“We won’t be intimidated:” salmon group on forest spraying

By MATTHEW HAYES

Pain of Mount Polley spill felt in New Brunswick

By TRACY GLYNN

A senior employee at JD Irving, Ltd. warned the Miramichi Headwaters Salmon Federation they would face reprisals if they went public with their opposition to glyphosate spraying, according to a spokesperson for the Federation.

The Federation became the first salmon conservation group in the province to go public with its opposition to Partnership spraying.

John Gilbert, JD Irving’s chief biologist, contacted the Federation’s president, Randy Lutes, to ask him not to attend a press conference organized by the Alliance to Stop Spraying in New Brunswick on August 1st.

The phone call was confirmed by Lutes, who said Gilbert told him he might not buy a ticket to the Federation’s annual dinner.

JD Irving, Ltd. (JDI) responded to the NB Media Co-op’s request for comment by denying that Gilbert spoke on behalf of the company. In an email statement, Mary Keith, JDI’s communications officer, stated: “Mr. Gilbert made the call without the knowledge of JDI and his comments were his own, not those of the company.”

Downplaying the importance of the call, Judy Lutes, secretary and treasurer of the Federation, said, “We don’t want to burn bridges if we don’t have to.”

Other members of the Federation who heard about the call felt it was an attempt at intimidation.

“John Gilbert warned us that JDI would withdraw access to the river. It has been open since, well, forever,” Kevin Shaw, a director of the Federation, told a press conference in Fredericton on August 1.

Currently, Federation members access the river through Irving property, and individuals who wish to fish on the north branch of the Southwest Miramichi must be members of the Federation.

When contacted by the NB Media Co-op, Gilbert said he had “not officially” spoken to the Federation. He was aware of concerns Federation members had about glyphosate spraying and said he had made an offer to have JD Irving scientists address the group. He refused further comment.

In their statement from Mary Keith, JDI affirmed it continues to be focused on science-based forest practices and the rational use of herbicides.

JDI is New Brunswick’s largest forestry company, and the biggest user of glyphosate in the province, according to 2017 data from the government of New Brunswick.

Growing opposition to glyphosate

New Brunswick uses more glyphosate in forestry than any other province in Canada, according to the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health in her 2016 report on glyphosate. Opposition to spraying cut forest land has been growing in New Brunswick.

“People are sick and tired of the forest being poisoned, and there are a lot of first hand accounts of people seeing the forest around their homes being sprayed,” Shaw said.

Shaw grew up in the woods of Juniper and says there are no deer in his forest. The deer harvest has dropped 60% since the mid-eighties, according to the Alliance.

“What’s changed in our forest to cause this loss? Clearcutting and spraying of glyphosates are the two things that have changed,” said Shaw.

Members of the Alliance are also concerned about the potential health impact of spraying, calling its continuation an ongoing experiment on New Brunswickners.

Glyphosate is a herbicide that kills hardwood trees and ground vegetation. It is the active ingredient in Monsanto products such as VisionMax and Forza that are sprayed to promote growth of softwood plantations in the province.

In 2015, the World Health Organization’s cancer research body listed glyphosate as a “probable carcinogen.” After winning a court battle, California has mandated that, as of July 1, products containing glyphosate carry a warning label that states the products contain potentially carcinogenic ingredients.

The Alliance is calling on New Brunswickers to oppose the spraying of glyphosate. According to a 2016 report of the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health, 40% of forest land cut in 2014 was sprayed with glyphosate, compared to only 28% in Ontario, and 11% in Nova Scotia. Quebec banned spraying Crown forest in 2001 due to public health concerns.

Mango Sheppard of the Council of Canadians, Fredericton Chapter, said that members were opposed to glyphosate spraying because it was a “quick fix, with long term health and environmental costs.”

Forestry companies have argued that the downsampling is needed to keep the industry competitive in the province. NB Power also says that it needs to spray to keep costs down.

Several speakers at the press conference talked about the inefficiencies and low employment rates from outdated forest management practices.

“The province doesn’t employ as many people in its forests as other neighbouring jurisdictions,” said Caroline Lubbock-D’Arcy, a spokesperson with Stop Spraying NB (SSNB). Kim MacPherson, New Brunswick’s auditor general, reported in 2015 that the province lost $7-10 million each year from its Crown forestry operations in the five previous years, 2009-2014. She cited the costly silviculture program as a key factor.

