



The Brief

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Canada is under-reporting deforestation, carbon impacts of forestry: Wildlands League

By TRACY GLYNN



Damien Hardie is the executive director of Community Forests International. Photo submitted by Community Forests International.

Canada is under-reporting deforestation rates and the carbon impacts of forestry practices, according to a new report by the Wildlands League. The report alarms long-time advocates for forestry practices that consider the impacts of climate change.

Damien Hardie, executive director of the Sackville-based Community Forests International, worked for years as a tree planter in Canada’s forest industry and has spent time on the roads and landings investigated in this new research.

“I always knew they were some of the deepest scars on the landscape but this new research is shocking. The carbon debt from clearcutting in Canada is even worse than previously estimated,” says Hardie.

The December 2019 report, issued in time for the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 25) in Madrid, reveals that approximately 21,700 hectares (about 40,000 football fields) are deforested from roads and landings for forestry operations each year in Ontario alone, and this deforestation has not been previously included in the calculations.

The Wildlands League calculated that is seven times greater than the reported deforestation rate by forestry for all of Canada despite the fact that only 17% of Canada’s logging takes place in Ontario. Canada has been reporting a deforestation rate of 2,800 ha/year, a fraction of the actual total.

The report calls the associated carbon cost of Ontario’s deforestation rate “nationally significant,” representing an estimated 16.5 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent of lost carbon sequestration in the last 30 years.

Canada’s forests are emitting more carbon into the atmosphere than they are absorbing, explains Hardie.

“Canada’s forests could make the difference we need this decade to avoid worst case climate breakdown. Forests are irreplaceable carbon sinks and our country is basically one of the largest forests on Earth. There’s more forest area here than all of Brazil or China, for example,” says Hardie.

The report, “Boreal Logging Scars: an extensive and persistent logging footprint in typical clearcuts of northwestern Ontario, Canada,” states that a total of 650,000 ha of productive forest has been lost in the last 30 years due to roads and other logging infrastructure.

“That’s a staggering loss, equivalent to 10 times the area of the City of Toronto,” says Janet Sumner, the Executive Director of Wildlands League.

Wildlands League wants the government of Canada to revise rules for monitoring deforestation to address the impacts from logging roads and landings in the boreal forest; and, to review and improve its current under-reporting of the carbon impacts from logging.

Beyond reporting deforestation rates more accurately, for Hardie, forestry needs to be part of achieving “the greatest possible carbon pollution reductions as quickly as possible. We have to adapt. Canada can be a leader globally on climate-smart forestry but we’re not a leader right now.”

Hardie’s organization, Community Forests International, is one of several organizations in New Brunswick working to combat deforestation and the carbon impacts by forestry.

“In New Brunswick, we actively protect and restore the special Acadian forest biodiversity on the forestland we manage, that’s also how we store the greatest possible amount of carbon over the long term,” says Hardie.

Hardie’s organization is working with the New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners to “share our forest carbon and climate resilience knowledge with other woodlot owners and managers in the region so it becomes a more of a mainstream approach.”

“Transitioning in a way that shares an economic upside with people and communities most directly connected to the forests is so critical. I believe smart climate policy can be the best and most inclusive rural economic development policy too,” says Hardie.

Tracy Glynn is a reporter for the NB Media Co-op and doctoral researcher with RAVEN, a media activist research project based at the University of New Brunswick.

Why should Saint John seniors pay more for water than the billionaires?

By DOUG JAMES

At a time when governments are encouraging seniors to stay in their own homes for as long as possible, Saint John is charging them more for water than anyone else in the city, including the billionaires who operate Canada’s largest oil refinery and a major pulp and paper mill.

Ever since the late industrialist, K.C. Irving, demanded and got a 25-year ‘sweetheart’ deal for the pulp mill in Saint John in 1957, the family has continued to negotiate ‘special agreements’ with the city that provide a steady flow of cheap water to fuel their industrial enterprises. The more they use, the less they pay.

The demand for water by the Irving Pulp and Paper mill is almost insatiable. It gorges 40 million cubic metres of water out of Spruce Lake annually, causing many to believe that the only reason thousands of west side homeowners were switched to wells two years ago was to ensure a never-ending supply for the industrialists.

I understand that the costs of getting the water to me and other homeowners in such a sprawling city as Saint John, with so many old pipes that need to be replaced, is greater than the cost of getting water to the pulp mill, and that my water is potable, whereas the mill uses raw, untreated water. Some will use this to justify charging residential users more for their water than industry has to pay for its water. But I reject this argument, at least in part, given that industry pollutes the air (we have among the highest lung cancer rates in Canada), which leads to higher healthcare costs.

