

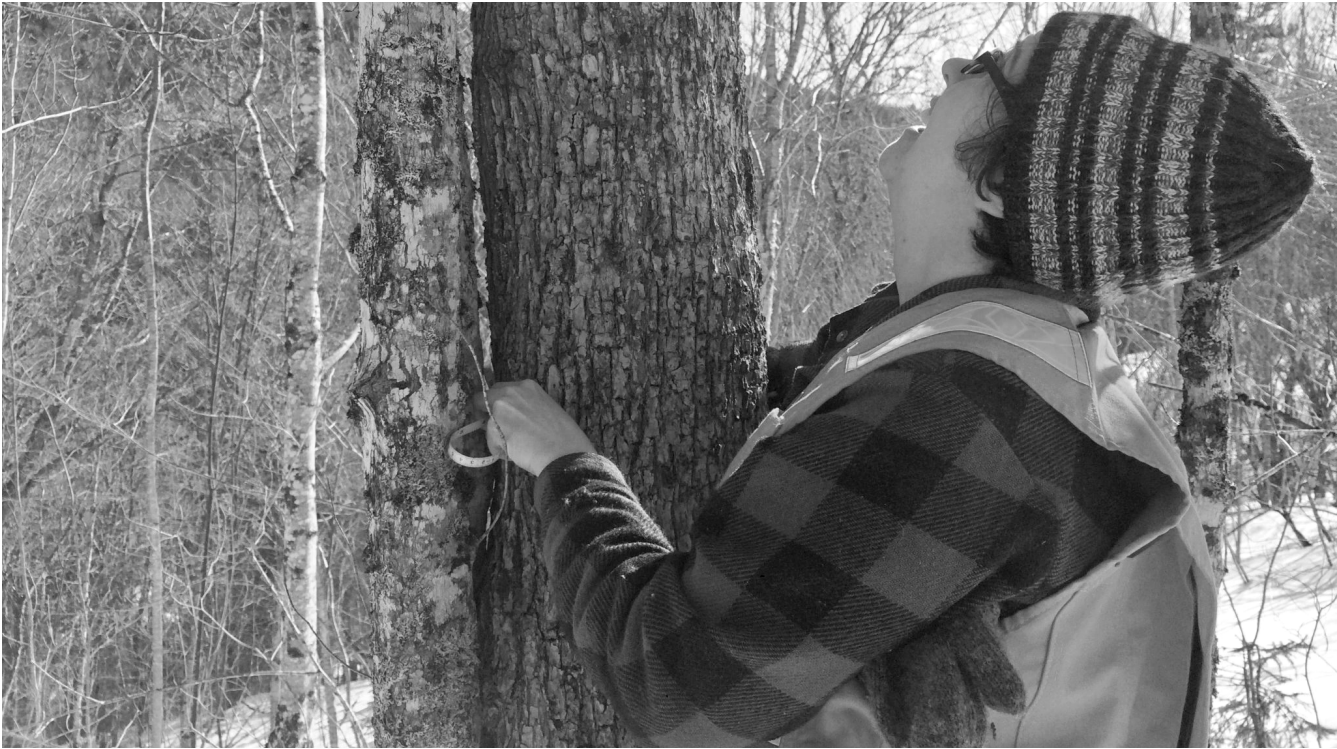


The Brief

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Protect the Wabanaki forest, one of the most endangered forest types in Canada

By AMY FLOYD



Megan de Graaf of Community Forests International measuring the diameter of a tree. Photo from Community Forests International.

You are invited to take a minute, close your eyes and recall your childhood experiences in the forests of New Brunswick.

My memory is of walking too far into a young stand of spruce that got so dense and crowded with sharp branches, that not even a young deer could move through. A person would almost have to crawl on their hands and knees to get through. This is what I thought a forest to be – because that is all that I knew. I had no idea how far the forest was from its natural state.

It was not until I was in my late twenties that I started to understand the importance and rarity of the Acadian/Wabanaki forest. As Community Forests International said in a recent press release for their Forgotten Forests Campaign, it “is one of Canada’s most diverse and endangered temperate forest types, yet is largely unknown.”

