



Case Study: Engagement Organizing Strategy used by Stop Spraying NB

**Executive Summary:**

Prior to the launch of the SSNB campaign an analysis was done of what has and has not worked in environmental movements in the region. It was identified that one of the missing components was a recognition and involvement of a key stakeholder in the province – the outdoorsmen community of anglers and hunters.

Initial steps were made during the “Great Resource Giveaway” tour of 2014 to reach out to the outdoor enthusiasts given that they are heavily impacted by the natural resource practices of the Province.

The original founders of Stop Spraying reached out to Don Bowser and Caroline Lubbe-D’Arcy to help design the campaign and the group sat down and consulted with others in how best to create a critical mass of individuals to make change on the issue of herbicide spraying.

During this initial period a campaign map was created using the theory of change that the objective of stopping herbicide spraying needed to be done through mass popular pressure by a

movement that was more representative of the province rather than the traditional environmental movement based in Fredericton.

The establishment of a social media presence quickly ballooned to over 18,000 members making one of the popular environmental movement's in the province.

Once the campaign map was created the group moved to start a mass petition which eventually and started to do awareness raising on the issue through town halls and sport-shows.

The campaign gained ground with the interest of local communities and this presents another driver of change through public declarations of communities that they do not spraying in their area.

Another and major avenue of pushing the objective forward is the interest of politicians in supporting or being seen to support the mass movement.

The petition drive created media awareness, and brought to the province demonstrable support for a single cause undersigned by a significant portion of the population. To put things in perspective, the 35,000 signatures represents 10 percent of the number of voters in the 2014 election – and this figure was reached without significant outlay of capital, and without purchased advertisements in traditional media.

The petition, supported by a strong Facebook page, proves Stop Spraying New Brunswick engaged – and continues to engage - a significant portion of New Brunswick's populace. It is well worth looking at the plan that achieved that result, and certainly, the steps SSNB took are of note to other movements of a similar nature both in New Brunswick, and likely, in other jurisdictions.

### **Laying the roadmap:**

The original founders of SSNB reached out to Don Bowser and Caroline Lubbe-D'Arcy to help design a campaign to pressure the provincial government to end the spraying of glyphosate,

and the group sat down and consulted with others in how best to create a critical mass of individuals to make change on the issue of herbicide spraying.

At this phase a “campaign map” was created, using the theory of change that government might take notice of a wider range of protest/input than normally delivered through the traditional environmental movement, a movement often seen as either Fredericton-centric, or at the least, anchored in urban centres. To succeed, the movement needed the support of both rural and urban constituent alike. It needed to diversify its support base. Analysis also identified that many attempts to tackle use of pesticides/herbicides do so using health contexts by making general claims about health impacts on humans, other mammals, fish and plants. These concerns often are expressed in ideological terms, not quantified and subject to claims of being dubious. SSNB needed to overcome that hurdle – and the perception that challenges most health-based protest movements - by relying wherever possible on quantifiable data: if it could not be measured and supported either by peer-reviewed scientific documents or a wealth of anecdotal data, it could not be included in the campaign. (For that reason, SSNB has intentionally divorced itself from the debate over glyphosate application in the agri-food industry, which is fraught with claims that may be valid, but nonetheless are challenging to quantify.)

An example of how SSNB leveraged quantifiable data lies in a 2015 Auditor-General’s report that highlighted the costs of the province’s forestry program, including the provincial subsidy of the spraying program. At that time, the subsidy averaged about \$2 million per year. These figures allowed SSNB to successfully target another demographic, albeit a small one: the fiscal conservative. Moreover, it allowed SSNB to escape the trap of arguing non-quantifiable health concerns. Instead of saying “spraying damages the environment and puts your health at risk,” by focusing on quantifiable sentiments the group could then say “the government is needlessly spending \$2 million a year (on something that damages the environment and puts your health at risk).”

### **Engaging a wide audience:**

Without question, social media was a key platform in the success of SSNB. One method that expanded the “on-ground” presence in areas removed from organizers came through Facebook, by identifying those who had expressed a desire to volunteer to either collect signatures, distribute signs, or both, and then contacting them through Facebook’s messaging interface.

As part of a defined social media strategy that remains in place today, organizers were diligent in enforcing a well-posted rules, which allowed, in turn, for the delivery of a consistent message. This ensured that the followers (which rapidly grew to more than 10,000) were not “turned off” by off-topic posts and material. A specific challenge lay in separating forestry-based glyphosate use from agricultural use, as an example. The Facebook group leaders were readily available to answer questions people had, and gave support when people wanted to talk to others about our goals. In short: the group found many useful volunteers on the SSNB Facebook group. The website led to some engagement, but nothing compared to the Facebook group.