The pulp mill also adds considerable heavy truck traffic to our streets and bridges, which then require more costly maintenance and repairs for which we, the taxpayers, foot the bill. When there’s a butane leak or explosion at the Irving Oil Refinery, who pays for emergency services? We all know the answer. We do, in both dollars and potential lives lost. Furthermore, the refinery and the pulp mill don’t pay their fair share of taxes on their industrial lands or equipment. They get a break at every turn.

The average Canadian uses between 80-100 cubic meters of water annually, or between 220 and 250 litres per day. As a single retiree, I use considerably less, so I’ll use the bottom end of that range for the purposes of calculating my own costs. I pay a set rate of \$1,428 per year for approximately 80 cubic meters of water (and sewage), which equals \$18 per cubic meter. The Irving Pulp and Paper mill consumes 40 million cubic meters per year and because of a ‘special agreement’, it pays only 8 cents per cubic meter, about \$3 million annually. There is something drastically wrong with this picture.

How much would the pulp mill pay if it too were charged \$18 per cubic meter? Not \$3 million per year, but an astounding \$720 million. We all know that would be unreasonable. There is no way the mill could be profitable at anywhere near that rate. But, if you are inclined to cry for the billionaires, how about a tear or two for senior citizens or the working poor who are struggling to stay in their homes and DO have to pay \$18 per cubic meter of water.



Irving Pulp and Paper Mill in Saint John. Photo by Alex Vye/Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Share Alike 3.0.

Hyping the illusion: Will a uranium mine be Higgs’ next genie?

By LAWRENCE WUEST

The Higgs government in New Brunswick is desperate for a gimmick to fulfill its obligations under the constraints of the federal carbon tax. The federal carbon reduction initiative requires NB Power to phase-out the Belledune coal-fired generating plant by 2030. Like other climate change procrastinators, the Premier is unable to accept that a shift to green energy is the province’s only option.

Thus we saw in 2019 several off-the-wall proposals for a quick fix to New Brunswick’s dilemma. First, CBC revealed that NB Power had invested \$12 million in Joi Scientific of Florida to build the equivalent of a perpetual motion machine to produce clean hydrogen gas from seawater. Then, we were treated to the revelation that the province is also investing in small modular nuclear reactors (SMNR) that have no proven feasibility, and which have no solution to the problem of disposal of their nuclear waste. Jacques Poitras of CBC and MLA David Coon recently exposed a questionable effort to skirt around the constraints of the Energy and Utilities Board in pursuing and

funding SMNR research and development. The cabal included the quasi-Crown corporation, NB Energy Solutions, along with R&D firms, ARC Nuclear and Moltex Energy, and included assorted civil servants, private consultants, and academics.

Any definitive proof of the feasibility or lack thereof of these reactors is years away. More likely in the short term is a renewed push for uranium exploration in order to hype the illusion that SMNR are for real. It is no accident that Premier Higgs joined with his counterparts in the uranium producing provinces of Ontario and Saskatchewan to push for SMNR.

We can expect talk of uranium exploration in New Brunswick to pick up speed in the coming months. New Brunswickers would be well advised to review not only past conflicts over uranium mining in the province but also to heed public health warnings about proceeding haphazardly with any kind of invasive development that places water and air resources at risk. The recommendations made in 2012 by the NB Chief

Edmundston pulp mill workers win wage increase and other benefits

By TRACY GLYNN

As the working class continues to fight the loss of hard-won gains, there is some good news to start 2020: pulp mill workers at Twin Rivers Paper in Edmundston have ratified a five-year collective agreement that will see their wages increase.

The collective agreement includes retroactive wage increases for a total of 11.25 percent over the life of the agreement. Wage adjustments will include production pay adjustments of 20 cents an hour in 2018 and 2019, and skilled trades pay adjustments of 25 cents an hour in 2018 and 50 cents an hour in 2019 and 2021.

Dave Boucher, President of Unifor Local 29, noted the importance of a strong bargaining team in winning this collective agreement.

“I want to thank the hard-working members for supporting the bargaining committee who worked to ensure that the management understood that members of Local 29 must share in the mill’s profits,” said Boucher whose local represents almost 300 members working at the Twin Rivers pulp mill.

Twin Rivers Paper Company, formerly known as Fraser Papers, is a privately-owned company and joint venture between Atlas Holdings and Blue Wolf Capital, their largest shareholder.