How do we not understand the value of this ecosystem? Likely, that is due to there being less than one per cent of old growth forest left in New Brunswick. Old growth has many definitions, but for simplicity we can say: found in a state similar to pre-colonial era (although we are not yet in the post-colonial era in many ways, including how we manage natural resources).

The World Wildlife Fund classified the Wabanaki forest among the most endangered forest types in Canada. Of the one per cent of remaining old growth, most of it is not contiguous, which means that it can be found only in small patches in various eco-regions of the province. Animals that need old growth habitat, like flying squirrels for instance, end up marooned in certain regions. There is too much monoculture forest, and too many roadways and developed areas to allow the wildlife to move to new areas on their own.

The Sackville-based non-profit, Community Forests International, has recently launched a campaign to protect 2,500 acres of endangered forest called “The Forgotten Forest.”

Community Forests International says that, “The small remnants of this forest that remain intact today are often on hilltops and in hard-to-access ravines, where forest clearing could not easily reach. Forest Program Manager, Craig Tupper and his colleagues have spent the last year searching for these remnants—which are usually found in corners of larger properties—and have lined up sales agreements with several private landowners.”

The organization has secured 80 per cent of the required funds to purchase woodlands through private foundations and now they are asking New Brunswickers for support.

Community Forests have done some admirable forest restoration projects over the years. To date, they have protected over 3,000 acres of ecologically valuable Acadian forest. Their work is not only about conservation,

but about restoration. On May 13, I had the opportunity to attend a workshop hosted by Community Forests International and the Nashwaak Watershed Association on Climate Adaptive Silviculture.

The Wabanaki forest is a hemi-boreal forest, where northern species like spruce, poplar, tamarack and birch mix with species from areas in the southern reaches of the Maritimes and New England. These tree species include oak, pine, maple and hemlock. This forest type had been quite diverse before colonial interference. We had forest fires only every thousand years or so, so most of the changes in the forest came in smaller patches through wind or insect damage.

The workshop taught us how warmer overall conditions, followed by intense wet periods and drought cycles would damage or weaken the boreal species, but favour the most southerly hardwoods. Extreme coastal weather like hurricanes put softwood monoculture stands at a higher risk for large blowdown events as they are shallow rooted and tend to be even-aged stands.

Landowners can select for the most climate adaptive trees to lessen some of the damage of climate change. Forest Program Director Megan de Graaf explained to our group that, “Our forests are currently very vulnerable to the risks of climate change, due to the over-representation of boreal-affiliated softwoods on the landscape (a product of past human intervention). This represents a ‘ticking carbon time bomb’ for our forests, since the rate of climate change is four times faster than the natural rate of adaptation in forests.” Just as human intervention shaped the forest to be what it is today, we also need to take an active role in restoration.

Old forests are not the only interest for Community Forests International. They plan to purchase and restore areas that have been harvested also, using a practice called proforestation — actively managing younger forests back to their full ecological potential to augment their ability to sequester carbon and adapt to climate change. While scientists struggle to build expensive and massive carbon drawdown facilities, we have this free and proven resource in our own backyard.

While timber prices are dismal, we simply cannot put a price on the value of a climate stable forest that helps to clean our atmosphere. Why not invest in our own future by supporting our remarkable Wabanaki forest?

Amy Floyd and her partner Drew Gilbert have recently become stewards of a small woodlot and former soil mining site on the Nashwaak River and are actively working on restoration with the help of the Nashwaak Watershed Association through the Nashwaak Forest Stewardship Project.

This article won the 2022 Brian Beaton Annual Prize in Journalism for Justice.

Mount Allison prof’s new book examines corporate plunder in Canada and abroad

By BRUCE WARK

The Canadian state was built on the violent dispossession of Indigenous Peoples and the theft of their resources...

Given this reality, is it really that surprising that environmental and social harm caused by Canadian corporations abroad does not receive much attention in this country?

