has a Master of Science degree in Forestry from the University of New Brunswick. He has a forest “woodlot” base of about 80 acres in the south-western part of that province. The term woodlot is used extensively in this book, as in the title. It implies that forests are here for human purposes as woodlots. This seeming unconscious human-centeredness e.g. humans as “stewards” for the forest, that humans can “own” Nature, etc. permeates **Restoring the Acadian Forest**. Social and cultural conventions, which presently determine how we humans interact with the forests, have no basis in biological realities as “rights”, but this is not up for contention in this book. The ethics promoted remain essentially human-centered or anthropocentric, and not based in Earth-centeredness or ecocentrism, where the “self” is defined as part of the forest: “We

are Earthlings first, humans second.” (Stan Rowe, **Earth Alive**, p.21.)

Simpson is also a fairly recently appointed spokesperson on forestry (2008), the “Forestry Program Coordinator”, with the mainstream Ecology Action Centre (EAC) in Halifax, Nova Scotia. When Simpson issues statements for them (the EAC forest mailing list is only one-way for its recipients), he lists his degree (M.Sc.F.) after his name. But the university does not necessarily confer the right to speak with authority on forest issues.

The projected coverage of this book is overly ambitious, as it includes not only the forests of the three provinces in the Maritimes but also of Maine. A note on the book’s cover makes an even wider claim: “**Restoring the Acadian Forest** is a comprehensive resource for woodlot owners in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, eastern Quebec, Maine and northern New England.” My focus in this review is Nova Scotia, where I have worked on forest issues. I have, in the past, worked with forest activists in New England and have had many articles published in **The Northern Forest Forum**, now defunct, but put out from a New Hampshire base.

My review of this book is thus written from the perspective of someone who has been involved both practically and theoretically in opposing industrial capitalist forestry in Nova Scotia since arriving in this province in 1979 from the West Coast, where I was similarly involved. The question which arises for me, is, to what extent does this book reflect and build on the views of those who have written on forest issues in Nova Scotia previously, whether from a status quo position or from an environmental perspective? Given his educational background and socialization, another question is to what extent does the author attempt to legitimate the foresters in the various provincial departments of forestry in the three Maritime provinces, and federally in the Canadian Forestry Service, by looking at their work non-critically? Does this author, for example, deny the responsibility of provincial and federal foresters for joining with the industry in defending and justifying industrial capitalist forestry in the Maritimes and opposing the environmental critique?

Those putting out books and other publications on the forests are attempting to influence the debate about what should happen to the forests. As the late Australian forest activist and deep ecologist Richard Sylvan (1935-1996) said a long time ago (see my [appreciation](#) of Sylvan’s life in the winter 1997 issue of **The Trumpeter**), the most fundamental conflicts in forestry are over values, not forest facts, and concern about how we humans are going to use the forests. All of us should strive to better ‘know’ the forest world and its inhabitants. Books which contribute to this in some way, like Jamie Simpson’s **Restoring the Acadian Forest**, whatever their inadequacies, have their place in this. Yet how do human interests see themselves as fitting in to forests and on what terms, is the fundamental issue for the Acadian forest – and all forests – and for genuine forest-keeping.

This review looks mainly at the theoretical and philosophical assumptions in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**. Such assumptions are reflected in the language used. The practical advice given is useful but, at least for Nova Scotia, can often be found in previously published literature, and will not be my focus. Also in Nova Scotia, the provincial department of forestry – which has gone under various names, currently Natural Resources – has put out a number of “fact” publications which do not obviously serve industrial forestry, although this is very much a minority trend, e.g. “Woods And Wildlife From Your Woodlot” by Fred Payne, or “Notes on Nova Scotia Wildlife.” (See for much practical forest-related information for Nova Scotia some publications, un-acknowledged in Simpson’s book, Gary Saunders, **The Trees Of Nova Scotia: A Guide To The Native And Exotic Species**; Anders Sandberg and Peter Clancy, **Against the Grain: Foresters and Politics in Nova Scotia**; Wilfred Creighton, **Forestkeeping: A History Of The Department Of Lands And Forests In Nova Scotia 1926-1969**; Ralph Johnson, **Forests of Nova Scotia**; Jim Lotz, **Green Horizons: The Forests and Foresters of Nova Scotia**; The **Trees Around Us: A manual of good forest practice for Nova Scotia**; Robertson, Young, and Lees, **Hardwood Thinning Manual**; and the important Dalhousie University MA Thesis by Paul Webster, **Pining For Trees: The History Of Dissent Against Forest Destruction In Nova Scotia 1749-1991.**) Similar publications are available in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