The company is one of a handful of companies that hold a license to cut wood from Crown land in New Brunswick, on the unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi’kmaq and Passamaquoddy.

Twin Rivers holds the Carleton and Restigouche-Tobique Crown licenses, a combined area of 527,179 hectares. They were one of three companies to primarily benefit from

the controversial 2014 forestry strategy that guaranteed an increase in their wood supply from the Crown land.

Specializing in paper production, the Edmundston mill is part of Twin Rivers’ integrated operations comprised of a paper mill in Madawaska, Maine, and a lumber mill in the New Brunswick village of Plaster Rock. In 2016, the company acquired the assets of New York-based Burrows Paper Corporation, including paper mills in New York and Mississippi. In 2018, the company bought the Pine Bluff mill in Arkansas.

A wage increase was not the only gain for the Edmundston workers. Qualifying retirees will be provided with 18 months of dental and health benefits. Workers will also get a family day starting next year.

“The agreement follows the pattern set for the sector and the fact is this mill is making money and the company knows our members are essential to its success,” said Scott Doherty, Executive Assistant to Unifor’s National President.

Mayor of Edmundston Cyrille Simard welcomes this collective agreement: “Twin Rivers Paper plays an important role in our economy. This new contractual agreement is good news as it brings stability in our local economy and in the forestry sector for the whole region.”

In the early 2000s, many mill workers in New Brunswick lost their jobs when a wave of mill closures hit the province but a record volume of wood was being cut from the Crown land, a situation that was denounced by the unions representing mill workers, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick and smaller forestry players such as Miramichi Lumber. Regions of the province such as Miramichi were especially devastated when their mills closed.

Daniel Légère, president of the New Brunswick Federation

of Labour, says that a strong labour movement is needed more than ever in “the face of global economics with free trade for corporations, but highly constrained rights for workers driving inequities on a massive scale.”

“Trickle down economics has failed workers, families and communities for decades. It’s time to turn the channel and try bottom-up economics. Only when we pay workers a fair share of the gains of economic growth, invest in their education, job training and benefits will we see the benefits of bottom-up economics,” said Légère.



Twin Rivers Paper pulp mill in Edmundston, New Brunswick. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

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Seniors pay more for water than the billionaires?

By comparison, the City of Toronto charges industrial customers \$3.95 per cubic meter for the first 5,000 cubic meters of water and then gives them a 30 per cent discount; lowering the rate to \$2.77 per cubic meter.

Depending on how much water each industrial enterprise in Saint John uses, they have a ‘special agreement’ with Saint John Water that allows them to pay pennies on the dollar for this precious resource. While the pulp mill pays 8 cents per cubic metre; the refinery pays 26 cents; still far below the \$18 that I am forced to pay for what little water I use, and substantially less than the City of Toronto charges its industrial customers.

If the powers to be were to raise the industrial rate for water even to a still ridiculously low rate of 40 cents per cubic meter, the City of Saint John could wipe out its entire projected 2021 deficit of \$12 million and have substantial additional revenue coming into the public purse year after year to pay for public transit, road repairs, lifeguards etc., instead of having to cut services as planned. The city’s ‘financial crisis’ would be solved overnight.

It is time we treated water for what it is; a valuable resource that is owned by the public. Only the public should determine what it is worth.

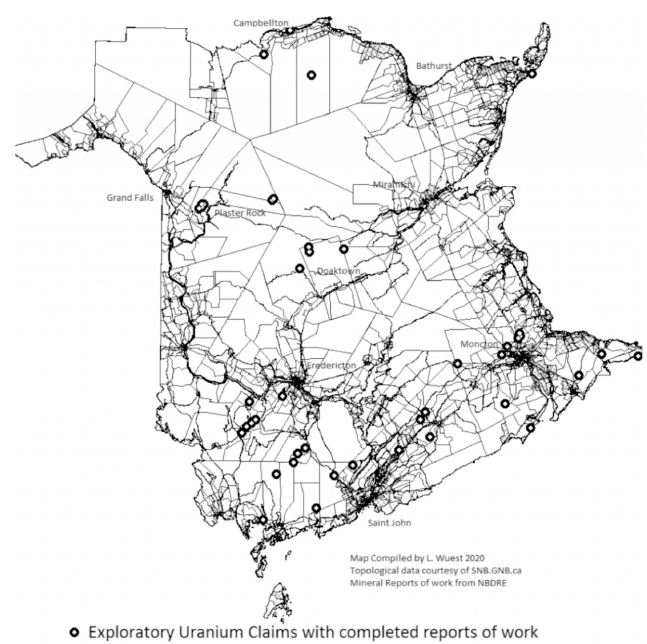
Doug James is a member of the Saint John Citizens Coalition.

