

# Not seeing the forest for the trees

Cape Breton group works to save old-growth forests

BY GAZETTE STAFF

Nova Scotia's climax forests have almost disappeared. Less than 1% of forested land remains as old growth. One of the most public campaigns to save this ancient Nova Scotian wilderness was launched in the late 1980's by the Margaree Environmental Association (MEA) to preserve remnants of Cape Breton Acadian forest.

The Maritimes and parts of the Gaspé and New England are home to the Acadian forest. It is a transitional forest between the more northern boreal forests and the southerly deciduous forests. Both of these are represented in the Maritimes, depending upon local conditions. For example, Cape Breton valleys consist of deciduous trees, whereas its highlands are predominantly boreal. Unfortunately for local wildlife, early lumber barons began their assault on Canadian forests here and as high quality timber became rare, they moved west.

Two tracts of land, the Bornish Hills of the Keppoch Mountain and the Big Ridge of the Creignish Hills, were the focus of the MEA's attention. These areas were islands of pristine wilderness surrounded by clearcuts. A brief video produced by the group reports a contractor had "not seen such an alive area with such high wood yields in years," instead of

the "aged and decayed" forest that the Department of Natural Resources felt had to be "salvaged."

Chief Roderick Googoo, of the nearby Whyoccomagh Band Council, said, "I have visited the sites that are clear-cut. There is nothing but total silence, no birds. It's like being on the moon. As far as I could see, nothing but total devastation."

With money from the World Wildlife Fund Canada and Mountain Equipment Co-op, the MEA produced two widely distributed posters. One was of a large Cape Breton clear-cut and the second was a satellite image of the island revealing the extent of the clear-cutting.

As well, a photo exhibit, entitled "Cape Breton Island: Wilderness Disturbed," by Nova Scotian photographer Stephen Patterson, toured the province and is on permanent display at the Cape Breton Highland National Parks Visitor Information Centre in Cheticamp.

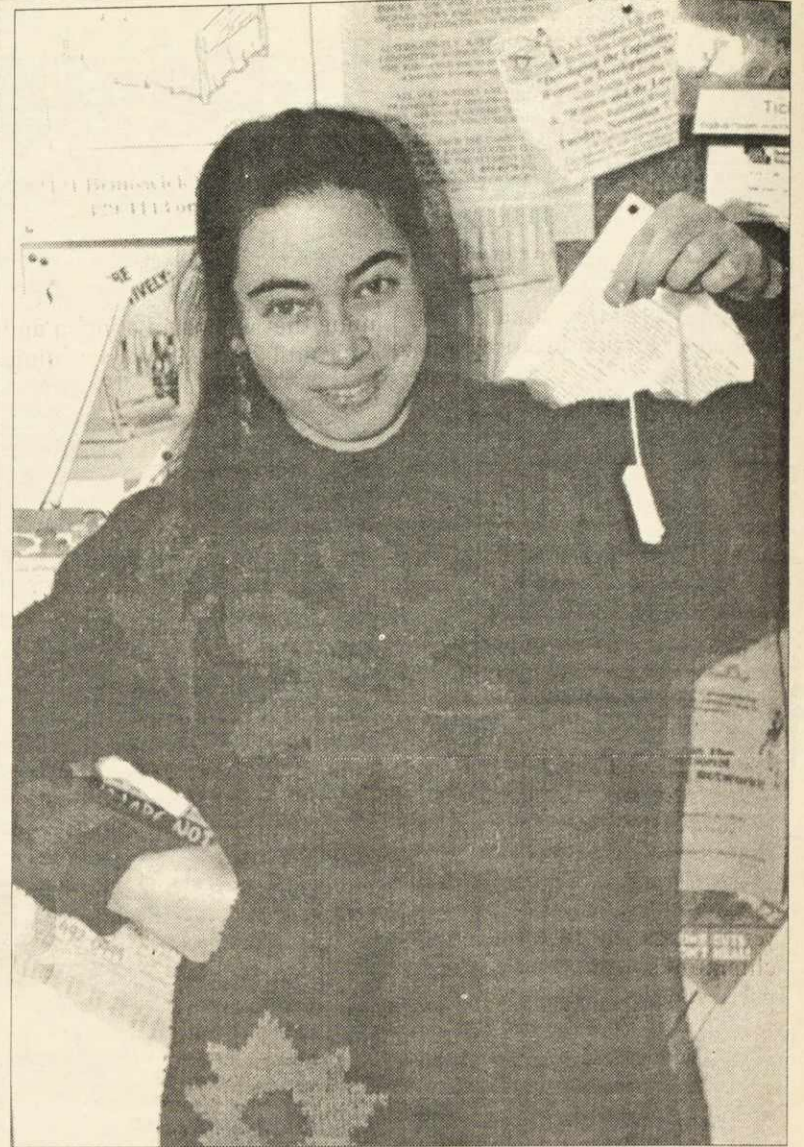
The destruction was best demonstrated through the video "Cape Breton Endangered Spaces." It takes the viewer on an aerial journey over the numerous plateaus to show the extensive clearcuts that are well hidden from Cape Breton tourist routes.