Organizers made the petition .pdf readily available as a downloadable file on the Facebook group, which was a key strategy: the group avoided the less effective online petition, which is not recognized by the Legislature of New Brunswick, written petitions still carry more weight than the online petitions, which is easily skewed and rendered irrelevant by out-of-area contributors. In fact, the stacking of online petitions is so rampant among environmental groups that it has a name: “clicktivism.” When SSNB says that 35,000 people signed its petition, it can say so because it gathered physical evidence of 35,000 signatures.

The downloadable petition .pdf came with clear instructions on where to send completed copies. Many people chose, on their own, to collect signatures, which expanded the reach of the petition campaign throughout the province, but organizers were diligent in reminding people to submit petitions before key deadlines (petition presentation dates.) The creation of a firm, time-based deadline gave to the enterprise a feeling of urgency,

or a need to complete a task in a defined timeframe. This, too, followed the general principles of basic management, of assigning a task with a clearly identified, and achievable, completion date.

In conjunction with the petition drive came the awareness-boosting (and revenue-generating) exercise of selling signs and stickers. Supporters came forward mostly through social media – specifically the Facebook group – and volunteered to become local sellers. Caroline – current chair of SSNB – served as the “sign depot,” collecting revenue and distributing signs. At first, those not known to the group were asked to pre-pay for the signs. Those who demonstrated consistent reliability were allowed to obtain merchandise and remit sales revenue after the fact.

Another part of the larger movement were invitations to address town councils or other community groups. Organizers made the suggestion on Facebook, and through its “captains” - that is, energized volunteers in various communities – and several groups invited SSNB speakers to provide information to their council/group.

### **Mobilizing support (recruiting untapped allies):**

In New Brunswick (and elsewhere), the forestry application of glyphosate is a practice aimed at culling the post-harvest, post replanting growth of hardwoods (birch, poplar, maple) in order to maximize the softwood growth for future harvesting. The application of glyphosate does more than kill those target species, however: it kills flowers foraged by pollinators in the flowering stage, and birds in the seed stage, and the grass and saplings that feed deer and moose. More than any other user group, outdoors enthusiasts, particularly anglers, hunters and ATV/snowmobile users, bear witness to the devastation caused by glyphosate. Indeed, prior to SSNB, hunters had complained – with little response – about declining deer population and the loss of natural habitat for deer and other wildlife. That unheard voice represented a previously untapped group of advocates, and their concerns (loss of forest habitat, diminished deer populations) were also quantifiable (simple mapping, government data and easily compared with burgeoning

population data from Quebec, which ended glyphosate application almost two decades ago.)

The first significant overtures to the hunting/fishing community came during the 2014 “Great Resource Giveaway” tour, organized in an effort to prevent the government from entering into a long-term contract with forestry companies that increased annual allowable cuts and expand access to Crown Land.

In discussions with outdoor enthusiasts and the hunting/fishing/ATV community, a fascinating observation came to light: many had felt the need to end herbicide application on Crown forests, or challenge forestry practices, but had not felt comfortable broaching the topic with classic environmental groups, in large part because they felt (with some justification) that most environmental groups were anti-hunting/anti-fishing. Further, the ATV/hunting/fishing crowd did not feel like politicians were interested in the needs of the outdoor community. Thus, when SSNB pledged to help express the concerns of the active outdoor participant, many were only too delighted to assist. SSNB gave the previously ignored hunting/fishing community a means to express their concerns, and many of them have, as evidenced in hundreds of distinctive yellow “Stop Spraying” signs found on posts and cabins in camp and hunting territory.

A key point must be made here: for many of the hunting/fishing community, a more “in-person” contact method proved beneficial. This is not to suggest that members of the outdoor community did not participate with social media discussions and exercises, but rather that a good number of the outdoors community came to support SSNB through either discussion at trade shows, or through engagement with local “captains” selling merchandise or representing the movement at markets or other events.

To SSNB, members of the hunting and fishing community represented the first eyes to the change in the forests, and specifically able to bear testimony as to the loss of wildlife habitat, and in particular, the loss of deer populations. In short, hunters and fishers verified the general claims made by environmentalists.

