

OSINT Report on Glyphosate Application and Regulatory Capture in New Brunswick: An Analysis of Irving Group Operations and Ecological Degradation

The Political Economy of Forestry in New Brunswick: Regulatory Capture and the 2014 Forest Management Agreement

The Canadian province of New Brunswick presents a unique administrative and ecological landscape, characterized by an unprecedented level of integration between public resources and a single private conglomerate: the Irving Group. Approximately half of the provincial land base consists of public Crown land managed under Forest Management Agreements (FMAs). In 2014, the Progressive Conservative administration of Premier David Alward fundamentally altered the governance of these public lands by executing a highly controversial FMA with J.D. Irving Limited (JDI). This contract, drafted and signed in secret before its public release, extended JDI's timber harvesting rights on Crown Timber Licenses No. 6 and No. 7 until March 31, 2037.

The 2014 strategy represented a paradigm shift toward intensive industrial fiber production. It granted JDI an immediate 20 percent increase in its annual allowable cut of softwood timber. To accommodate this intensive extraction, the provincial government reduced the public lands off-limits to harvesting—including old-growth forest stands, deer wintering zones, and riparian buffer strips—from the historic target of 30 percent down to just 23 percent. This policy shift drew immediate legal and constitutional challenges. Seven Mi'kmaq First Nations, representing the communities of Buctouche, Eel Ground, Eel River Bar, Indian Island, Metepenagiag, and Pabineau, filed a lawsuit against the provincial government. The chiefs argued that the FMA and the Crown Lands and Forests Act itself constituted an unjustified infringement on their unceded Aboriginal and treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather within unsurrendered Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq, and Passamaquoddy territories.

Central to this regulatory environment is "outcome-based forestry". Under this framework, traditional prescriptive environmental regulations are replaced by high-level, corporate-defined outcomes. This framework effectively privatizes oversight, allowing larger clearcuts and reduced government monitoring on public lands. This degree of regulatory capture is sustained by a continuous "revolving door" between JDI's corporate suites and the highest offices of provincial power. A prominent example is former Premier Blaine Higgs, who spent 33 years as a senior executive for Irving Oil before entering politics in 2010, establishing a political apparatus deeply sympathetic to Irving's corporate interests.

This political captured status is further insulated by the Irving family's historical monopoly over the province's English-language media. Through Brunswick News Inc., the family controlled

nearly all major daily publications, including the Telegraph-Journal, The Daily Gleaner, and The Times & Transcript. This media monopoly allowed the conglomerate to shape public discourse, systematically suppressing critical investigative journalism on environmental practices, labor disputes, and government subsidies.

The socialization of corporate costs extends beyond the forestry sector. The city of Saint John, which hosts JDI's massive industrial footprint and the largest oil refinery in Canada, struggles with deteriorating roads and chronic municipal deficits. While the refinery generates billions in export revenue, the municipal tax base is heavily distorted, forcing residential taxpayers to subsidize industrial operations. This capture is exemplified by 2023 legislation allowing Irving Oil to pass the costs of federal Clean Fuel Regulations directly onto provincial consumers.

The Silvicultural Regime: Glyphosate Dependency and the Creation of Green Deserts

To maximize softwood yields for pulp, paper, and lumber operations, JDI relies on an intensive silvicultural model characterized by extensive clearcutting followed by the aerial spraying of glyphosate-based herbicides. Clearcutting rates in New Brunswick are among the highest in North America. The Auditor General's 2015 report revealed that clearcutting accounted for 80 percent of all provincial harvesting over the previous two decades, while selective and partial cutting declined to just 10 percent.

Every year, starting in August and continuing through September, private contractors execute aerial herbicide applications across approximately 13,000 to 15,000 hectares of Crown land. The objective of this chemical application is the systematic eradication of broadleaf hardwood species—such as maple, birch, oak, and poplar. By eliminating these naturally occurring hardwood competitors, JDI accelerates the regeneration of planted softwood conifer seedlings, such as spruce, pine, and balsam fir.

This systematic elimination of native hardwoods has transformed vast swaths of the Acadian forest into what ecologists term "green deserts". These monoculture plantations lack the vertical canopy structure, species diversity, and food sources necessary to support native wildlife populations. The Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Elders of the North Shore of Lake Huron have documented wide-reaching, multi-generational mutations in plants that survive initial glyphosate spraying. Academic studies have confirmed that glyphosate residues remain active in forest plant tissues, such as raspberries and blueberries, for a decade or more, frequently exceeding maximum recommended limits for human consumption.

