



The Brief

Vol. 5 No. 9

A publication of the NB Media Co-op

June 2014

nbmediacoop.org

Volley of gunfire directed at shale gas protester's property fails to interest police

By DALLAS MacQUARRIE

St. Ignace - "I don't have any expectations that the RCMP will do anything about it!" That's the verdict of a man whose complaints to the RCMP about more than 20 shots being fired at his property were ignored for five days.

Dennis Beers, his wife Rahima, and their two young children, ages one and five years, live in the Harcourt area near the junction of Highways 116 and 465. The family is staunchly opposed to shale gas development, and for months has had a large sign acknowledging Aboriginal ownership of land in New Brunswick.

On the night of Saturday, April 12, someone fired more than 20 bullets through the sign, and Beers notes there's no way of knowing how many missed. "The gunman was firing in the direction of both us and the neighbor's house," he said.

On Monday, April 14, Beers and his father telephoned the RCMP and the person answering the call took a message. "We didn't hear anything Tuesday, so we called back Wednesday, and got told they hadn't had time to send anyone out," Beers said. "And all the while the evidence - the empty shell casings - was on the ground by the side of the road, exposed to the weather."

Beers had his second call to the RCMP returned by an officer in Moncton a few hours later who said "they would send someone around to see." The next day, Thursday, April 17 - five days after the shooting - an RCMP officer from Richibucto came to the Beers farm to investigate.

"He was quite apologetic and seemed puzzled about why it had taken so long for someone to respond," Beers said. "He collected the empty shell casings, but said they really needed a bullet fragment." No such fragment was found.

After not hearing anything for a couple of weeks, Beers' father called the RCMP, and was told the case had gone "cold."

Beers is annoyed that the RCMP didn't follow up on a lead, and by a seeming double-standard in the RCMP's treatment of people in Kent County. "We're opposed to shale gas," he said. "Last summer during the protests near Harcourt we had... *(continued on page 2)*



Dennis Beers has already experienced the violence that he fears will accompany the return of shale gas exploration by SWN in Kent County this summer. Beers says that a sign on his family's property near Harcourt was the target of a shooting on April 12. "Near the end of last summer's protests, my father decided to put the following phrase on the sign: 'Got Land - Thank a Native.' This was more than a mere slogan to us, since our family owes everything to the First Nations, especially the Mi'kmaq... When our ancestors were sent across the Atlantic, never to see our homeland again, half starved, half dying, it was the Mi'kmaq who accepted us into their lands. We have known nothing but generosity and kindness from the Mi'kmaq, and for that, a phrase like 'Got Land - Thank a Native' is nowhere near enough," wrote Beers for the Halifax Media Co-op on April 28. Beers says he is still affected by the violent crack down on shale gas opponents that occurred in 2013. The RCMP tactical riot force and armored vehicle (seen here) moved in on shale gas opponents to remove a blockade of SWN's shale gas equipment on Highway 134 in Rexton, NB on Oct. 17, 2013. The experiences of shale gas opponents like Beers in Kent County demonstrates who and what the RCMP serves and protects. Photo from Warrior Publications.

Hundreds rally to oppose JD Irving & NB government's plan for the forest

By ASAF RASHID

Fredericton - Hundreds of people converged on the New Brunswick Legislature lawn on May 13 to oppose the province's forestry plan and a contract signed with JD Irving, which they say will benefit the province's largest Crown land license holder but will harm the forest, woodlot owners, other forest users and forest-dependent communities. Tree discs were placed on the lawn to create the visual effect of stumps in a clearcut. A banner read, "Jobs Don't Grow on Stumps."

A contract was signed in secret between JD Irving and the NB government a month before it was made public on March 12.

Many of the speakers and signs seen at the rally condemned Irving's control over the province.

The contract with JD Irving allows clearcutting in areas of the forest where select cutting was the previous standard to ensure natural regrowth, removes government monitoring and guarantees the company an increased timber supply for 25 years, according to the Conservation Council of New Brunswick. The Council is calling on the government to not sign the Forest Management Agreement, which would effectively implement the contract. The Agreement is set to be signed by July 1.

"A decade ago, WWF found that our forest type, the Acadian forest, was one of six endangered forest types in North America. Instead of working on conserving and restoring our forest, our governments have allowed for its further degradation in the last ten years to the point that there is no large intact areas of forest greater than 500 square kilometres and all but two watersheds in our forest have less than ten per cent forest cover," said Tracy Glynn, the Conservation Council's Forest Campaigner.

