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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Spraying a concern for Iroquois Fall resident

Is it just my imagination or are we about to cover Northeastern Ontario with herbicidal spray this month?

What are the warnings in the newspapers for? Are we supposed to be able to stop this from happening? I guess we'll all have to wear gas masks as we pick this year's crop of herbicidal berries.

I suppose an organic seal on forest products and power is too much to ask for.

At least we get a warning when these planes will be flying over dropping their lethal cargo so we can all take cover or evacuate the area.

This month it won't be your imagination if your favourite camping spot smells like a golfcourse.

On a positive note, this might solve the riddle of our dying deciduous trees and our declining fish and wildlife population.

It's strange how most towns and cities are banning the use of herbicides, yet we choose to apply these chemicals to weed the better half of this beautiful province.

Philippe Cormier, Iroquois Falls

Taking from seniors to pay for health care

This month was the first installment of the province's new health premium — blood money taken from our private senior's pension.

We are a tad above the cutoff point and now our only worry is how to replace it on a fixed income.

We aren't rich. The cutoff is 23K per annum. Any funds for retirement were used up trying to keep our family together. We thought we could get along if we watched our pension money carefully and tried not to spend too much on heating.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Herbicide spraying in the bush couldn't be safer

The residents of Northeastern Ontario need not be alarmed. There will not be an invasion of spray planes Mr. Cormier implied in his letter to the editor recently. I would also like to reassure people they do not need to buy gas masks to enjoy their favourite camping spots in the weeks ahead.

Tembec is one of the largest forest companies in Northeastern Ontario and has been one of the companies putting the advertisements in the newspaper. I would like to explain a few things so people can make an informed decision about herbicide spraying.

I would agree there have been numerous advertisements, but the law requires the

public be notified when a company is going to apply any amount of herbicide in the forest. Even if it was not a law, Tembec believes this is the right thing to do because the forest on Crown land belongs to the people of Ontario.

Before Tembec decides to apply herbicide to an area, we first look at the other values in the area. For instance we do not spray camping sites of areas adjacent to water bodies. We also look for alternate techniques to ensure the original forest type is reestablished on the site.

However, aerial application of herbicides has been proven to be the safest and most cost effective tool to use. Therefore, when we come to the conclusion that a herbicide application is required we select only approved chemicals that ensure the forest grows while at the same time eradicating all the other plants.

At the time of application we ensure signs are posted at the side in advance of application and on the day of the spray, ground crews block off the area and a reconnaissance flight is made to ensure no campers, berry pickers or hunters are in the block.

Forestry is unlike the agriculture and horticulture industries that use herbicides to create monocultures. Since our objectives is not to create monocultures, Tembec need only spray a forest area once every 100 years and on an annual basis spray about 0.003 per cent of the total forested area.

Mr. Cormier expressed a concern about a "lethal cargo." All approved herbicides are tested for their toxicity. The herbicides used in forestry have a toxicity level half that of table salt and about three times that of alcohol.

Richard Groves, Tembec, Timmins office

Spread out too thin, the quality of work will suffer and the public's patience will run out.

Richard Gravel, Timmins

Many herbicide questions still need answers

I was quite pleased to read Phillippe Cormier's letter (*Spraying a concern for Iroquois Falls resident, Aug. 4*) outlining his concern on herbicide spraying.

It's a shame more people aren't asking these questions.

I am also a little disappointed Richard Groves of Tembec (letter: *Herbicide spraying in the bush couldn't be safer, Aug. 9*) says it is the safest tool and that forestry is unlike the agriculture and horticulture industries that use herbicides to create monocultures, especially when we are surrounded by jack pine monocultures.

I had this battle with a local forestry company a few years back when I owned a cottage on Horwood Lake and the Hardiman Bay peninsula was cut. There was an aerial spraying notice that was put in the paper advising an information session.

Unfortunately, only five or six people showed up for the session and when we started asking questions no one had answers.

I did my homework and found the forestry companies, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Health, health units, Agriculture Canada and the companies who supply the herbicide all had conflicting warnings and guidelines on the use of the particular herbicide they were to use.

At the time, the herbicide to be used contained 24D, the same chemical used in Agent Orange.

Certain guidelines stated that while the herbicide is being sprayed, residents should put their children's toys inside, cover sandboxes, cover patio furniture, and plastic patio furniture should not be left outside. Wind conditions were to be under a specific speed, spraying was to be done a certain distance from the water, spraying wouldn't be done if it was to rain within so many hours of the spray, etc., yet other guidelines had no warnings.

It is difficult to believe that all the legal guidelines are met and it would be interesting to see which government office is responsible to ensure all the guidelines are met.

I also happened upon a CBC Radio broadcast on the exact subject at the same point in time, and the speaker was a retired government official from Thunder Bay who approved the use of the herbicides to forestry companies during the course of his employment.

After retiring, he did some research and regretted that he ever approved the use of any herbicide.

He said cancer rates in sprayed areas increased 40 per cent and traces of the

herbicide were found in blueberries nine years later.

Another question that remains is: what happens to the wildlife in the areas being sprayed?

It is impossible to remove the bald eagles, moose, wolves, fox, ect. If they are sprayed, do they die a slow death? Does it cause them to go blind? If they eat vegetation in a freshly sprayed area, are they poisoned?

If the forest industry does not wish to create monocultures, why are there so many jack pine monocultures in the North?

I realize that for the forest industry to survive they must harvest and replant, but to say this is the safest method — come on.

Other provinces use sheep to eat the undergrowth and while it might not be the most cost effective tool, it has been proven to be much safer.

After many cottager meetings and a petition, the Hardiman Bay Peninsula was not sprayed and left to regrow as a natural forest.