The forest industry should be called by its real name – the de-forestation industry. The Acadian forest, which existed for thousands of years in terms of its basic ecological composition, has been destroyed in the Maritimes. As this book notes, about one percent of Acadian old growth forest remains. The species composition has not only changed significantly but the trees which remain after the forests have been “pulped” are matchsticks compared to the forest giants of the past. Plus the flora and fauna are hugely impoverished. The perspective of this reviewer is that any truly sustainable forestry requires a sustainable society. Any society places demands upon its forests. Why is it that we think, as in this book, that we can “manage” forests for the better but we do not raise the necessity to manage humans and their demands upon the Acadian forest? Leaving aside the implied hubris in this book’s title, society itself has to be sustainable if forestry is to follow suit. But this is not part of the discussion in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**.

DISCUSSION

"As deep ecology supporters see it, we share this planet with other life forms, including all animal life, on a basis of equality. There is no hierarchy of life forms where humans are on top of an evolutionary pyramid, free to do whatever they want with the rest of the natural world." - (Part of my written tribute to Pam Langille, associating her with this sentiment, on learning of her recent death.)

How Did this Book Come into Being and Why Was it Written?

We are told that this book had its genesis in the concerns of someone in Nova Scotia, working in the woods, who stated that: “There was no comprehensive resource available for woodlot owners who wish to learn about the Acadian Forest and ways to restore its ecological and economic value.” p. iv

So one has to ask is this true and does it hinge around the definition of “comprehensive” because there are a number of books and pamphlets written with this general focus for Nova Scotia. Can one also “restore” a destroyed Acadian forest, or is this human conceit to believe we have such ecological knowledge? And when there is conflict between “restoring” ecological and economic value what wins out? Is not the overwhelming bias towards economics as Jamie Simpson indicates in the quotation, in a different context, which opens this review? Furthermore, given the comprehensive assumption in the premise for the need for this book, then any author who takes up such a task has to write such a “comprehensive” book. This should be one of the criteria for its evaluation.

We are told that “technical accuracy” was achieved by having people from the Canadian Forest Service, the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources, the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and others, review the manuscript. So in the name of a “woodlot” alternative to industrial forestry, Simpson has embraced for accuracy those who in government employment have provided intellectual services in support of industrial forestry! In Nova Scotia it has been provincial and federal foresters who have spoken up publicly, when necessary, to defend the clear-cutting and the spraying practices of the forest industry.

What Is the Social Base for the Critique of Industrial Forestry?

Is this book also “inclusive” in the voices portrayed in Nova Scotia, as elsewhere in the other Maritimes provinces, in opposing industrial forestry and in helping to define possible alternatives for small woodlot owners?

In Nova Scotia, environmentalists like Charlie Restino, Geoffrey and Elizabeth May, Rudi Haase, Judy Davis, Neal Livingston, myself, and others too many to name, worked to put forward a wildlife and tree-friendly alternative to the routine massacre of industrial capitalist forestry. (See for an excellent deep

ecology-inspired exposure of the general industrial forestry problem in Canada and the United States, the 1993 book **Clearcut: The Tragedy Of Industrial Forestry**. Also see several forest-related essays by myself on our [web site](#).) There were of course a range of perspectives from light green to deep green within this environmental opposition in Nova Scotia. My own interventions tried to uphold an ecocentric and social equity perspective, inspired by deep ecology. The philosophy of deep ecology or ecocentrism is not mentioned once in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**, as is its contribution to the critique of industrial forestry in the Maritimes.

The important point is that the basic challenge to and critique of industrial forestry in Nova Scotia mainly came out of the environmental movement. (Jim Drescher, a professional forester, and “woodlot” owner featured in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**, also played a role as an environmentalist in developing the critique of industrial forestry. For example, Drescher wrote a brilliant 1994 poem describing the absurdities of forest ‘ownership’ called “[Break the Momentum](#)” which I have used extensively.) The opposition to forest biocide use in Canada was *centered* in Nova Scotia. This overall historical environmental record for Nova Scotia is absent from **Restoring the Acadian Forest**.