Deer biologist Rod Cumberland said that the reduced conservation forest area, which includes deer yards and wildlife habitat zones, coupled with poor forestry practices that allow herbicide spraying to kill off hardwood saplings has displaced deer and moose from Crown lands. "You wonder why we see deer in our backyards. It's because there's not much food left in the woods," he said.

The deal with Irving spells out a different approach to forest management called outcome-based forestry. The experience with outcome-based forestry as practiced by JD Irving in Maine has been larger clearcuts and less government oversight, according to critics.

The NB Federation of Woodlot Owners, which represents 40,000 woodlot owners in the province, co-organized the rally with the Conservation Council. Woodlot owners feel that they have been sidelined by JD Irving's dominance in New Brunswick's public forests, dominance they say has cost the province jobs and revenue. They say that JD Irving has not wanted to pay woodlot owners fair prices for their wood and the future plan will give the company even less incentive to do so.

Jean-Guy Comeau, a Miramichi woodlot owner, told rally goers that private woodlot owners have faced tough conditions for some time. "Let me remind you that the problems started in 1982 with the Crown Lands and Forests Act," said Comeau who was referring to an Act that gave large forestry companies control over the public forest in the form of licenses. A decade later, in 1992, the woodlot owners would decry Frank McKenna government's stripping of a guarantee that gave woodlot owners the primary source of supply to the province's mills.

"When you guarantee wood supply (to the industry from Crown lands), you don't guarantee jobs; you don't guarantee industry in your community. What you guarantee is that you've lost your power," said Comeau.

"This deal is not even necessary because there's a million cubic metres of wood on private land that's not getting to the marketplace," said Rick Doucet, President of the NB Federation of Woodlot Owners, who continues to advocate for woodlot owners regaining primary source of wood supply to mills.

Newly re-elected St. Mary's First Nation Chief Candice Paul could not be at the rally because of the election happening in her community but she prepared a statement that was read by Judie Acquin-Mikovsky. The Chief's statement said that while the government of New Brunswick has a legal duty to consult St. Mary's prior to making any decision that has the potential to adversely affect St. Mary's Aboriginal Rights, and title and treaty rights, the government did not consult for either the Irving deal or the forestry plan.



Northern New Brunswick filmmaker Charles Thériault (seen here) performed a capella called "Not with JDI," poking fun at JD Irving's prolific "That's why I'm with JDI" ads that are aired during hockey games and the CBC evening news. "They rule over New Brunswick like it's their own kingdom," sang Thériault. Photo by Joe Gee.

"The increase in logging has the potential to interfere with St. Mary's Aboriginal title, Aboriginal harvesting and treaty harvesting rights. We call on the New Brunswick government to engage with us promptly on this issue or St. Mary's will have no choice left but to consider its legal options," read the statement.

Tom Beckley, Forestry and Environmental Management Professor at the University of New Brunswick, told the audience that the government is not interested in the public's opinion about how Crown Forests should be managed. Beckley and the Dean of Forestry at the University of New Brunswick are among the 184 professors from the province's public universities and Maritime College of Forest Technology who sent an open letter to Natural Resources Minister Paul Robichaud on May 15 demanding a halt to the forest plan and the charting of new direction in forest management that uses "accumulated collective wisdom."

"We used to have a Minister's Advisory Committee made up of stakeholders and experts in the field, to advise the Minister (of Natural Resources). The province used to meet, consult and survey its stakeholders and citizens. But no more," said Beckley who co-authored a 2008 public opinions survey that made the news when the government abruptly cancelled public meetings to discuss the results. The survey revealed that New Brunswickers were not happy with the way that the government was managing the forest and they wanted to see water and biodiversity protection prioritized in forest management.

"From [Irving's] point of view, they're saving money when they're not making lots of people work. They make money in an industry, the pulp and paper industry, that doesn't make a lot of people work," said Rob Moir, a University of New Brunswick economics professor, to the rally goers. Moir pointed to New Hampshire, Vermont, Ontario and Quebec that have a secondary forestry industry that employs many more people with the amount of timber they harvest.

Taking the microphone after his father's speech, 14-year-old Sam Moir said, "I don't want to work in Alberta. I want to work here." But if the deal with Irving goes through, it will be harder for Sam to get his wish.

Asaf Rashid is a Fredericton-based journalist and activist.