— *Capitalism & Dispossession: Corporate Canada at Home & Abroad*

Mount Allison University Politics and International Relations Professor David Thomas launched a new book on September 7 that examines the ways in which Canadian corporations acquire and profit from marginalized peoples’ land and resources both in Canada and abroad.

“Half the book looks at cases in Canada and half of it looks at cases abroad,” Thomas told about 60 people attending the book launch at Mount Allison University.

He said that the book tries to point out the deep connections between foreign and domestic land grabbing, resource extraction and plunder, and how those things are supported directly and indirectly by the Canadian government.

The book also examines the continuing resistance of local people who organize to protect their land, water, communities and ways of life.

Case studies

Capitalism & Dispossession brings together case studies written by 15 academic authors including Thomas himself, who co-edited the book with Veldon Coburn, a professor at the University of Ottawa’s Institute of Indigenous Research and Studies.

“There’s a big body of literature on Canadian corporations abroad and then there’s a big body of literature on Canadian political economy and things happening here,” Thomas said, adding that these two facets of Canadian business are typically separated, hiding the deep connections between them.

“We tried to put them into one volume and then Veldon and I tried to weave some of the connections and threads together in the introduction and conclusion.”

Thomas said the foreign case studies include an examination of how a big Canadian gold mining company in the West African country of Burkina Faso is displacing local people engaged in small scale mining while Canadian nickel mining in the Sorowako region of Indonesia has driven some Indigenous people from their farms while offering low-paid, precarious work to others.

The case studies in Canada include the displacement of the Ojibwe of Grassy Narrows in northwestern Ontario, from 142,000 square kilometres of land to a reserve of just over 41 square kilometres, clearing the way for mining and forestry and leaving the Indigenous people to subsist on fish and game even as the Dryden paper mill dumped nearly 10 tonnes of mercury into the English-Wabigoon river system causing widespread illness and death.

The book also examines the successful resistance of Mi’kmaw grandmothers to the Alton Gas project—a Calgary-based energy company’s plan to pump water from Nova Scotia’s Shubenacadie River to flush out underground salt deposits and create huge caverns for storing up to 10 billion cubic feet of natural gas.

Canadian complicity

“Our entire foreign service is dedicated to the promotion of corporate interests abroad,” Charlotte Connolly told the audience at the book launch.



Professor David Thomas introduces the book he co-edited with Veldon Coburn, *Capitalism & Dispossession*, at the Mount Allison University in Sackville on Sept. 7. Photo by Bruce Wark.

Past time to stop platforming the Fraser Institute. Canada can afford public health care

By ADITYA RAO and TRACY GLYNN



Sharon Teare, President of the New Brunswick Council of Nursing Home Unions, and Steve Drost, President of CUPE NB rallying for public health care outside the Liberal MP retreat in St. Andrews on Sept. 12. Photo by Arun Budhathoki.

Telegraph-Journal readers would be forgiven if they read the paper and thought that public health care is unsustainable, costing individuals and families a fortune, and should be abandoned.

After all, the newly Postmedia-owned paper drew attention to a report by the Fraser Institute, a conservative think tank, published in August alerting “unaware” Canadians of the cost of public health care.

The report claims that a “typical Canadian family” of two parents and two children with an average household income of \$156,086 will pay \$15,847 for public health care this year. Single parents will pay \$5,812, according to this report. Unattached single individuals will pay \$4,907.

The report, titled “The Price of Public Health Care Insurance, 2022,” however, is an exercise in deception. Let us explain.

According to their calculations, in 2022, the report’s authors state that 23.9 per cent of tax revenue from income tax will be spent on health care. Let’s assume this percentage is correct. Since they simply cite to raw data tables and to “author’s calculations,” there is no way to know.

Therefore, one presumes that if you know the income tax paid by any family or individual, then it follows that 23.9 per cent of that will be paid for health care. Thus, first they calculate that an unattached single individual’s average income is \$50,140. Then, they calculate the average total tax bill to be \$20,528. And then 23.9 per cent of that number leads you to \$4,907 paid for health care.