Woodlot owners through their organizations in Nova Scotia were initially on board with the assumptions of industrial forestry – clear-cutting, spraying, narrowing the species basis of the Acadian forest in favour of pulp mill-desired softwood species, etc. A major reason for this was that the federal and provincial governments subsidized this type of forestry for woodlot owners. “Venture Groups” for woodlot owners in Nova Scotia were set up as an organizational form designed to bring small forest owners on board for the goals of industrial forestry, i.e. supplying pulp to the mills. These venture groups, starting in 1977, were funded mainly by the federal government. The government ended this funding in 1995, and the approximately 18 venture groups then in the province had to go it alone or go under. In the past, I have taken part in a number of demonstrations and many on the ground anti-spraying actions against the destructive forest practices of the then local venture group of woodlot owners in Pictou County, West Pictou Forest Owners.

It is however true that in the last few years a re-vitalized Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners' And Operators' Association has itself contributed to undermining industrial forestry as the dominant thought paradigm for Nova Scotia's forests, by promoting a more ecologically conscious forestry, variously called “low impact” and “restoration” forestry. Spokespersons like Wade Prest and Tom Miller from this Association, who are featured in this book, with others like Bob Bancroft who has focused on wildlife, have come to play significant forestry roles in Nova Scotia. But in the past, and still to a large extent today, woodlot owners as well as pulp and paper mill workers have been part of the industrial forestry problem in Nova Scotia. This kind of history is also absent from Jamie Simpson's text.

The Misrepresentation of Aldo Leopold

By my count, Simpson makes eight references to Aldo Leopold, as a way of conferring, presumably, some philosophical legitimacy to the book. He does not however give the actual page references to Leopold's book of essays **A Sand County Almanac**. Leopold is used to justify the approach that Simpson pursues in his book, of “resource” extraction forestry as primary. For example, this author opens Chapter Three, called “Working in the Woodlot”, not with Leopold's Land Ethic (which is never given in the book), but by the following quote on page 40, attributed to Leopold, situated under a sketch of a person using a chainsaw to cut a tree in a woodlot:

“I have read many definitions of what is a conservationist...but I suspect that the best one is written not with a pen, but with an axe....A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land.” (Aldo Leopold, **A Sand County Almanac** 1949.)

Since Leopold's time, the word “conservationist” has become distorted and is now associated with the ‘Wise Use’ movement in forestry activist circles. Wise Use supporters lay the emphasis, not on “preservation”, but on something called a “working” forest or “conservation”. Preservation is projected as

something negative to which environmentalists aspire and "conservation" is used to mean the human utilization of forest lands for extractive or "fun" purposes – with the aid of ATVs, snowmobiles, etc. In the context of the term Wise Use, all of Nature becomes available for human and corporate use, and human access to "resources" like forests or wildlife is always the priority. One needs to be aware what the contemporary use of the term "conservationist" will convey, even if embellished with Leopold's name.

As I have explained elsewhere, Aldo Leopold is perhaps the most important ecophilosophy influence on the North American green and environmental movements. This would be particularly true for the United States. Leopold's Land Ethic has become very influential:

"The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." **A Sand County Almanac**, p. 239

Leopold, who was a forester and a hunter, moved in his own lifetime from conventional "resource management" to an Earth-centered land ethic. Simpson's Leopold has remained a resource manager forester. But, in actuality, Aldo Leopold became a pre-deep ecology, deep ecologist – before Arne Naess, the Norwegian founder of deep ecology, introduced the distinction between "shallow" and "deep" ecology in the early 1970s. This is nowhere conveyed by Jamie Simpson in his numerous references to Aldo Leopold. Leopold's book of essays, published after his death, has an essay called "Thinking Like a Mountain", which has come to symbolize his ethical shift. He describes the shooting of a female wolf, accompanied by her pups and the "green fire" dying in the wolf's eyes as her life was extinguished. Through this incident Leopold came to understand that deer and elk need predators, if they are to thrive and not over-browse the mountains which they inhabit. One cannot remove one part of an ecosystem to benefit what is seen as human-centered interests, i.e. "more game", without suffering dysfunctional consequences to the rest of the system. The death of the she-wolf taught Leopold this fundamental lesson and, through his own experience, has taught countless others.

