The Irving family of New Brunswick own more land than anyone in the world except for royalty. Jim Irving Sr. and his sons have more than 100,000 square kilometres of Crown land, to increase their harvesting. David Coon and others have asserted that level of cutting is too high for the forest to be sustainable. This is a level of cutting that Irving and others have lobbied for more than a decade using a variety of public and private pressures.

Brown: What has happened is that Irving has taken over more of the leases that were abandoned by some of the other companies that closed their mills and left. I think it is fair to say that Irving now occupies a bigger piece of the pie than they ever did before and consequently when governments feel a certain pressure to accommodate them because their mills are scattered around the province so there are lots of communities that depend on those jobs. The new government that was elected in September, the election campaign promised to review the new forestry plan because there was a lot of criticism around forestry in New Brunswick?

Brown: That was interesting that was left out.

Brown: Tell us more about your recent forest bill?

Coon: The bill would annul the contracts that were established to guarantee for the next 25 years a significant increase in softwood cutting allowed to J.D. Irving and other companies that hold Crown licenses.

Brown: The (proposed) legislation is directly contrary to the interests of the Irving’s and they did cover it in their paper. Your complaint is that it’s on page five. It’s marginally covered and the way it’s covered characterizes it as something of interest to fringe voices and nothing to be taken too seriously. Is that accurate?

Coon: Media tends to talk to the powers-that-be and tends to reflect the conventional wisdom. If you are not connected to the powers-that-be or if you are not speaking in the narrative or the voice of conventional wisdom then you don’t tend to have much of a place in the media.

If you read the business pages of Brunswick News, you don’t get a robust sense of business enterprise in New Brunswick. You certainly don’t get much of a sense of their businesses with respect to forestry. It would be hard to know that there are independent mills in the province and what their struggles are. It would be hard to know anything about the economic role of private woodlot owners and the contracting businesses they run.

Brown: Let’s talk about private woodlot owners. I read on the CBC that the prior government said that private woodlot owners would be positively impacted by the deal the Alward government struck to give more Crown wood to the Irving’s. Is that true?

Theriault: Not at all. I discovered that our mill in Kedgwick, the Irving mill, had been turning wood away. The mill workers were supposed to work two shifts, 12 months a year. They were only working one shift and seven months a year. We were lacking wood and the Irving company was saying it was because the government wasn’t giving the mill enough wood. The Deputy Minister at the time said that we should have more than enough wood: 83,000 cubic metres of wood was supposed to be going to Kedgwick but the Mill and the people from the mill said, no, we’re not getting it. For three years, they were taking that wood, which was coming from the Miramichi area, and sending it elsewhere, instead of Kedgwick. That robbed our people of $3 million over three years. That hurts our economy.

Brown: The mill was cutting 400,000 cubic metres a year and employing 60 people but they were not buying any wood from the private woodlot owners. In 1982, the owners of woodlots and Forest Act stated that the industry was supposed to buy from private woodlot owners before having access to Crown forest. The price paid to the woodlot owners had to be the same price they paid the province. It was kind of fair. In 1992, Frank McKenna came along and changed that law. Industry no longer had to buy from private woodlot owners. Overnight, the price of wood dropped 40%. The private woodlot owners were paid 40% less and the province was paid 40% less. Those with private woodlots now can’t make enough money to pay for the gas to cut the wood.

Brown: One has to wonder what is not being said because of the lack of other media outlets. What happened to the Carleton Free Press?

Glyn: A few years ago, the Carleton Free Press was started by Ken Langdon who used to work for a Brunswick News newspaper, the Bugle-Observer, in Carleton County. He was met with numerous roadblocks put up by Irving. First, a court injunction was used to try and stop him. It argued that his newspaper would cut into the Bugle’s advertising rates. That injunction did not go forward. In the end, the paper ended up shutting down because the Irving newspaper, the Bugle Observer, had cut their advertising rates, making it very difficult for the paper to make a go of it.

The above transcript of the CANADALAND show in Fredericton has been truncated and edited for clarity. To listen to the entire show, go to canadalandshow.com and listen to episode 71.
Maine residents oppose relaxing of environmental rules for J.D. Irving mine

By CONNOR ALBERS

Augusta – J.D. Irving, Ltd is facing more public opposition to its attempts to change environmental regulations this time in neighbouring Maine.

J.D. Irving is already under fire in New Brunswick for the heavy-handed lobbying that resulted in a forestry strategy for the province’s public forest that guarantees the company an additional wood supply for the next 35 years. The additional wood supply will come from de-classifying conversation forest and increasing clearcutting and herbicide spraying.

