




Province expects federal funds for spruce budworm fight

TIM JAQUES | The Tribune
February 8, 2017

Share this article  Facebook  Twitter  Email



A spruce budworm.
Photo: Submitted

Besides the \$2-million announced in Tuesday's budget speech, the province is expecting to get some help from the federal government to battle a threatened outbreak of spruce budworm in the province.

A statement issued Wednesday on behalf of minister of energy and resources development Rick Doucet indicated that the money would go towards an existing effort to control so-called "hot spots" in the north, mainly in Restigouche county.

"Our natural resources have always played an important role in our economic success. Our primary industries, including forestry, contribute significantly to our GDP, employing thousands of people around the province and generating significant spin-off activity. It is vital to protect the forest, which is a cornerstone of the New Brunswick economy," the statement read.

"New Brunswick will contribute nearly \$2 million in 2017-18 to the Healthy Forest Partnership's research initiative with the majority of funding going towards spruce budworm treatment and the remainder going towards developing knowledge of spruce budworm ecology to help us better manage budworm and keep populations low. We look forward to news of the federal government's contribution to the partnership, expected in the federal budget."

The [Healthy Forest Partnership](#) is a consortium of forestry businesses, government and academics working to prevent spruce budworm populations in northern New Brunswick growing into a massive outbreak like that faced by the province in the 1970s.

The Healthy Forest Partnership did not answer an email or return a voice message on Wednesday, but Campbellton-Dalhousie MLA Donald Arseneault, who also sits at the cabinet table as minister of post-secondary training, education, and labour, also said on Wednesday that the province is hoping for federal financial help, particularly since the spruce budworm moths seem to be moving into northern New Brunswick from a massive infestation in neighbouring Quebec.

"We are currently in conversation with the federal government in order to have a big package. We need to do something. When you see the pictures of what is happening in Quebec it would devastate our forests. We definitely need the federal government to be our partner in this. There is a strategy put together, and the \$2-million is going towards that. But there definitely needs to be a bigger investment than just that," Arseneault said.



A heap of dead spruce budworm moths on July 25, 2016 in the parking lot of a car dealership in Campbellton. The moths, coming from Quebec, had been swarming around the lights the night before.

Photo: Tim Jaques/The Tribune Archive

The spruce budworm is native to much of North America. While still at the larval or caterpillar stage, it eats the needles of conifer trees, mainly fir and spruce.

In the 1970s, the spruce budworm denuded millions of hectares in New Brunswick. Few living in the province then will forget the extent of the outbreak, and the thousands of budworm moths flying around street lights at night.

"Hot spots", mainly in eastern Restigouche, are being treated before they can expand. The insecticides used are Btk (short for *Bacillus thuringiensis var. kurstaki*), and Mimic. Both are used in residential settings and in organic farming.

The first is a naturally occurring bacterium that kills the caterpillars, and has been used for years to kill tent caterpillars.

The second is a natural insect growth regulator that disrupts the caterpillar's regular growth pattern.


The Healthy Forest Partnership scientists say that neither has any effect on anything but caterpillars, even if the sprayed caterpillars are eaten by birds, but researchers are studying their effect on other caterpillars which are not being targeted by the budworm program.

On July 24, 2016, a migratory swarm of spruce budworm moths, apparently from the huge Quebec outbreak exceeding six million hectares, landed in eastern Restigouche County. Many were seen at a Campbellton car dealership, attracted by the bright lights on its show lot.

Rob Johns, a forest insect ecologist at Canadian Forest Service in Fredericton who works with the Healthy Forests Partnership researching the spruce budworm, said at the time that 80 per cent of the moths collected after the July 24 incident were females.

Any increased damage from an increased infestation as a result of this migratory swarm will not be seen until later this year, although scientists will probably have some idea of the threat before then. Johns said at the time that even with so many females found in last July's collection, it does not necessarily mean there will be more fertilized eggs laid, because for various reasons they could be unfertilized.

On Wednesday, Johns deferred comment on the increased program funding to the provincial government.

Share this article  Facebook  Twitter  Email