Province / Jurisdiction	Scale of Glyphosate Application on Clearcut Lands (2014 Data)	Primary Management Regime / Funding	Alternative Vegetation Management Status
New Brunswick	40%	Highly intensive; fully funded by public taxpayers.	Banning resisted by industry; manual thinning rejected as uneconomical.
Ontario	28%	Widespread; approximately 70,000 hectares sprayed annually.	Minimal; heavy reliance on chemical site preparation.
Alberta	21%	Moderate; industrial	Limited; restricted to

Province / Jurisdiction	Scale of Glyphosate Application on Clearcut Lands (2014 Data)	Primary Management Regime / Funding	Alternative Vegetation Management Status
		forestry applications.	localized management.
Manitoba	18%	Moderate; regulated applications.	Limited.
Nova_Scotia	11%	Low; primary supply sourced from private woodlots.	Highly encouraged; extensive private management.
Québec	0%	Prohibited entirely on public lands since 2001.	Mandated; relies on natural regeneration and manual crews.
Vermont (USA)	0%	Prohibited entirely in forestry since 1997.	Natural regeneration and mixed-species management.

This intensive chemical intervention has dramatically heightened the wildfire vulnerability of the provincial landscape. Naturally occurring hardwood trees, such as birch and maple, act as natural firebreaks due to their higher moisture content and lack of volatile resins. By contrast, JDI's tightly packed, resin-rich conifer plantations burn five to ten times faster, creating a drier, hotter, and more volatile forest environment. The strategic risk of this chemical manipulation was highlighted during the 2024 wildfire season. The province of Québec, which relies on natural regeneration and manual thinning, recorded less than 250,000 hectares burned, whereas provinces heavily reliant on chemical monocultures suffered catastrophic, multi-million-hectare losses.

Operational Realities: Documented Incidents of Careless Herbicide Application

Despite corporate claims of precise, carefully regulated chemical application, open-source intelligence records a persistent pattern of careless herbicide use, drift, and direct exposure in New Brunswick. These incidents expose systemic failures in operational monitoring and containment, directly threatening rural communities, forest workers, and municipal drinking water supplies.

Incident Location / Date	Exposure Specifics and Environmental Pathways	Primary Entities Involved	Regulatory, Public, and Judicial Responses
Kedgwick River Region (Kedgwick, Northern NB)	Over 50 silviculture workers doused with chemicals from a helicopter spraying public forests.	J.D. Irving Limited / Helicopter Spray Contractor.	Sparked the Kedgwick petition; 1,100+ local residents signed, driving a provincial petition with over 13,000 signatures.
Wirral Region (Wirral, NB)	Glyphosate formulation "Vision Max" drifted through an open bedroom window	NB Power / Chemical Application Crew.	Direct citizen complaints; highlighted the inadequacy of buffer zones and

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	during transmission line treatment.		wind-drift controls.
Turtle Creek Watershed (Moncton, Southern NB)	Systematic chemical spraying executed inside the protected drinking water reservoir boundary.	Private Forestry Licensees / Municipal Water Authority.	Moncton mayor and municipal council demanded immediate cessation; toxicological debates on reservoir contamination.
Kedgwick River Clearcut (August 2016)	Herbicide spraying scheduled on active public land; environmentalists established physical blockades.	EcoVie Activist Group / Acadian Forest Licensees.	Activists deployed with protective gear to physically disrupt spraying; demanded an immediate provincial moratorium.

These incidents demonstrate the physical limits of aerial spray drift control. Standard agricultural and industrial nozzles generate a highly volatile chemical mist. Wind currents frequently carry this mist far beyond the targeted clearcut boundaries, leading to involuntary chemical exposure for nearby residents and the contamination of non-target organic environments.

The Suppression of Science: Institutional Purges and Corporate Pressure

To preserve the legitimacy of its high-yield silvicultural model, the provincial political and corporate apparatus has historically engaged in the systematic suppression of scientific dissent. Public servants, academic researchers, and health officers who compile data challenging the safety of glyphosate have faced swift professional retaliation.

The most prominent example is the late 2015 dismissal of New Brunswick's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Eilish Cleary. Shortly before her termination, the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified glyphosate as a "probable human carcinogen". Dr. Cleary publicly concurred with the finding and initiated a comprehensive provincial study to evaluate the long-term health risks of industrial glyphosate spraying in New Brunswick. On November 2, 2015, Dr. Cleary was abruptly placed on administrative leave by the Liberal government of Premier Brian Gallant. On December 7, her employment was terminated "without cause".

Following her suspension, JDI's corporate communications apparatus, led by spokeswoman Mary Keith, issued aggressive statements demanding that media outlets retract articles connecting her dismissal to the company's intensive herbicide use. In January 2016, the province executed a highly confidential settlement with Dr. Cleary, which was later revealed via court-ordered disclosures to involve a severance package of \$720,000. Political scientists characterized this substantial public expenditure as hush money designed to enforce a non-disclosure agreement and neutralize her public advocacy.

