July 15, 2022

**Western Forest Products Planning More North Island Herbicide Spraying**

Western Forest Products is continuing its long-standing use of chemical herbicide applications on public forests to kill native hardwood species including red alder and western maple in regenerating cutblocks as well as important foraging species including thimbleberry and salmonberry.

The company is currently advertising it's 5-year Pest Management Plan that authorizes herbicide use on a vast area of the North Island including the Port McNeill region and the forests surrounding Quatsino Sound from 2022 through to 2027. This plan is not being advertised online, and was spotted in a print newspaper, but is available from the Western Forest Products website.

The herbicides that will be authorized include glyphosate, triclopyr, and aminopyralid. The application method will be by backpack spray and stem injection.

Glyphosate is the controversial herbicide used in Roundup that is subject to ongoing lawsuits related to its carcinogenicity. It has also been found to contaminate vegetation for up to 12 years and to have impacts on freshwater zooplankton at small quantities and to be toxic to aquatic organisms.

The public has until August 12th to submit comments to the silviculture manager at the Port McNeill Western Forest Products office at csilva@westernforest.com or 250-956-5200. Once this plan is approved, as it will be regardless of public opposition or public comments, the public has no further opportunity to comment for 5 years. Nor will there be any further public notification of what areas will be sprayed on an annual basis. The locations of which cutblocks will be treated will be kept hidden from the public until after the fact, despite what Ministry of Forests staff may say. There is no requirement in the *Integrated Pest Management Regulations* to disclose spray locations to the broader public ahead of time.

"One of their main targets under this program is red alder," says Stop the Spray BC spokesperson James Steidle. "Red alder is a highly beneficial, nitrogen-fixing, fire-resistant species that is critical for coastal ecosystems."

"A 2002 study of coastal Alaska found that headwater streams with more riparian alder will provide more invertebrates and support up to 400 percent more downstream fish biomass than those basins of just young-growth conifer," says Steidle

The study, written by Jack Piccolo and Mark Wipfli and published in the *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* argues that maintaining an alder component in previously harvested stands "may offset other potentially negative effects of timber harvest (such as sedimentation and loss of coarse woody debris) on downstream, salmonid-bearing food webs."

Red alder is also the main food and dam-building material for coastal beaver, who help maintain biodiversity, reduce flooding, and help maintain water flows. A recent Washington State University post raises the provocative question: Alder: A Weed, or Just the Tree We Need?

"The purpose of these 'vegetation management plans' is to reduce the species of trees that we need the most right now to create diverse, resilient forests in the face of heat waves, drought, floods, and declining biodiversity. Let's

not forget alder are more flood tolerant than conifer. We are exposing fisheries and wildlife in our public forest to toxic chemicals so that we can remove the hardwood species that are exponentially more fire-resistant, reduce flooding, reduce erosion, cool landscapes because of higher albedo, support exponentially more wildlife, more salmon, and sequester more carbon in less time."

"This program literally mal-adapts our forests to climate change, makes fire and flooding worse, kills off the deciduous species that Indigenous culture and identity revolved around, yet we continue to spend taxpayer dollars to carry out these questionable objectives. And to make it even more of a head-scratcher, alder is a perfectly good wood."

The forests of Northern Vancouver Island have seen significant herbicide spraying over the previous 33 years. Although the amount treated every year is relatively small, the impacts on the forest type are long-lasting and contribute to a landscape of reduced diversity and higher vulnerability.

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James Steidle
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*Figure 1: Quitsino Sound Sprayed Cutblocks 1987-2020 Source: RESULTS database*