But this is not correct.

First, the report relies on the Fraser Institute’s “Canadian Tax Simulator” which has been criticized by economists for inflating the amount of taxes that individuals pay by thousands of dollars.

Second, the Fraser Institute’s fixation on the “average”

instead of the more reliable “median” family is a political choice. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has criticized this as being designed to coax Canadian families – who tend to think of themselves as an “average family” – into believing that they pay nearly half their income in taxes.

Finally, by their own admission, the authors note that it is difficult to estimate how much an individual or a family pays directly towards health care costs because that’s simply not how health care spending works. Generally speaking, health care is funded from general revenues.

The attempt to then conjure up a number for how much individuals and families are spending on public health care becomes immediately political. This is because the question they must answer is: *what revenue source must be excluded in this experimental calculation, and what is the political impact from it?*

The answer to that question tells us exactly which team the Fraser Institute is playing for. Right off the bat, it appears that they have excluded corporate income taxes from this calculation. Accounting for corporate income taxes would probably yield a smaller percentage of income tax revenue spent on health care because the amount of income tax being considered becomes larger.

Now, it is possible that they already adjusted for the revenue from corporate income taxes in coming up with their 23.9 per cent figure, but – again – we don’t know that because they haven’t shared their calculations.

What about the impact from other sources of government revenue like sales taxes and royalties? Well, the authors note that sales taxes and other sources of revenue may also fund health care, but they say nothing about how they adjust for the impact of those revenue sources. Again, we are forced to assume that they simply did not include them in their calculations.

Their goal, clearly, is to leave the reader with the impression that the “average family” is shouldering a disproportionate burden in financing health care, and if only they knew, then maybe they’d be open to something else. What that “something else” could be, I’m sure, is extremely clear to the authors – and presumably corporate funders – of the report.

Make no mistake. This Fraser Institute report is the oldest political trick in the “think tank” playbook – Cherry-pick the numbers you want to work with, make acknowledgements about other data that exist to create the impression of academic integrity, ignore them anyway, and create the evidentiary basis to fuel political campaigns for your paymasters.

If they had submitted this report for peer review, it would have been shredded.

It does not require too much reading between the lines to find that the Fraser Institute’s report is intended to make the case for the privatization of health care and queue jumping for the rich who can pay for health care. Private health care takes doctors and health care staff and resources away from the public system, which results in longer wait times and a health care system more concerned about profits than quality health care.

Privatization of health care is not going to help Dieppe resident Marilyn Mannette who cannot afford to take time off work to go to her cancer treatments, as reported in the *Telegraph-Journal* on August 9. To maximize profits, private clinics accept the healthiest and wealthiest, often refusing services to the elderly or those with chronic conditions. The public health care system that has been gutted of the resources and staff it needs to optimally function is then expected to take care of these “costly patients.”

We can afford universal public health care. The Liberal-NDP Confidence and Supply Agreement promises to extend public health care coverage. Finally, the dream of a universal national pharmacare program is in sight. More accessible dental care, more doctors and nurses in the public health care system, and improved long-term care are also on the table.

The thing is, the Fraser Institute is not interested in good faith debate about public policy. They won’t disclose their funders, but have reportedly taken money from the Koch brothers, have been linked to “dark money” and the oil industry, and have even produced “research” claiming that the harmful effects of tobacco are exaggerated. That research was funded by – you guessed it – the tobacco industry.

So much is at stake and the Fraser Institute’s misleading report is at best a distraction from the important public conversations that need to be had on how to best deliver quality public health care in Canada.

Intellectually compromised and politically shrewd, the Fraser Institute dances to the tune of their corporate funders. Treating them as though they are a legitimate interlocutor in public policy debates is a disservice to society.

Aditya Rao is a lawyer and researcher. Tracy Glynn is the National Director of Operations and Projects for the Canadian Health Coalition.

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Mount Allison prof’s new book

“A lot of people don’t know that,” she added.