Dr. Cleary's dismissal followed a clear institutional precedent. In 2012, her landmark report, *Recommendations Concerning Shale Gas Development in New Brunswick*, validated grassroots

concerns regarding the systemic public health and water pollution risks of fracking. The Progressive Conservative government of the day initially attempted to suppress and bury the report, releasing it only after intense public and media pressure.

A parallel suppression of scientific inquiry occurred within the provincial academic and wildlife research sectors. Rod Cumberland, a prominent wildlife biologist and the former chief provincial deer biologist, spent years documenting a severe collapse in the provincial white-tailed deer population, which plummeted from 286,000 in 1985 to approximately 70,000 by 2014. Cumberland's research identified JDI's extensive clearcutting and glyphosate spraying as the primary drivers of this collapse. He calculated that the annual spray program systematically eliminated enough broadleaf browse to feed 26,000 to 32,000 deer annually, forcing the animals out of public forests and into agricultural and residential zones.

After finding his research stonewalled by the provincial Department of Natural Resources, Cumberland accepted a teaching position at the Maritime College of Forest Technology (MCFT). However, his continued public advocacy and criticism of glyphosate drew severe corporate backlash. Internal correspondence revealed that JDI representatives actively complained to MCFT's administration, offering to supply "science-based" literature to counter Cumberland's findings. In a wrongful dismissal lawsuit, former MCFT Executive Director Robert Whitney testified that Cumberland's anti-glyphosate advocacy prompted a "barrage" of calls and visits from forest industry representatives, including an Irving executive who pressured the college to terminate his contract, stating "we can get rid of him".

On June 20, 2019, Cumberland was summarily fired by MCFT. Within 24 hours of publicly declaring that Cumberland's firing was politically motivated by the forest industry, the college's retired Executive Director and fellow wildlife biologist, Gerald Redmond, was also fired from his teaching post. The MCFT board of governors, which includes representatives from major forestry companies, the federal government, and the provincial natural resources department, maintained that the dismissals were unrelated to glyphosate, a claim widely rejected by academic and labor organizations across Canada.

Economic Distortions: Subsidized Monopolies and Private Woodlot Decimation

The intensive chemical forestry model in New Brunswick is heavily dependent on public subsidies. Unlike neighboring jurisdictions, New Brunswick taxpayers directly fund the silvicultural operations of private licensees on public Crown lands. This funding covers mechanical site preparation, seedling planting, and aerial herbicide spraying. At an estimated cost of \$1,000 per hectare, New Brunswickers would provide over \$600 million in public funding to pulp and paper companies over the next 50 years under current conversion targets.

Subsidy / Financial Program	Annual Public Cost (Taxpayer Funded)	Core Mechanism and Corporate Benefit	Market and Trade Consequences
Silviculture & Planting Grants	\$24.5 Million	Funds JDI's mechanical preparation, planting, and chemical spraying.	Deemed an unfair export subsidy by the US Department of Commerce.
Licensee Management Fees	\$26.5 Million	Direct state payment to four licensees for forest management services.	Contributes directly to the chronic provincial forestry deficit.

Subsidy / Financial Program	Annual Public Cost (Taxpayer Funded)	Core Mechanism and Corporate Benefit	Market and Trade Consequences
Net Crown Forestry Deficit	\$7.0 - \$10.0 Million	Annual net financial loss incurred by the provincial treasury on Crown lands.	Socializes the intensive overhead of private timber extraction.
Subsidized Stumpage Pricing	\$30.69 / cubic metre	Subsidized public timber suppresses the market value of private wood.	Decimated independent woodlots, forcing sales to large conglomerates.

This subsidized access to Crown timber has severely distorted the local wood market, decimating the independent woodlot sector. Because JDI is guaranteed a vast, cheap supply of wood from public land, it holds monopsonistic power over private landowners. If independent woodlot owners—represented by the New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners—demand fair market prices for their timber, JDI can simply decrease its private purchases and increase its harvest from subsidized Crown lands. This structural suppression of wood prices has rendered small-scale, sustainable woodlot management economically unviable, forcing many owners to sell their lands directly to JDI or large investment firms, further consolidating corporate land ownership in the province.

The Fragile Science of the Chemical Lobby and Federal Courts

In response to mounting public opposition and scientific challenges, J.D. Irving has maintained an aggressive public relations and lobbying campaign to defend its silvicultural model. During the 2021 public hearings held by the New Brunswick Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship, JDI executives mounted a concerted effort to frame glyphosate as a safe, indispensable tool for global economic competitiveness.