Will a uranium mine be Higgs’ next genie?

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Medical Officer of Health with respect to shale gas exploration also apply to uranium exploration. Without sufficient regulation, exploration will inevitably bring to the surface radioactive material from deep within the earth, placing ground and surface waters at risk. With poor setbacks, poor prior testing, poor drilling oversight and poor waste management regulation, domestic water supplies and wells in affected areas will inevitably be placed at risk.

Along with reviewing the history and the Chief Medical Officer of Health recommendations, it is important to consider the communities most likely at risk. The map below pinpoints locations of past exploration work on uranium claims. In many of these locations, the population is relatively dense and drilled wells are the sole source of water.



In 2008, the province experienced an upswing in uranium exploration activity, buoyed by an unusual spike in uranium prices internationally. The New Brunswick Environmental Network, the Petitcodiac Riverkeepers, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick and the community organization Support Citizens Against Radioactive Emissions New Brunswick (S.C.A.R.E. NB) mobilized to raise community awareness of the dangers of uranium exploration and mining. The coalition demanded that the government of the day impose a permanent ban on uranium mining in the province. Although their demands were not met, public pressure did succeed in getting the government of 2008 to modify its “Standard Conditions for Mineral Exploration” to include specific but weak constraints on uranium mining.

Significantly, the revised guidelines, which are still in effect, do not include a setback for exploratory drilling near domestic water wells. The guidelines only require that wells within 500 metres of exploration sites be tested prior to drilling. The only other health and safety constraint of consequence is a requirement that all radioactive material be returned to the drilled hole, with concurrent grouting and sealing of the drill column. These two constraints are similar to the ineffective constraints on shale gas exploration, which the New Brunswick

public so vehemently opposed from 2011 to 2013.

In the end, as with shale gas, and tungsten, it was the collapse of commodity prices that eventually curtailed mining industry interest in the province’s relatively poor deposits of uranium. However, as mining expert Joan Kuyek documented, exploratory mining companies are all too ready to exploit public gullibility and governmental ignorance to capitalize on these unwitting pawns in their highly profitable investment games.

Given the desperation of today’s politicians, the government will likely find it expedient to funnel taxpayer money into new uranium exploration enterprises. This “investment” will be needed to create the hype and the illusion that something significant is happening to reinforce the government’s claims about SMNR. The province is now faced with the prospect of renewed haphazard uranium drilling to commence in areas where previous work has indicated some “whiffs” of uranium. If this happens, settler and Indigenous residents in the affected areas will need to be vigilant and ready to mobilize to protect their interests.

Whether or not uranium mining is in the cards in the near future, the public needs to demand that the 2012 recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health be immediately implemented to include ALL endeavours that threaten our precious water resource. While many of the Chief Medical Officer’s recommendations apply to the developmental stage of the uranium mining industry, several apply specifically to the exploration stage. These guidelines need to be in place in order to protect public health against the gaps in knowledge about cumulative and full life-cycle effects of the radioactive resource and its use.

With respect to uranium and its by-products as created by the nuclear reactor process, no one—neither the province nor scientists nor society in general—has answers to these crucial questions about cumulative and full life-cycle impacts. Nor does the province know how effectively radioactive waste can be contained and managed at exploration sites. Bringing deep-seated radioactive material to the surface is akin to letting the genie out of the bottle; there is no return to pre-drill conditions. Just as shale gas exploration has possibly brought deep-seated methane to surface wells in the Elgin area, bringing radioactive material to the surface via uranium exploration will be fraught with insufficient regulatory baseline monitoring and uninformed reactive response. The damage will have been done and the impacts will be irreversible.

Unfortunately, the government of New Brunswick has a poor record of ensuring citizen health related to exposure to radioactivity. A 2008 CBC report, based on the work of Inka Milewski, then science advisor for the Conservation Council, revealed that the provincial government had not followed up on recommended testing of residents in the Harvey area after high levels of radioactive radon gas were found in that area dating back to 1981. That lack of action to ensure citizen health and safety from 1981 to 2008 is a lesson for all New Brunswick communities. Communities may find themselves at the mercy of uranium exploration companies, and a government pursuing an ill-advised quest for small modular nuclear reactors.

Lawrence Wuest is an ecologist living in the Upper Nashwaak on unceded territory of the Wəlastəkwiyik, Mi’kmaq, and Peskotomuhkati.

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