Deer emerged as a unifying symbol for both the outdoors groups

and the typical environmental protester. When hunters began relating anecdotal evidence of diminishing deer populations, it gave credence to the (data-supportable) observations of former provincial biologist Rod Cumberland's declaration that forestry practices – including application of glyphosate – were wholly to blame. This came, perhaps coincidentally but nonetheless fortuitously, at a time when a number of municipalities were expressing challenges with urban deer, allowing for many to reach the conclusion others had already made: deer in urban environments are, in part, a result of activities taking place in rural forests that many urban dwellers knew little of. In response to urban residents asking why deer had taken over their gardens, SSNB was able – with evidence – to provide the answer at a critical time.

Social media helped guide these diverse groups and viewpoints to a single cause. A Facebook page quickly blossomed to more than 20,000 members, giving SSNB the distinction of becoming one of the most popular environmental movements in the province.

With that social media support as foundation, the SSNB group launched the petition drive, and in conjunction, began efforts to raise awareness through participation at “town hall” events and sports shows. (The latter further galvanizing the hunting/fishing/outdoor enthusiasts.)

The petition campaign gained strength as localized interest grew throughout the province.

### **The language barrier:**

While efforts to form a bridge between previously distant groups such as the classic “environmentalist” and the average outdoor enthusiast proved successful, SSNB has not performed as well in terms of engaging the francophone community. An example would be the tour of Dr. Thierry Vrain, which attracted reasonable attention in anglophone communities, because these events were promoted heavily by SSNB and local supporters. The francophone events were not organized by SSNB, and locals did not promote it as well, which, as a consequence, led to low attendance figures.

SSNB has taken steps to engage the francophone members of

the province. A member of the board is bilingual, while French signs/stickers – indeed, signs with a different colour scheme – made available. However, sales data conforms with the above assertions: English sign and sticker sales (more than 1400 signs, 800 stickers) have far out-done French sign sales (200 or so). There seems to be more active engagement in English NB, although there are two very active areas in the French region that operate separately from SSNB: Kedgwick/St. Quentin and Acadie Peninsula.

SSNB has worked together with some local groups (Kedgwick, Dalhousie), but in the English communities it has been active individuals, who we found via the SSNB Facebook group, not existing groups that have proven key to generating local awareness, the exception being one salmon group in Juniper.

**Future use of data/information:**

With the keen clarity of hindsight, organizers now acknowledge that petition sheets could have included a space for email addresses for SSNB use. However, at the same time, this would have added to the challenge of obtaining the 35,000 signatures. Further, with a limited number of active central volunteers, mining 35,000 entries for email addresses would have been a near-impossible task. (Presuming a generous data-entry rate of three per minute, or 180 per hour, collecting and entering email addresses would require almost 200 person-hours of work, or about five average work-weeks. )

The other issue is that many people would likely not be interested in giving us their email address (signatories frequently asked not to be contacted when provided their address as required by provincial petition regulation). Also, no matter how much it was stressed that writing clearly was essential, a lot of entries were not written down clearly. If SSNB had an army of volunteers, creating a database with all these names and the communities/ridings their signatories lived in would have been ideal, but not practical. As it has turned out, engaging our supporters via Facebook and some via email has proven pretty successful. Also, the task of sorting signatories according to their ridings proved too time-consuming, and thus did not take place.

While the upside of the Facebook social media platform has



been noted, it is also worth noting a critical challenge: Facebook has become the go-to means of distributing information, but is not a sure-fire contact medium when compared to, say, email. SSNB cannot be certain all those following its Facebook page see notifications of new posts and/or events, and indeed, SSNB assumes many supporters do not receive such notifications.

### **Influence on politicians/media coverage**

In New Brunswick, perhaps more than many jurisdictions, media coverage proved a challenge to obtain. This is in part due to the fact that all three daily newspapers and all but one community newspaper in the province is owned by Brunswick News, which is a subsidiary of J. D. Irving, the largest forestry company in the province. In essence, the newspaper's ownership stands largely to benefit from the preservation of the existing forestry practices, and herbicide spraying on Crown land in particular. The province's lone quasi-independent newspaper, the Saint Croix Courier/Courier Weekend, did provide coverage of the growth of SSNB. (Note: the editor of the paper at the time is now a member of SSNB's board.)

Media, in general, followed the tabling of the first set of signatures in December, 2015. The French media covered the issue more in depth, whereas the English media only reported that we had tabled signatures. The more favourable coverage in francophone media did not translate, as noted above, into on-ground activity or volunteer support.