We did not lose the bald eagles, great blue herons, wolves, lynx, bobcats, partridge, rabbits, raccoons, etc. — none of which I can honestly say I've ever seen in a monoculture area.

Karen Hamel, Timmins

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Herbiciding forests done as safely as possible

I would like to first thank Karen Hamel for expressing her opinions on herbicide use and encourage others to do the same. She is correct that people should be engaged; after all, it is your forest and your children's future.

At this time, there are only two chemicals that are approved for aerial application in Ontario. Each chemical is better at controlling different plant types. If an individual desires to know more about the chemicals and the rules on their application, call any one of the companies or government offices for details as we both use the same fact sheets.

The procedures for application of herbicides in forestry operations are quite regulated. The companies either meet the legal requirements or they are charged.

The provincial Ministry of Natural

Resources and Ministry of Environment approves and audits the operations. Strict reporting relationships are respected.

The chemical 2,4-D has been tested by the federal government and is approved for safe application. Agent Orange was a mixture of fossil fuels and several different herbicides and has never been approved for use in Canada. Comparing 2,4-D to Agent Orange is like saying aspirin is not safe to use because if you mix it with Tylenol and drink it with gasoline, it will kill you.

We are always looking for alternatives. In Northeastern Ontario, we tried using sheep to control vegetation. Unfortunately, the only thing that benefited from this technique were the wolves and bears.

In some areas hand-tending with brush saws is done. If you have ever cut down a poplar or willow tree from your property, you know that soon after you cut it, new shoots appear on your lawn from the

stump and roots. The same is true in the forest. If you cut poplar trees down to let the young spruce or pine trees grow, the poplar trees come back very quickly.

To ensure the pine and spruce trees can grow, you may have to cut poplar trees two or three times.

Another challenge with brush saws is that it is one of the higher accident-prone activities in forestry operations.

The forest industry and the government are working collaboratively to meet everyone's objective for the forest. The people of Ontario should be proud of how their forests are being managed but there is always an opportunity to improve.

If you have a question or idea, talk to your local company or government office. Maybe that idea or question will create the next new advance in forest management.

**R.W. Groves R.P.F.,
chief forester, Tembec**

919102

Herbicides only safe if we understand them

(Re: Herbiciding forests done as safely as possible, Sept. 3)

Several issues should be addressed regarding herbicide usage, and although I am not a scientist, I do recall some recent history.

In a letter by R.W. Groves R.P.F., Chief Forester, Tembec, he implied that because the government accepts the use of 2,4-D as a herbicide, it must be completely safe to use.

However, this summer I watched government ads on television recommending that people use insect repellent containing Deet to repel mosquitoes that may be carrying West Nile virus. However, Deet is a known cancer-causing agent.

Could the governments acceptance of 2,4-D be a similar situation?

It was not too long ago that the government approved the use of now known extremely toxic chemical agents. DDT was commonly sprayed in southern marshlands/farmlands to eliminate mosquitoes and other insects/pests. It was not discovered until years afterwards that DDT was in fact killing our fragile environment as it worked through the food chain.

We truly cannot know the long-term

effects of 2,4-D or other chemicals as we may not always know what to look for as negative side effects. This is not to say that I am an advocate of complete elimination of this chemical as a herbicide, but simply that it should not be used in all forestry areas.

I propose one of these areas that herbicide is not to be used is in the vicinity of tourism water bodies and hunting areas. These areas provide significant employment opportunities for an area otherwise largely devoid of industry, and from a strictly economical viewpoint, should merit extra protection.

The concept of "cost" is still, unfortunately, the deciding factor regarding whether or not to drop poison from a helicopter onto a freshly cleared area. Also, this concept of "cost" is not a true indication of negative value as it only amounts to dollars and cents, and does not burden the consumer with the "cost" of environmental damage.

Grazing animals, manual thinning, and other alternative environmentally sound methods of forest tending are available in our forests but will not be utilized so long as the government allows the use of herbicides.

The concept of change will be resisted by large corporations as change may mean the increase expenditure of dollars and cents.

Joel Theriault, Foleyet

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Even wild meat can't escape herbicides

A friend of mine recently asked me why I chose to avoid eating beef.

I replied that I didn't like the concept of eating animals that had been subjected to herbicides in their food source. I explained that this was why I prefer to eat wild game like bear, moose, deer, and partridge rather than farm-raised animals like cows and chickens.

It was not until a friend of mine had a pattern of recurrent headaches from eating bear meat, which I had harvested, that it struck me that my wild game was also being subjected to herbicides/pesticides in their food sources and this may

be the cause of her headaches.

The question then became: Is there a difference between farming and the Ministry of Natural Resources?

Both have financial obligations which must be met and, as such, both have an interest in maximizing profit from a limited number of animals. The difference between these two is that the beef industry gives the consumer the choice of eating meat from an animal that has not been subjected to herbicide/pesticide in its food source, though the price is slightly higher to compensate farmers for additional expenditures due to the lack of herbicides/pesticides.

The question then naturally arising would be: Are hunters and fishermen willing to spend addition money on

game tags to help ensure the meat they're harvesting is free from pesticides/herbicides applied in standard forestry practices?

I, nor any other hunter I know, has ever been asked if we felt it acceptable that the forested area we hunt in the fall was sprayed from above by poisons.

However, we should not blame forestry corporations with commitments to shareholder profits for this unacceptable choice. We, as anglers and hunters, must jointly express our concerns regarding this issue to our elected government to bring about desired changes.

Visit WhiteMoose.ca periodically for more information as the forestry section is in the process of development.

Joel Theriault, Foleyet