Through their lobbying and public awareness campaign, the MEA was successful. The Big Ridge was protected in 1990 and

is included in the Trout Brook Candidate Protected Area.

Will the Acadian forest be able to recover some of its former glory? Unfortunately, it is not likely. Firstly, in order to germinate and grow, the deciduous trees require shade, which large clear-cuts do not provide. Secondly, former hardwood stands are replanted with more favourable, genetically similar conifers (evergreens). The sugar maple, yellow birch, and beech that manage to grow are then killed by either pesticides or manual weeding.

All is not doom and gloom though. Clear-cutting on Cape Breton Crown land by Stora — a Swedish-owned pulp mill and prime user of local wood — stopped in 1992, but the deficit in wood supply was taken up by private woodlot owners. Although many resort to clear-cutting, a growing number are practicing more environmentally friendly strategies. Neal Livingston, one of the key members of the MEA, feels much of the change at Stora is due to consumer-driven pressure from Europe, especially Germany. Yes, Europe, not Cape Breton, not the rest of Nova Scotia or Canada, but Europe! Lastly, the System Plan for Parks and Protected Areas will likely preserve a variety of examples of the province's native ecosystems.



The Keeper is a reusable chlorine-free alternative to the tampon.

## This one's a Keeper

BY TANIA TREPANIER

A Keeper might be the perfect gift for the women you know.

It's small and easy to carry. It's convenient and comfortable. It's a million dollar industry's best-kept secret. It's reusable and it lasts a lifetime.

It's an alternative feminine hygiene product.

The Keeper, a rubber, bell-shaped receptacle, came out of a movement known as the "white wash" campaign. The white wash campaign refers to a consumer-based movement which opposes the manufacturing and marketing of chlorine bleached products. By boycotting products ranging from paper to menstrual pads, consumers have forced manufacturers to stop chlorine bleaching and to find alternative products.

Feminine hygiene products such as pads and tampons are extremely wasteful. Each woman will use approximately 10,000 pads in her lifetime. In the 1940s, when North American women used cloth pads, the average paper use averaged 150 pounds per person per year. Now, we use 640 pounds per person per year. Feminine hygiene products, among other disposable paper products, are responsible for much of this difference. Obviously, the waste disposal problems associated with this are great.

Also, the chlorine bleaching of feminine hygiene products has potentially serious negative health effects. When chlorine and the pulp of paper products mix, they form organochlorines, often referred to as "the world's most dangerous chemical." They store themselves in our fat tissues and bioaccumulate, which means that the body cannot eliminate them. A recent US study has shown that these toxins are more dangerous than previously thought. They have been linked to breast cancer, immune suppression, and

damage to major organs such as the liver, kidneys, and brain. The presence of organochlorines in the body may also lead to infertility and birth defects.

Kate Brennan-Alpert has taken these problems very seriously. Brennan-Alpert is completing her Biology degree at Dalhousie with a specialization in Ecology. She also has a background in environmental activism and has worked with the Nova Scotia Youth Conservation Corps.

"Nearly all of these products are bought by women. Every year, North American women spend about two billion dollars on single use disposable pads and tampons, and therefore women have enormous consumer clout," said Brennan-Alpert.

Switching to reusable menstrual products is not as radical or difficult as it might at first seem. Brennan-Alpert wants to convince as many women as possible that there are more viable alternatives when it comes to using menstrual products.

She points out that through advertising, the Canadian sanitary protection industry promotes an image that sanitary products must be "whiter than white."

She says "the industry is dedicated to keeping women believing that menstruation is a dirty process."

Brennan-Alpert will be putting on a workshop in which she will discuss the environmental and health problems associated with menstrual products on pharmacy shelves.

"Look forward to a fun and informative workshop where we can discuss the menstruation taboo and it's associations with the present situation. It's time to take menstruation out of the closet," she said.

The workshop will be this Thursday evening, November the 9th in the Student Union Building. All are welcome to attend.



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