How did Leopold judge whether some action is right or wrong? To quote from his book, again not one of the references used by Simpson:

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic (living) community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." **A Sand County Almanac**, p. 262

Any forestry being advocated has to be evaluated from such a perspective. For Leopold then, with mature ethical consciousness, the biotic community must be the ultimate moral and ethical authority.

Of Things Not Spoken

The main thing to understand about what remains of the Acadian forest are not various "facts" about the tree species, which trees are or are not shade tolerant, how to measure 'lumber' or a cord of wood, how to build bird or bat boxes, etc. or naming the remaining animal life and their habitat preferences. Forest facts about the Acadian forest ARE good. However, the main issue is what attitudes or values do we humans bring to our interactions with the forest, with their mostly unquestioned assumptions, and what are the behaviours which follow from this? There are two fundamental value assumptions by this author which profoundly affect how this book has come to be written.

1) The book is human-centered, not ecocentric, even though the word "ecology" is frequently used. Ideological mantras used are "an ecologically healthy and economically valuable woodlot" (p. 63) and "improving a woodlot." (p. 67) There are a couple of quite progressive forest comments, but they are very much a minority current. For example, Simpson quotes Glen Blouin to say that "the beauty and the mystery of nature" is "far more complex than either we or our computers can comprehend" (p. 17): or a quite wonderful quote by Bernd Heinrich which expresses my own sentiment: "The very idea of 'managing' a forest in the first place seems oxymoronic, because a forest is an ecosystem that is by definition self-managing." (p. 68) But, overwhelmingly, the thrust in **Restoring the Acadian Forest** is how to "manage" and "improve" a woodlot. Ultimately, however, as Simpson says in the unguarded lead

quotation for this review, given on another occasion, forest management “means managing a forest for its highest economic value.” So even human-centered is interpreted in the narrowest of terms. The Earth or the interests of the forest and its inhabitants are not put in first place. The more caring humans, from Simpson’s perspective – here woodlot owners, the audience for this book – become anointed “stewards” of the forest, wise enough, if we pay attention to this bible for woodlot owners, to “manage” whatever remains of the Acadian forest back to restorative health. What we have destroyed in the past can be rebuilt, is the unrealistic assumption, and we have the knowledge, under the tutelage of author Jamie Simpson, to do this. But who has taught this teacher?

2) The second fundamental value assumption, which Simpson brings to **Restoring the Acadian Forest**, is the non-questioning of the overall legitimacy of industrial capitalist society – a society which is rooted in continual economic expansion, without respect for ecological limits. The human and corporate demands on the Acadian forests and the forests of this world, reflect those taken-for-granted values which drive capitalist society. (Expanding human populations are obviously also a large factor in this never-ending consumption of the bounties of the Earth.) An expression of this expansionary demand for Nova Scotia forests remains still in my mind. It involved a submission to the Royal Commission on Forestry in the early 1980s. The largest pulp and paper mill in the province, then Stora, with up to 1.7 million acres of crown (public) land as part of its licence, submitted a ranking of 60 countries in terms of “Paper & Paperboard” per capita consumption. The submission bemoaned the fact that most countries lagged so far behind the leader, the United States, and upheld it as role model for consumption purposes: “Development in the poorer nations is painfully slow but somewhere down the road the future potential can be visualized.” (References for this given in my article in **Alternatives**, Vol. 15, No. 1, “The Case Against Forest Spraying with the Bacterial Insecticide Bt”, December 1987-January 1988.)

Because of his human-centered and pro-capitalist orientation, there is a lot that Jamie Simpson never questions, such as the social mythology of private ownership by humans of the Earth. The idea, that one species – humans – through “ownership”, has the power of life and death over other species and the Earth itself, is unquestioned in this book. Thus woodlot owners ‘own’ their woodlots and are more or less free to determine what goes on within the demarcations of their lots. Simpson never refers to the impact of industrial capitalist society on woodlots, except for some passing references to climate change. This is why the pursuit of the “sustainable” woodlot, even if ‘certified’ by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), is divorced from any relationship to the wider society.

