

Go with the flow



By Nate Smelle

FOR THE LAST MONTH EVERY shred of spare time I have had has gone into preparing for the big flow. The first step was finding a suitable drilling site. Next came drilling the holes, harnessing flow collecting the resource and refining it for human consumption. No need to worry neighbours... there will not be any leaky pipelines of bubbling crude contaminating our backyards any time soon; the resource I am currently exploiting does not leave behind tar-soaked footprints or tailing ponds. This resource flows in harmony with the changing seasons once a year for only a few weeks.

For years I have ?hmmmed and hawed? over whether the amount of maple trees on the land where I live was worth tapping or not. Checking out a few of the small-time producers in the area it has seemed to me that the whole ordeal would be too much work with not enough reward. Considering the old maples I had been eyeing up were located deep in the bush well away from my home it always made more sense to opt out of the labour intensive process and just purchase the delicious gold nectar from one of the local farmers' markets. Hearing from friends how much syrup one of their brothers had produced from even less trees than I had available I knew right away this year would be different.

Not wanting to miss out on this brief window of opportunity we immediately purchased the gear from the Bird's Creek Farmers' Co-op and headed up into the hills to begin the extraction. Tapping into 10 sugar maples and two birch trees, we hopefully hung our buckets to await the bounty. Although the main flow is just beginning as I write this piece, already more than nine litres of syrup have run through the trees into our boiling pots. Collecting another 30 litres of sap to boil in just a single day I expect our overall rate of production will rise by quite a bit by the time the flow slows.

Tuned in and turned on to how easy it is to harvest this abundance of natural capital, this new ritual will surely be part of my annual routine as every winter turns to spring. Before the letters start to pour in, anyone who has tapped the trees, carried the buckets of sap, cut wood and stood there watching the sap boil from start to finish knows that maybe 'easy' is not the best word to describe maple syrup production. Actually it would be more accurate to identify it as one of the most difficult processes I have ever seen through. Still it is relatively easy in comparison to other potential types of resource extraction we could take part in. Extracting and producing maple syrup does not leave behind a massive scar on the land that will taint the quality of life for future generations. In fact, if done right it will barely even leave a scar on the tree you drill into.

Now I may not be an economist, but considering a barrel of oil (158.99 litres) is currently trading for around \$50 (\$0.31 per litre), and that a litre of maple syrup trades for about \$3,180 a barrel (\$20 per litre) I think we need to shift our government's support from fossil fuels to healthy trees and forests. Imagine how our wealth would grow if we were to invest \$1 billion of our tax dollars each year into maintaining the ecological/economic health and welfare of our forests instead of subsidizing the make-work project underway in Canada's tar sands.

How sweet that would be!