Connolly, who is a research assistant with the Justice and Corporate Accountability Project, is one of the authors of a case study on the Escobal silver mine in southern Guatemala—a mine that has received extensive support from the Canadian embassy there as well as Canada’s foreign service, now known as Global Affairs Canada.

“Essentially, the Canadian government promotes what it calls a ‘whole of government’ approach to the promotion and protection of foreign trade and direct investment abroad,” Connolly said.

“Economic diplomacy forms one part of this broader strategy and it’s described by the government of Canada as quote, ‘the harnessing of all of Canada’s diplomatic assets to support the pursuit of commercial success by Canadian companies abroad.’”

Connolly said she and her co-authors sifted through thousands of pages of embassy documents they obtained under the federal Access to Information law.

“The Canadian government considered the Escobal silver mine as a strategic capital asset,” she said.

“It was the second-largest reserve of silver in the world, which is significant and results in a lot of returns for Canadian banks and investment firms as well as Canadian pension funds,” she added.

The documents obtained through Access to Information showed, Connolly said, how Canadian officials successfully lobbied against the Guatemalan government’s proposals to take a bigger stake in mining projects while increasing royalty payments.

They also showed Canadian indifference to military and police repression of the Xinka Indigenous people and their neighbours who launched peaceful protests against the mining project because it threatened their land and water.

She read an email from then Canadian ambassador Hugues Rousseau celebrating the approval of the mine’s operating licence on April 3, 2013;

Everyone’s perseverance finally paid off today. We are expecting quite a backlash from the opposition groups that were probably taken by surprise. However, this time both the [Guatemalan] government and the companies are ready to defend themselves with an aggressive campaign on the benefits of responsible, extractive industry activity.

“That was one of the most shocking things I read,” Connolly said, “because the campaign was very aggressive.

“Between 2012 and 2014, over 100 community members were criminalized, over 10 were shot including a 16-year-old girl and her father,” she added.

Connolly said Canadian officials suggested that the death of the 16-year-old, who was actively opposing the mine, occurred because of “street fighting” during a local parade even though an email from Canada’s trade commissioner acknowledged that “some individuals, who might be employees of the mining company” may have been involved, but she did not call for a full investigation.

“This is really just one example of many other case studies, which demonstrate how Canadian economic diplomacy in Latin America and around the world has systematically thwarted the self-determination of Indigenous and campesino communities who contest mining projects,” Connolly concluded.

Elsipogtog protests

“Are there any cops here?” Patti Musgrave Quinn asked as she began her presentation at the book launch.

Now serving as Mount Allison University’s Indigenous Affairs Coordinator, Musgrave Quinn took part in the Elsipogtog First Nation’s successful resistance to fracking exploration on their traditional lands.

Although it isn’t included as a case study in the new book, Musgrave Quinn said the Elsipogtog story is similar to the ones that are included.

She described taking photographs of hotel parking lots jammed with police vehicles in the Moncton area on October 16, 2013 and sending them to the Mi’kmaq Warriors at Elsipogtog.

“We knew that tomorrow morning, we were dead,” she said.

Hundreds of police in riot-gear arrived that morning with dogs and snipers firing rounds of rubber bullets to enforce a court injunction against a Mi’kmaq blockade that had been preventing vehicles owned by SWN Resources, a Texas-based energy company, from continuing its exploration for natural gas.

More than 40 of the protesters were arrested that day.

Musgrave Quinn said she herself was not there that morning, but watched live feeds of it.

She urged her audience to watch the YouTube video Rexton Raid showing events as they unfolded.

“That was an absolute horror scene,” she said.

“It took me a couple of years to stop crying; it took me a couple of years to drive without looking behind me; it took me a couple of years to not want to puke every time I saw a police car because I was really afraid,” she said.

“Capitalism is in bed with people that we’re supposed to depend on.”

Bruce Wark worked in broadcasting and journalism education for more than 35 years. He was at CBC Radio for nearly 20 years as senior editor of network programs such as *The World at Six* and *World Report*. He currently writes for *The New Wark Times*, where this story first appeared on September 12, 2022.

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