According to the Alliance, the New Brunswick public is paying $2.5 million per year for spraying that could be used to hire up to 1000 bush cutters instead. “Doesn’t it make more sense to employ people who could be contributing economically to their community?” asked Lubbock-D’Arcy.

Further action against glyphosate spraying in New Brunswick is planned for later this summer. Alliance member groups, Ecology from Fredericton, is preparing to camp on cutclear land that is slated to be sprayed later this summer. According to spokesperson Francine Levesque, “we are being drowned in spray in our region.”

“People are sick and tired of the forest being poisoned, and there are a lot of first hand accounts of people seeing the forest around their homes being sprayed,” Shaw said.
Propping up business interests in the province of New Brunswick in their editorials should not come as a surprise to any reader of The Daily Gleaner or The Telegraph-Journal, but the newspapers crossed a fine in their editorials on July 4 (‘Poor optics of mine opposition’) and July 5 (‘Chiefs should not complain’).

The Daily Gleaner accused First Nations of ‘poor optics’ when it told First Nations of the province that they should not have signed accommodation agreements with the provincial government over the Sisson project, proposed as one of the world’s largest open-pit mines near Stanley on traditional Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) territory. The compensation for the open-pit mine was accepted after the provincial government threatened to cancel other tax agreements that First Nations depend on for the delivery of social services.

The claim that First Nations should not have signed the agreement if they remained opposed to the mine implied that First Nations were thankless and greedy. This stereotype has been mobilized persistently in New Brunswick history to degrade First Nations communities and to undermine support amongst non-Indigenous New Brunswickers. It perpetuates racist stereotypes that are the product of colonial institutions, which limit the agency of First Nations to determine their future. These stereotypes have no place in the public life of the province in 2017.

Besides being obviously offensive in its paternalism, the editorials failed to explain why the Wolastoqiyik First Nations signed accommodation and tax agreements over the Sisson project. Poor media coverage of the inking of these agreements led people to believe that Indigenous peoples of the province were suddenly in favour of the mine. Madawaska Chief Patricia Bernard set the record straight. Chief Bernard explained to CBC on Feb. 13, 2017 that the New Brunswick government threatened to cancel tax deals with her band and other First Nations communities if they did not sign an agreement on the Sisson mine. The First Nations need the funds from gas, tobacco and sales taxes to pay for essential services in their communities. Chief Bernard made it clear in February that she and other Chiefs continue to oppose the proposed mine.

The CBC article problematically describes the tax deals as ‘ lucrative’ when in fact they are modest and barely cover the needs of communities that have been kept in poverty for generations by failed Canadian policies.

The Wolastoqiyik did not have a veto over the mining project, because their sovereignty has yet to be proven in Canadian courts. These same courts regularly uphold the private property rights of mining prospectors on disputed lands.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent is a key principle found in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that was adopted by the General Assembly in 2007. Almost a decade later, Canada lifted its objector status to UNDRIP but has yet to implement the declaration in policy or practice.

Proposed resource extraction and pipelines across the country on indigenous land make implementing UNDRIP particularly tricky for the federal and provincial governments. The coercive tactics used by the New Brunswick government to get accommodation agreements with the Wolastoqiyik First Nations demonstrate a failure of the provincial government to take Free, Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous peoples seriously.

It is disappointing that the media in this province—so crucial to holding public institutions to account—have consistently failed to accurately report on issues involving First Nations’ interests and resource exploitation.

Given the extensive coverage in the Canadian press around Canada 150 and Canadian colonialism, and the desire of many Canadians from diverse backgrounds to move towards truth and reconciliation with First Nations peoples, the Irving newspapers owe their readers a public explanation of the issue.

First Nations need support above all else, to seek the kind of development that suits them, and for the media to be honest and upfront with its readers. Chief Bernard made it clear back in February that she and other Chiefs continue to oppose the proposed mine. The CBC article problematically describes the tax deals as ‘ lucrative’ when in fact they are modest and barely cover the needs of communities that have been kept in poverty for generations by failed Canadian policies.

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And, they owe Wolastoqiyik First Nations an apology.