October 9, 2019

Honourable Doug Donaldson  
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development  
FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honourable George Heyman  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy  
ENV.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Ministers Donaldson and Heyman:

I write to you on behalf of BC Nature (the Federation of BC Naturalists), which represents more than 50 naturalists’ clubs and 6000 members province-wide. Our membership consists of dedicated naturalists, including scientists, who are connected to, have expertise in and concern for the preservation of British Columbia’s landscapes and the diversity of organisms that inhabit them. We support any effort to promote the integrity of our natural ecosystems, not only to protect their biodiversity, but also our lives and the lives of our progeny in British Columbia.

BC Nature expresses dismay about the aerial spraying of glyphosates as an herbicidal tool to promote conifer crop species growth by killing aspen. We are well aware of the ongoing controversy about the use of glyphosate and its accompanying additives, including different opinions within your ministries. We oppose the spraying.

BC Nature questions silviculture plans mandated to convert mixed conifer broadleaf forest to conifer-only forest, thereby greatly reducing not only habitat and species diversity and the complexity of the soil ecosystem, but also fire resistance and climate change resilience. Many of our members worry about the impact of diminished deciduous forest on the number and variety of Neotropical migrants, already in steep decline. Most of these birds help control insect populations and require this mixed forest habitat for breeding and the production of their food. Consumptive users of broadleaf forest, such as trappers, report a decline in furbearers after aerial spraying. Fire danger, temperature increase and carbon dioxide sequestration decrease without an aspen mix. If regeneration hasn't failed in the absence of herbicide application, perhaps herbicides were never required. While the possibility exists that aspen will slow the growth of conifers, we feel that, in general, the effects of conifer/broadleaf competition are exaggerated, at least in the BC Interior. Can those making the prescriptions show that the use of herbicide is necessary by providing evidence of what happens if they don't use it while using the best regeneration practices?

We are highly suspicious of claims that Bayer-Monsanto uses to defend glyphosate safety and ask you to examine the mounting evidence that the chemical is a carcinogen, likely to all mammals. Germany has banned glyphosates. The EU may follow suit. A recent lab study found epigenetic transfer of diseases and other abnormalities in descendants of rats exposed to glyphosate (Kubsad et al. 2019). We wonder if the known threat to frogs, insects and other
invertebrates extends to other animal taxa and microbes. Glyphosate can be stored in roots of perennial plants during dormancy and then move up to shoots and fruits in years following application (Wood 2019). We don’t know the long-term effects.

Perhaps further research will reveal symbiotic relationships between aspens and conifers, in parallel to UBC’s Suzanne Simard’s work (Simard et al. 1997) on the facilitation of young Douglas-fir forest growth and soil pathogen control by paper birch in the Southern Interior. And could the currently doomed aspen become more valuable as a crop tree?

At the landscape level (10,000 ha plus), BC Nature is seriously concerned with the prospect of shifts from broadleaf and mixed forest conditions to conifer-dominated landscapes and associated shifts in bird populations. We demand assurances that where spraying is taking place, in the Peace or Omineca, such shifts are not occurring. Independent data sources and analyses, (e.g. Forest Practices Board) could resolve this issue.

We claim that along with many obvious environmental and health costs of intensive herbicide application others remain hidden…for now. At a time when the agricultural model of herbicide use is being revisited, it seems ironic that glyphosates are applied increasingly to our natural ecosystems. While not a major practice in forestry in our province, we remain concerned and implore you to revisit the issue and carefully re-examine aerial spraying of glyphosates as an herbicide tool to more quickly grow marketable timber.

Yours truly,

Cornelis (Kees) Visser, Ph.D., P. Geol.

References (further references upon request):


