



## Hundreds rally to oppose JD Irving-NB government plan for the forest

Written by Asaf Rashid on May 20, 2014

Northern New Brunswick filmmaker Charles Thériault performed a Capella song 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,” sung Thériault. Photo by Joe Gee.

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 J.D. 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.

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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 1st.

“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.



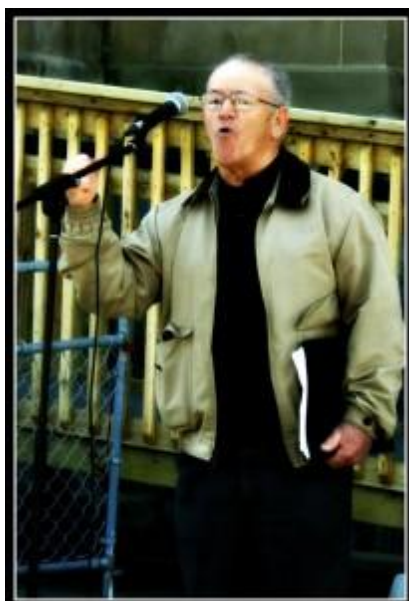
A banner seen at the Rally for Our Forest on May 13 in Fredericton. Photo by Joe Gee.

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, Miramichi woodlot owner, thanks the professionals who are speaking up against the forest plan. Photo by Joe Gee.

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-Miksovsky. 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.

"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.*