Even existing real problems like the supremacy of mining rights over woodlot ownership, or the impact of forest spray drift from industrial forestry practices over woodlots, or, in Nova Scotia, the supremacy of hunters’ ‘rights’ over woodlots and their wildlife, do not rate a mention in this guide to forest stewardship. There is also no discussion of the negative ecological impacts of off-highway vehicle use by woodlot owners.

Another contradiction for woodlot owners, also not discussed, regards those who use biocides on Christmas trees and blueberry growing. For example, I once attended in Nova Scotia a “low impact” or “restoration forestry” field day which was also part of a commercial blueberry operation! Also not discussed is the impact of drift from similar spraying operations carried out by others close to the woodlot. Biocide drift from industrial forest and commercial blueberry spraying, and blow-down from clear-cutting operations by industrial forestry, have all personally impacted where I live. Those who live in forested areas in New Brunswick (humans, other animals and plants), have since the early 1950s suffered enormously from drift from industrial forest spraying. No woodlot can be an island of forest purity within Maritime society.

There seems to be no one responsible for the destructive impact of industrial forestry in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**. The overall model of social change presented is one of social harmony – let’s talk it out together – not one of social conflict, which best reflects how forest change has occurred in the Maritimes. I do not recall author Jamie Simpson referring to a single forest company by name in his book! Government departments, whether provincial or federal, have worked hard in the Maritimes to defend industrial forestry and all which follows from it, also come off unscathed. The author cannot even bear to name the New Brunswick home-based forest giant Irving as being part of a committee he was on, “to

create a standard for sustainable forest management in the Maritime Provinces.” (p. vi) Simpson quotes Gary Schneider of the (government subsidized) “Macphail Woods Ecological Forestry Project” on Prince Edward Island, about being “positive” about the environmental message and not to be “negative” about the forest industry. This message Simpson seems to have taken to heart.

I also think, perhaps understandable because of his forestry education, that the opposition to clear-cutting and biocide spraying (whether herbicides or insecticides) is not absolute for this author. Again, the language is a give-away, as for example, “clearcutting is rarely appropriate when restoring a woodlot.” (p.56) Yet industry clearcuts the forest because of what it sees as short term economic necessity (crudely, it makes more money this way) not as long term biological necessity. Environmentalist who put the Earth first frequently come across those who give clearcutting a lease on life in public arguments by saying – as does Tom Miller in this book – that they are against “indiscriminate clearcutting.” Non-indiscriminate clearcutting can, in Miller’s own words, encompass five to six acres. (p. 102) The justification for “some” clearcutting – that shade intolerant trees require this – will not hold up if the forest can experience wind throws (blow downs), insect blooms and fire, which can open up spaces for shade intolerant species, as part of a restored Acadian forest in post-industrial society.

The author speaks in negative language of “insect infestations” (p. 4) not insect blooms. In another place, he speaks almost positively that “large-scale insecticide spraying to kill spruce budworms...has kept budworm populations artificially low...” (p.121) There is opposition to “broad-scale herbicide use” (p. 28), yet provincial and federal foresters are promoted as mentors for Simpson, when such people have many times in the Maritimes been all over the media supporting forest spraying. There is no denunciation in this book of the chemical warfare carried out by industrial, government-sanctioned forestry, whether insecticides or herbicides.

Jamie Simpson comes through as a Light Green, someone who not only believes that humans are the dominant species, but someone who basically accepts the existing power structures and the necessity to work within them. He promotes the so-called Model Forest Projects, in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (both of which helped in the financing of his book). I have always viewed the Model Forests, dominated by “harvesters” of the forest, as public relations projects for the Government of Canada. First established in 1992, they help to project the mythology that Canada’s forest are being managed sustainably.

