The Cumberland Files: NB Natural Resources, industry in synergistic tizzy over whistleblowing deer scientist

By MILES HOWE

Rod Cumberland asserts that glyphosate applications to New Brunswick's Crown lands is the cause of the province's dwindling white-tailed deer population. Cumberland is seen here speaking to a rally of hundreds opposed to the Alward government's forest plan in May 2014 at the NB Legislature. The forest plan gave an unsustainable amount of wood to J.D. Irving from public lands, according to the critics of the plan. Photo courtesy of Conservation Council of New Brunswick.

Glyphosate mixtures are applied to Crown forest after a clearcut in order to eliminate hardwood tree species and select for softwoods. The plantations largely produce pulp.

Cumberland's wedge issue was that glyphosate spraying in New Brunswick is responsible for the province's dwindling white-tailed deer population, as it destroys their food supplies. He has also highlighted the scientifically-proven detrimental health impacts of exposure to glyphosate mixtures, and has gone so far as to liken the future health-related fall-out from glyphosate applications in New Brunswick to "this generation's Agent Orange."

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An email dated January 27, 2014 speaks to the merging of corporate interests and provincial governance. In the email, J.D. Irving's in-house biologist John Gilbert requests advanced knowledge of the DNR's stance on Cumberland's anti-glyphosate claims in order to suitably lockstep his employer's public reaction. "I need to be aware of the department's reply to craft our own response," writes Gilbert.

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Days after the email was sent, R.A Lautenschlager, a biologist and the executive director at the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre, publicly surfaced as a would-be spoil to Cumberland's anti-glyphosate claims. Lautenschlager, a long time supporter of glyphosate applications in forestry, argued that glyphoates do not negatively impact the abundance of deer food in a debate with Cumberland on CBC Fredericton's morning radio show on Feb. 26.

At the same time, speaking points "arising from the R. Cumberland" letter were being drafted internally for DNR spokespeople. Official answers for DNR staff were limited to the potential impact of glyphosate spraying on New Brunswick's deer population, in particular their access to food supplies. The emails discuss moving forward on the Cumberland-led issue of glyphosate spraying as an item of business for an already-existing "Risk Assessment Group" to address and analyze.

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The email chain suggests that DNR actively sought out an expert who might counter Cumberland's claims. An email from mid-February 2014 suggests that the search is on for a "specialist or scientist to address Rod's conjecture," who could be from "another jurisdiction" if necessary.

Debriefing Elsipogtog: The Anatomy of a Struggle by Miles Howe

When is a journalist not a journalist? According to CBC New Brunswick's Information Morning host Terry Seguin, and media guests Dan Leger and Philip Lee, it is when the journalist becomes an activist. Calling freelance journalist Miles Howe a mere blogger, they questioned his credentials as a journalist. Leger even called Howe a "hot-headed fanatic" for his opposition to fracking at Elsipogtog, Howe, whose stories and blogs appear regularly on the Halifax Media Co-op and elsewhere, was arrested in 2013 at least three times by the RCMP near Rextown — basically for being a photo-journalist. His camera and computer were seized by the police. Howe had to resort to crowd funding to raise money to replace these valuable tools of his trade.

But Howe has the last laugh. He just published his first book, Debriefing Elsipogtog: The Anatomy of a Struggle, which provides insight and service to the cause of Aboriginal people and which his detractors cannot erase.

Howe fits into a time-honoured tradition of citizen-journalist — one epitomized by George Orwell, who noted, "Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed: everything else is public relations."

Howe broke the story about fracking and showed how far the New Brunswick government, the U.S. company SWN Resources and the police were willing to go to open the province to fracking. Howe also demonstrated the commitment of Aboriginal people, and some white settler communities in the poorest province in Canada, to fight the destruction of their land and water.

Howe closely examines the mythical tradeoff between environmental protection and jobs. He looks at the toll fracking takes — from the chemicals used in the fracking process to the contamination of aquifers, to damage to wells, to possible earthquakes.

Howe also writes about the history and politics of white settler New Brunswick and the sense of Tory and Liberal governments. He makes no bones about how the Irvings control the resource and the media sectors.
Renewable energy far better than fossil fuels for creating jobs, clean energy, healthy environment

By DALLAS MQUIARIE

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The NB Media Co-op
For details and updated event listings, visit nbmediacoop.org.
To list your event, visit createmore.org.

Silver Wave Film Festival. SWFF runs from Nov. 5-8 in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Visit swff.ca for film screenings, English and French programmes, and to purchase tickets. 

Project Power. Cinema Polética Fredericton & the Council of Ministers of Education, Culture and Heritage Canada present Project Power, a film written and directed by Kateri Martin, which explores the impact of Canada's education system on Aboriginal youth. Visit cinemaopolitica.org for more information.

Cinema Polética believes in the power of art not only to spark change, but to create change. Contact Cinema Polética at cinemaopolitica.org.

Debriefing fishpox

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The news that six of the ten poorest postal codes in Canada are in New Brunswick First Nations’ communities. Howe charts the largely untold history of First Nations peoples in New Brunswick, and offers a behind-the-scenes analysis of the politics and actions of the Assembly of First Nations New Brunswick, the Eelkogat First Nation and the Mi’kmaq Warrior Society.

The real villains in the book include the RCMP who sparked violence and made scores of brutal arrests at the protests.

Harper’s government views First Nations peoples as writes Benjamin Shingler of the Canadian Press: “Federal officials closely tracked the fallout of an RCMP raid on a First Nations protest against shale exploration in New Brunswick, at one point raising concerns it could spawn another countryside movement like Idle No More. Documents obtained under access-to-information legislation reveal a lengthy email chain last fall monitoring events related to a blockade near Rexton, N.B.”

In the end, the RCMP was the scapegoat. The laws set a new standard for arrest and detention. If the police have a reason to suspect that someone or a group may commit a terrorist act, the police can arrest and detain them. They can act on a mere suspicion that an arrest is likely to prevent any terrorist activity.

Howe’s book shows how the Aboriginal community has been taken back against colonial encroachment and oppression – I’m sure the Harper government is paying attention.

Judy Haiven is a Professor of Management in the Sobey School of Business at Saint Mary’s University and an associate researcher at the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives – Nova Scotia (CCPA-NS). This book review first appeared in the Sept./Oct. edition of Canadian Dimension.

In Brief

Reproductive Justice NB is denouncing the rape culture that persists at universities in Fredericton, in particular the silencing of discussion of campus rape by some professors and administrators. The feminist collective congratulated St. Thomas University Journalism Professor Jan Wong for organizing a screening at the university of The Hunting Ground, a documentary about campus rape on U.S. campuses. One sexual assault has already been reported at St. Thomas University during this academic year that began in September. Campus rape is a very real traumatic experience for one in four women on campus-based university in the U.S. Canadian universities do not publish rape statistics.

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