Aroostook Resources, a J.D. Irving company, plans to mine zinc and copper at Bald Mountain in Aroostook County, Maine. The company has been lobbying to loosen the state’s Department of Environmental Protection’s regulations for mining projects since at least 2012. Critics charge the proposed changes would allow unlimited groundwater contamination from mines, decrease the size of buffer zones between mines and public lands, and reduce the responsibility of mining companies to clean up toxic wastewater.

The planned project would take the form of a 100 acre pit mine, which J.D. Irving claims “has the potential to create tens of millions of dollars in economic activity and hundreds of jobs over a multi-decade time frame.”

J.D. Irving is the pulp and paper wing of the Irving family’s group of companies, all of which are privately held, and therefore not submitted to the same level of public scrutiny and financial disclosure as publicly-traded companies. James K. Irving inherited the company from his father in 1992, with the proviso that he would renounce his Canadian residency in order to avoid paying taxes in Canada. He resides in Bermuda.

As in New Brunswick, the proposed environmental deregulation would allow mining companies to increase clearcutting. In late February, about 100 people voiced concerns with the relaxing of the state of Maine’s environmental regulations before the state’s Land Use Planning and Development Committee in 2014 and sent back to the DEP for reconsideration. Environmentalists, farmers, hunters, fishing enthusiasts and landowners were among those present at the hearing.

The proposed rule changes were submitted in a Bill by Democratic representative John L. Martin and Democratic Senator Troy Jackson at Irving’s request, and have both Democratic and Republican support. The changes were rejected by the Legislative Committee in 2014 and sent back to the DEP for reworking. Democratic governor Paul LePage has publicly stated his support for environmental deregulation.

Despite the strong opposition, the bill was submitted this year identical to the previous version.

Opponents of the mine say that the type of mining Irving plans to carry out presents serious ecological risks, specifically to aquatic wildlife.

Bald Mountain is in close proximity to the Fish River system of lakes, which is habitat for brook trout and a wide variety of other aquatic species.

A recent report published by the Natural Resources Council of Maine, “Bald Mountain Mining Risks, Hidden Costs,” describes how hard rock mining exposes sulfide-containing rock to air and water, creating large quantities of sulfuric acid. “The acid also leaches heavy metals naturally present in the rock, many of which are extremely toxic to fish and other aquatic organisms,” the report states.

The mine’s opponents have raised concern that the proposed new rules of time a company is allowed to deliberate on cleaning up mining waste. It is common practice to leave toxic byproducts from mining in earthen-dammed tailings ponds until the company is ready to begin cleanup of the fluids.

Opponents fear the dams might leak or collapse, contaminating groundwater, rivers and streams of northern Maine with massive amounts of wastewater. They cite the example of the Mt. Polley mine disaster in British Columbia in 2014 where a tailings dam collapsed, dumping 2 billion gallons of wastewater into nearby bodies of water.

Residents are concerned about how much the mine would harm the local economy and jobs. The fishing industry, “adds $36 million dollars to the Aroostook economy every year... If it was ruined, all those jobs would disappear: those jobs that may last lifetimes,” says Shelly Mountain, a resident of Aroostook County. Additionally, jobs in wildlife tourism or creating millions of dollars in environmental compliance, claims they will create, most of which will be temporary.

A small minority of supporters of the proposed changes to the mining rules were present at the hearing. They included Matthew Muzzy, a geotechnical engineer representing Seavee and Maher Engineers Inc. His firm profits from the new design and construction oversight of containment structures for mining waste. He said the old rules did not allow space for any mining applications, and that the proposed changes will allow mining companies to take place. “I believe the rules are strict. What they do is give an applicant a chance to be an applicant,” said Muzzy.

Hillary Lister of Maine Matters Research and Consulting disagreed. She said the permits given out under the proposed rules are much more lenient about disposal of hazardous materials, including not only sulfuric acid, but also radioactive byproducts like uranium and radon. “They [the hazardous materials] would be approved for disposal as site on part of the mining permit issuance.”

Lister has been following Irving’s practices in the state for decades, and voiced concerns about both the company’s track record and the State’s lenient enforcement. “They’ve had the biggest clear-cut violations in state history, yet the maximum fine is $70,000. That’s nothing for them to pay off.”

Conor Albers does radio reporting for WMPO, Greater Portland’s community radio station.