Simpson also promotes the “certification” of the Forest Stewardship Council, which he says he was involved with in the beginning in the Maritimes. He seems oblivious to the contradictions in the granting of the FSC seal of approval. I opposed this certification process from the beginning in Nova Scotia and further opposed the more recent “certification” of the largest pulp and paper mill in the province and the involvement of the Ecology Action Centre in asking others to join the process. Even though I do not support the emphasis on FSC certification, I pointed out in internet postings that the FSC certification bid by Stora-Enso should be opposed both by those who support this certification process and by those like myself who oppose the FSC stamp of approval. For those who support FSC certification, to extend this to Stora-Enso (now sold and renamed the NewPage Port Hawkesbury mill), amounts to greenwash and undermines those small woodlot “owners” in Nova Scotia who oppose industrial forestry and who are searching for a low impact forestry path, using FSC certification as a marketing seal of approval. When major pulp and paper companies can become FSC approved as in Nova Scotia and across Canada, then this so called forestry standard is basically meaningless, except to promote greenwash sales.

The author also supports financially rewarding woodlot owners “for their commitment to maintaining a healthy environment for the benefit of society.” (p. 49) I disagree with this. Wade Prest, a Nova Scotia woodlot owner of 1,900 acres (about half of which is FSC certified), featured in this book, also wants carbon credits and compensation for not cutting trees. (pp. 104-107)

It is industrial capitalism which has commodified Nature and despiritualized the world around us. Changing consciousness, not paying so-called compensation for those working the land, is the path we should be embarking on. Wildlife and plant life have no place within a monetary arrangement devised solely by humans, because ultimately, with such a value system, humans and corporations will still determine the matters of life and death for nonhuman life forms. As the [Deep Ecology Platform](#) puts it,

"The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves...These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes."

Alternative Forest Models: Earth or Ecology Primary, Not Economics

This is a letter to the editor called "Redefining Woodlots" written by Billy MacDonald of Red Tail Nature Awareness and myself, in April of 1999. It was published in a number of Nova Scotia provincial newspapers. It is an example of a rather different perspective to that outlined by Jamie Simpson in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**.

REDEFINING WOODLOTS

Dear Editor:

Small woodlot owners have, in the recent past, been viewed only as a source of wood supply for the pulp and paper industry here in the Maritimes. Government agencies have taken this as an unquestioned assumption, and their programs facilitate this.

Small woodlot owners who have bought into the above assumption have, up until now, been the public face of THE woodlot owner. This letter is one of the means we are using to try to change this.

Woodlots are not a "resource". They are a responsibility to hold in trust for all other species which are part of the living Acadian forest - and for future generations of Canadians.

According to federal government data, there are 16,000 woodlots in Prince Edward Island, 35,000 individuals have woodlots in New Brunswick and 30,000 individuals in Nova Scotia have small woodlots.

What is often called "the woodlot", is for us a nature sanctuary or protected area for trees, other plants and wildlife; a place which protects our water supply and the biological integrity of our streams; a place where we as humans can renew ourselves spiritually; and finally, it is a source of personal pleasure, education and beauty, which we want to share with others.

We are not opposed to small amounts of wood being removed, provided that ecological integrity is maintained. The biodiversity and the forest canopy of the Acadian forest must be kept. We are totally opposed to clear-cutting, herbicide and insecticide spraying, and the use of heavy machinery which degrades the forest and also eliminates workers.

As small woodlot "owners", we are appalled at the severe alteration of forest habitats, which is supported by provincial and federal governments. We TOTALLY reject the view that those who temporarily own a woodlot be allowed to destroy life there, for reasons of economic self-interest.

We all belong to communities beyond the human one, because we all SHARE this one planet.

We reject the viewpoint that the Earth is human property. If there are claims to ownership, then there need to be also responsibilities and accountability to Nature and society. Ownership should be seen as a privilege, attached to a definite set of obligations. It is considered a privilege to drive a motor vehicle which involves rights and responsibilities to others. It should be the same for woodlot owners.

We do not believe in economic bribery in order to "convince" someone to change their destructive ways. Basic values have to change and we want to contribute to this. To bring about the needed changes to protect woodlots, WE PROPOSE THAT SMALL WOODLOT OWNERS NO LONGER HAVE THE RIGHT TO DESTROY THEIR WOODLOTS FOR ECONOMIC REASONS. Responsibility to the Earth and to future human generations must enter into "ownership criteria". Woodlot owners must be accountable to hand on the woodlot in a BETTER condition, bearing in mind the interests of all the plant and animal species living there. We need to expand our way of thinking about woodlots, and go beyond the current view of the woodlot as an industrial feedlot.