Media attention shifted somewhat in August 2, 2017, when SSNB and other anti-spraying community groups held a press conference on August 2'17 in Fredericton, which attracted media attention (written, TV and web, but not CBC). Brunswick News also published a very pro-spraying (biased) story in which SSNB was openly criticized.

A few weeks later, the English media (CBC) became more interested because of events in Petitcodiac. A sympathetic mayor and his council caused JDI to react and organize a public information session through its communications subsidiary, Forestinfo. Because the citizens were very engaged, media covered what happened there.

A critical turning point, in terms of media coverage and

municipal support, came Aug. 25, 2017, when media began giving attention to the letter written by Dawn Arnold, the mayor of Moncton. Arnold, in a letter addressed to Department of Environment and Local Government minister Serge Rouselle, expressed concern over the impacts of spraying on the watershed feeding the Turtle Creek watershed, which provides drinking water to the city of Moncton. Here, one of the leaders of the three major communities took a position in direct opposition to the provincial government. The matter drew attention (CBC) to SSNB.

Arnold and Moncton were hardly an exception. Over time, one, then another community made public declarations expressing a desire to see the end of glyphosate spraying. Involving municipalities created an interesting friction, essentially pitting the voice of the grass-roots – that is, the elected politicians of small towns and villages – against a provincial government increasingly perceived as indifferent to the needs of the populace. This in turn created another interesting shift, as politicians felt ever more pressure to support, or at least, be seen as supporting the mass movement.

The Green Party of New Brunswick has long stated its opposition to both spraying, and in wider terms, the forestry practices tied to the use of glyphosate on Crown forests. Green Party Leader, Fredericton (Green) MLA David Coon was supportive from the beginning and tabled most of the petitions. Restigouche West (Liberal) MLA Gilles LePage agreed to table half of the almost 13,000 petition signatures at the second tabling event in May of 2018.

Some MLAs signed the petition, but did not take any further action until November of 2017. Two political parties – the Progressive Conservatives and Peoples Alliance of New Brunswick started contacting SSNB in September 2016. In April 2017, the PANB leader gave firm support to a ban, and promised that this will be a platform item. The PANB reiterated its anti-spraying stance in a position document release in the spring of 2018, in advance of the usual platform releases which occur closer to election periods. (The 2018 election is slated for Sept. 28).

In October 2017, the new NBNDP leader confirmed support for

a ban, and wrote a commentary that was published in Brunswick News and on the NB NDP website. However, the party itself has yet to release a statement of position or hint as to whether a commitment to end spraying is part of its 2018 platform.

Attempts to secure such a commitment are underway, but have not yet generated a response.

In November of 2017, Gagetown/Petitcodiac (PC) MLA Ross Wetmore tabled a motion for a temporary halt to spraying while a committee studied the issue further. He claimed that he had noticed a lot of letters from constituents (some written via SSNB, and others via an easy electronic letter to MLAs by CCNB), and that this was his response to his constituents. However, it must also be mentioned that the timeframe of the temporary moratorium, had the motion passed, would have ceased in time to allow normal spraying to take place in August of 2018. SSNB did not consider the motion to be a sincere effort to end the practice, as demanded by those that had signed the petition.

The motion, however, proved irrelevant, for the governing NB Liberals - led by Minister Rouselle - used their majority to force an amendment to the motion which, essentially, proved a re-writing in whole to state the government would heed directives of federal regulators, with an added clause asking the Chief Medical Officer of Health to update a report on glyphosate. (Note: the former Chief Medical officer of Health, Dr. Eilish Cleary, was fired without cause while gathering data on the impact of glyphosate.)

### **Obstacles and impediments:**

Political influence, or the fear thereof, remains a critical challenge. Groups and individuals who can be reasonably assumed as natural allies are nervous to vocally support this campaign because of fear of funding loss when they are already in a precarious position. These groups include wood marketing boards, and private woodlot owners, who are suffering financially as a result of the spray program. The spraying program is part of the 2014 forestry plan which allows more clearcutting and herbicide spraying on Crown Land.

The aforementioned media monopoly remains a consistent barrier. In December of 2017, the head of Forestinfo published

an op-ed in the Brunswick News Fredericton Daily Gleaner publication. To SSNB, the article contained several flaws, and SSNB requested a rebuttal, and was invited to submit one. Five months and a requested revision (included in the demanded revisions was the removal of the Hansard-verifiable 35,000 signature claim) later, the article remains unpublished, and questions as to why remain unanswered. However, the content was not lost: both versions were published on the SSNB Facebook page, and triggered not-uncommon sentiments against the monopoly and its ownership arm.