Testifying before the committee, JDI Co-CEO Jim Irving asserted that a ban on glyphosate would be "disastrous" for the company's business, arguing that chemical application is necessary to maximize output on Crown timber leases. Irving dismissed concerns regarding environmental safety by pointing to the ubiquity of glyphosate in agriculture, stating: "You know the piece of toast you had for breakfast? It's got glyphosate.". To justify the practice, he contrasted New Brunswick with forestry practices in Brazil, noting that trees there grow 60 feet tall in six years due to the unrestricted application of intensive biocides, and warned that restricting chemical tools in Canada would force capital relocation and mass job losses.

Concurrently, JDI's Director of Research and Development, Andrew Willett, sought to undermine the credibility of anti-glyphosate advocates by categorizing them as victims of online misinformation, telling the legislative committee: "We can't make public policy... on something Karen from Facebook said or something we read on Google.".

This industry discourse relies heavily on the regulatory approval of Health Canada and its Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) as an absolute shield. However, OSINT tracking of the federal regulatory landscape reveals that Health Canada's approvals are increasingly isolated and legally fragile. In February 2022, the Federal Court of Appeal issued a highly critical ruling against the PMRA, finding that the agency had failed to conduct a scientifically rigorous assessment when it renewed glyphosate's registration in 2017. The court rebuked the PMRA's

"endless merry-go-round" of administrative rejections and ordered it to properly re-evaluate public objections.

Despite this judicial warning, in December 2022, the PMRA proceeded to renew the registration of glyphosate-based products, such as Loveland Products' Mad Dog Plus, for another five years without requiring any new safety data from the registrant. This renewal was met with immediate litigation (Case T2292-22) brought by a coalition of environmental and public health groups, including Safe Food Matters, Environmental Defence, and Friends of the Earth Canada. In a landmark ruling in February 2025, the Federal Court determined that Health Canada's renewal of glyphosate was entirely unreasonable and unsubstantiated by scientific analysis. The court set aside the registration renewal and gave Health Canada six months to conduct a transparent review that addresses sixty-one independent scientific studies submitted since 2017 showing increased environmental and ecological risks. This legal defeat exposes a significant gap between JDI's corporate assurances of absolute safety and the actual, legally deficient state of federal pesticide evaluations in Canada.

Date / Case Identifier	Regulatory / Judicial Body	Core Ruling / Finding	Strategic Implication
December 2015	New Brunswick Department of Health.	Firing of Chief Medical Officer Dr. Eilish Cleary.	Terminated "without cause" to suppress inquiry into glyphosate's public health impacts.
February 2022	Federal Court of Appeal.	Overruled PMRA's rejection of notices of objection.	Mandated a thorough review of glyphosate safety; criticized regulatory evasiveness.
December 2022	Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA).	Renewed Loveland's "Mad Dog Plus" for 5 years.	Executed without requiring new safety data; ignored 61 post-2017 risk studies.
Early 2025 / Case T2292-22	Federal Court of Canada.	Set aside PMRA's renewal decision as unreasonable.	PMRA given 6 months to justify renewals using transparent science; dismantled blind deference.
Early 2025	<i>Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology.</i>	Retracted the landmark 2000 glyphosate safety study.	Undermined the primary scientific citation used globally to justify glyphosate safety.

Strategic Policy Transitions and Ecological Alternatives

The evidence gathered through open-source intelligence demonstrates that the intensive, chemical-dependent forestry model practiced by J.D. Irving on public Crown lands is sustained through political capture, taxpayer subsidies, and the suppression of scientific dissent. The resulting ecological degradation—characterized by conifer monocultures, severe biodiversity

loss, collapse of wildlife populations, and elevated wildfire risks—has placed New Brunswick in an increasingly precarious position.

To mitigate these systemic risks, a strategic transition toward sustainable forest management is required. The successful model of Québec demonstrates that industrial forestry can remain highly profitable and globally competitive without chemical herbicides. Transitioning to manual vegetation control using specialized brush saws would eliminate chemical exposure risks, protect municipal water supplies, and directly generate thousands of silvicultural jobs in rural communities. Furthermore, restoring the conservation mandates of the Crown Lands and Forests Act would facilitate the recovery of the endangered Acadian forest, enhancing ecological resilience against climate-driven fire and pest events.

A comprehensive modernization of provincial natural resource policy must prioritize scientific transparency, fulfill constitutional obligations to First Nations, and establish independent public health oversight. By dismantling the subsidized corporate monopoly on Crown lands and supporting independent woodlot operators, New Brunswick can transition from a captured, ecologically vulnerable timber colony to a diverse, resilient, and sustainable forest economy.

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