Those who destroy or degrade their woodlots should suffer definite social and criminal sanctions. This code of responsible behaviour should apply to ALL forestry operations and operators, including the pulp and paper industry.

Everyone who has a connection to Nature knows that the forestry situation in N.S. is getting worse by the day. If you want a future which includes the Acadian forest and its wildlife, become involved.

Sincerely,
Billy MacDonald, Scotsburn and
David Orton, Saltsprings.
April 22, 1999

CONCLUSION

This has not been an easy book review to write, but I came to feel it needed to be written. I have in the past tried to review what I considered to be important books relating to forests and forestry in Nova Scotia. The present review fits into this tradition. **Restoring the Acadian Forest** has a lot of good and helpful information, but much of it is available elsewhere. My discussion of what was left out (for the province of Nova Scotia, for example) has documented this. Hence the "selective inclusiveness" title for this review.

This book also embodies the values and assumptions of the author, which I believe deserve some critical scrutiny, when we are being offered a "guide" for our relationship to what remains of the Acadian forest. Quoting Aldo Leopold a number of times cannot disguise a lack of eco-philosophical awareness, shown in the author's understanding of this important thinker, and also in failing to respond to the deep ecology forest tradition.

I have tried, with others, to combine an ecocentric perspective with a critique of capitalism within the

deep ecology tradition – this has come to be known as “left biocentrism.” Jamie Simpson, as shown in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**, has no critique of industrial capitalism and accepts the basic assumptions of this economic system, e.g. private property, a continually expanding economy that does not respect ecological limits, etc. which undermine any attempts to put forward what a sustainable forestry would entail. There ultimately cannot be islands of good forestry when the overall social system is unsustainable. Recently in Nova Scotia, the wildlife biologist Bob Bancroft, featured in this book, had his conservation work undermined by destructive industrial activity adjacent to his woodlot. He went public with his bitterness and the lack of response from any government authority.

I believe Simpson to be too inexperienced, from the perspective of involvement in past forest battles, to have undertaken such a comprehensive project. A graduate degree in forestry is hardly an adequate educational background. For him, there are no enemies, and forest corporations cannot even be given names. Foresters, whether employed by the provincial or the federal governments, or directly by the forest industry, or by small woodlot organizations, have been on the front lines in the Maritimes in defending the industrial forestry status-quo. There have been few foresters in the Maritimes region who have been “turned around” and come over to the Earth first side.

The growing public awareness about what is wrong with industrial forestry in the Maritimes has a history to which hundreds of environmentalists have contributed. Some of these environmentalists had patches of forests for which they felt directly personally responsible, many did not. “Woodlot owners”, in the main, and their organizations, were trapped in the industrial forestry paradigm. They clear-cut and sprayed, and supplied the softwoods that the mills wanted. Government funds subsidized them, like with the Venture Groups. Wade Prest and Tom Miller, who are held up as forest role models in this book, are two people I personally admire. But both of them admit they came out of such a background. Of course there were individual woodlot owners who stood against the industrial forestry model, from way back. But by and large woodlot owners shifted their sails to pick up the environmental wind which others had created in the Maritimes. None of this comes through in **Restoring the Acadian Forest**.

In the coming sustainable ecocentric society – post-industrial, non-fossil fuel-dependent – forests will be left “unmanaged.” In the long term, this is the best for our fellow non-human community members, who need the forests, as we humans do, as a home. When we take wood out of the forest, all its ecological functions have to be maintained. This means humans have to accept that ecology is primary, not economics. This is not an anti-logging position, but it can be seen as anti-logging in the context of not accepting the unceasing growth demands and population pressures of present industrial society and the orientation to a worldwide consumer market, which then becomes reflected in logging practices and their intensity. For such a market, there can never be sufficient wood supply. Let us abandon the conceit that we can “restore” the Acadian forest, a forest which we humans have knowingly destroyed. Just as one cannot restore a paved-over wetland, so one cannot restore a destroyed forest. We need a more caring forestry, which puts the Earth, not humans, first. From an ecocentric viewpoint – the only one viable in an increasingly destroyed world – this book ultimately fails to point the way forward.

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