In general, media seems now disinterested in the issue. When SSNB released updated figures as to the subsidy – \$2.8 million in 2017, based on figures obtained by a Right to Information and Privacy Protection Act request – not one single inquiry was made, despite a media release distributed to multiple contacts in the province.

Interestingly, SSNB learned about a complaint to CBC Ombudsman as a result of a CBC Info AM interview with Dr. Thierry Vrain. SSNB then learned via CBC Radio Canada that the complaint had been dismissed. There was nothing in the English media about this. The complainant, Richard Reeleder, is a former employee of the federal government.

The steadfast commitment to a non-extreme, fact-based message has either strained ties with, or alienated, some groups and individuals normally associated with outspoken and engaged environmental activism. However, the position of SSNB remains that the net gain of more moderate groups and individuals typically not engaged in social/political activism more than offsets this loss.

Despite the petition, and the grass-roots support for an end to spraying (and despite staggering information as to the harms to health, economy and environment) the government has remained utterly fixated on a pro-spraying policy. Ministry officials respond to questions with ill-sourced, questionable facts regarding the safety of the glyphosate product, and challenges to the cost (\$2.8 million/year in public subsidy) or economic viability (removing what would otherwise be value-added maple and birch, used in other jurisdictions for furniture, flooring, decorative accessories and the like) are ignored.

The challenge with reaching all supporters – a function of the Facebook infrastructure – admittedly means SSNB is unable to guarantee a message or announcement reaches all of its supporters. In retrospect, a tool like Nationbuilder (which is costly) might have been a better system, however, it is too late to consider integrating that kind of communications technology at this date unless an electronic sign-on item is created to collect email addresses of supporters. SSNB plans to continue this campaign until the Government of New Brunswick bans herbicide spraying on crown forests and by NB Power. Revenue and finances – or, more specifically, the lack thereof – remain a constant challenge. Though SSNB’s costs are minimal, they exist (website domain, printing, etc.). Sign and sticker sales have been our main source of revenue, supplemented by the odd donation. The group is a non-profit, but unable to issue tax receipts as a registered charity.

**Lessons learned:**

Despite the admitted success of the social media platform Facebook, as stated several times already, there is still merit in face-to-face engagement. Indeed, it would well be paramount. This campaign has been successful because efforts have been made to meet people face to face. More of this is needed; we need local captains to take on this task. So far, we have about 10 local captains in the province.

In order to obtain more supporter email addresses, SSNB will have to offer more activities on-line. However, it is uncertain if this will translate into growth of the movement.

Keeping the message “mainstream,” as it were, was vital to the success of the petition drive. Moving forward, SSNB will continue to ensure a narrow focus on a single, achievable goal, supported by data and science.

The capacity to present information to public sessions and municipal council meetings is vital. Invitations to speak lead to larger attendance because community members will tell their friends and family.

Media coverage, and specifically suitable and informative media coverage, remains a challenge. Media tends to only be interested if it is an “angry activists” story. Further, media under-reports attendance at events. That said, residents of New Brunswick

don't seem motivated to attend rallies so the numbers are always disappointing.

### **Conclusions:**

In summary, SSNB proved to be a wildly popular movement because of formative decisions to adopt a solid theory of change with concrete objectives, measurable outcomes and achievable results – in other words, using basic management principles to define goals and measure milestones, and moreover, relying as much as possible on quantifiable data. The second lay with a concerted and intentional effort to diversify the support base beyond the traditional small cadre of environmentalists. By finding traditionally disconnected groups such as hunters and the environmental activists, then presenting data-based and defensible messages that appealed to all, SSNB successfully diversified its base of support.

The primary goals of the group have not yet been achieved, but the road map to that objective has been laid in place. At this time, there is every reason to believe that the continued approach of engaging a diversified support base through targeted and fact-based, quantifiable messaging will continue to apply sustained pressure on the provincial government.

If funding for Nationbuilder was available, it would be easier to send mass announcement to supporters via Facebook; one would not have to rely on supporters checking the Facebook group at the appropriate times when posts have not fallen down the group. SSNB noticed that most of the support base, which resides in rural NB, does not routinely use email. So communication via Facebook messenger has been the most effective.

Because SSNB is a single- issue group, we don't feel that it would be fair to our supporters to target them with another, not related campaign.

If we were to do this again, we would add a 'contact' column for those who would like to be kept up-to-date by email, but we know that a lot of people would choose not to enter that information; asking for their mailing addresses was in a lot of case a challenge.

