

Pass the funnel, baby

BY SHELLEY ROBINSON

The school year has begun again — the campus abuzz with “haven’t seen you in so long” conversations, and everyone familiarising or re-familiarising themselves with what exactly it is that being back in school entails. All too often, however, all being back really means is a larger group of people with whom you get drunk, waste time and fritter away student loans. Classes too full to get a seat in last Monday, were facing rows of empty chairs by Wednesday, less due to drop-outs than from those who think they can just borrow notes.

Passionate enough about their right to education, students will throw Kraft Dinner at Lloyd Axworthy, but their passion doesn’t seem to extend to throwing the same effort into their studies. The Ameri-

can myth of college as the “best time of your life” — slated to begin an hour before the high school prom and end the September after you graduate from college. —



Is the real world scary enough to justify paying at least \$12,000 to stave off commitment and get a few beer discounts? No, but that’s what a lot of people are opting for. University is perceived both as a place to party, and the only way to land a decent job, and while this is not the same argument as “What’s a degree in (fill in your program here) ever going to do for you?”, there are similarities. Something may not seem very practical and yet may still be worthwhile, but I’m hard pressed to think of what a half-earned, half-assed degree is going to do for you besides get you the misplaced reverence of a few employers you probably don’t want to work for anyway. All of this leads to an environment where people convince themselves that class is an optional part of school, that by hanging out at the Grad House they’re broadening their horizons more than school can. Which isn’t to say that classes are all there is to higher education, though regular attendance at the Grawood on Thursday’s isn’t quite an extra-curricular activity.

The jury’s still out on whether university has all the answers. But since you’re already here, make the most of your time and money. Go to your classes. Get involved. If you’re gonna dick off anyway, drop out. Save yourself the hassle. Chances are you’re in the class I’m waiting for.

now serves as justification to put all major decisions on hold for three to four years. And what do you do? Easy enough to answer... you’re in university.

Unscientific Forestry Practices in the Christmas Mountains

BY DANIEL HARAN

How does a multinational pulp and paper company manage to clearcut the last bit of an old growth forest? Great public relations and really bad science — and if you help to elect a government like Frank McKenna’s, you’ve hit the jackpot.

The forest I’m referring to is the largest, least fragmented, least disturbed boreal forest in eastern North America: a 12,000 acre area known as the Christmas Mountains. According to plans drawn up by Repap (the company clearcutting the area), it will all be gone in a generation. By more realistic estimates, it will be gone much faster — every time an area is clearcut, adjacent areas are more prone to “blowdown.” Blowdowns have to be “cleaned up” or “salvaged,” creating a domino effect.

In a month of protesting, I heard government and Repap officials downplay such arguments. For example, they contend that it is mostly trees that are overmature or on slopes that are prone to blowdown...yet government officials didn’t want to show their aerial maps. Asides from purely economic or spiritual issues, the Repap/government unholy alliance have disagreed with protesters on how clearcutting will affect the watershed and biodiversity in the area.

Headwaters for three watersheds.

Messing with a watershed is serious business — just check out what happened to Bangladesh when their southern neighbours decided to cut their forests for foreign exchange. All of a sudden, the incidence of droughts and floods — along with their human and economic costs — increased exponentially.

The results of bad management would certainly not be as drastic in New Brunswick. Nonetheless, the 12,000 acres is where NB’s three major watersheds start, and results are already apparent. After heavy rains, in areas where clearcutting has taken place, water levels go up and down faster than they used to. Government and industry point to buffer zones around lakes and streams to say that they protected NB’s watersheds and that the zones cut down on siltation (which is true).

Meanwhile, the University of Maine was conducting a study to see why some places like New Brunswick had a healthier population of salmon than they did. I bet they will find that the forest acts like a buffer in the water cycle — like a sponge — and that when you clearcut, the salmon and trout can’t survive the change in their habitat.

“But we are protecting biodiversity...”

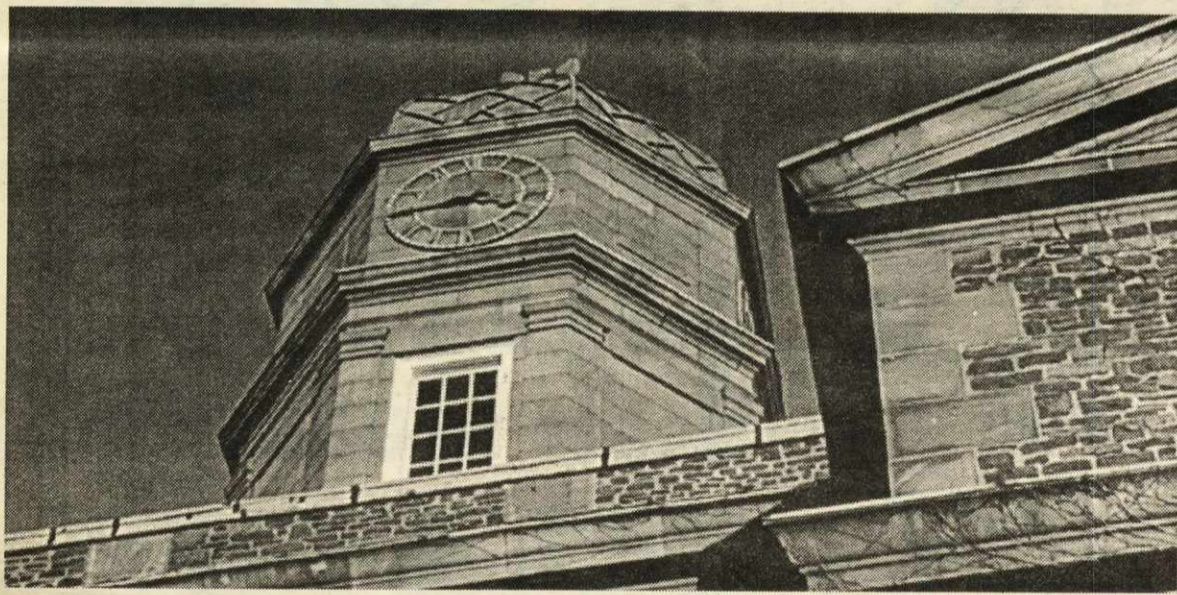
Government officials like to gloat that they’re protecting biodiversity, and most people think they’re doing a great job simply because the government is protecting those species that are hunted and of commercial value. But biodiversity doesn’t just include the big mammals and a couple dozen cute birds: it also means the moss on the ground and the fungi a foot below them. To think that you can protect some parts of biodiversity and not others is, well, rather naive. We just don’t know enough yet about the interaction between the species. In fact we haven’t even catalogued the types of mosses in this forest, let alone the fungi.

When a scientist visited the Christmas mountains to see mosses she found an exceptional diversity and even catalogued a new moss!

Another scientist, Dr. Flemming, has been studying keystone species in boreal forest ecosystems: the pileated woodpecker and a squirrel species. We need these animals to disperse those funky fungi in their droppings. The most interesting result from Dr. Flemming’s research is the finding that some species require old, decaying trees to live in. The fungi haven’t been catalogued but it is now known that some of them have exclusive, symbiotic relationships with plants and trees, which seems rather important to me.

So the bottom line is that we don’t know. We don’t know how badly the logging will affect the watershed or if the forest will be OK in 25 or 500 years without the fungi.

Time for pause? Nah! Repap needs to produce glossy paper for Sears, Reader’s digest, Chatelaine, Playboy and a bunch of other glossy mags and catalogues.



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