



MAPLE INDUSTRY:

A sticky situation

Climate change could devastate industry after 2025

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AMHERST DAILY NEWS

SACKVILLE, N.B. – Nova Scotia's maple industry could find itself in a sticky situation very soon if global warming is not curbed.

Ben Phillips, a Masters student in environmental science at Mount Allison University, recently completed a two-year study that points out sugar maples should perform well in the next decade, but could find themselves under substantial stress in 20 to 25 years because of climate change brought on by global warming.

"Everybody thinks that because winter is mild they won't have to shovel as much and they think they'll be able to go to the beach more, but this has consequences for our own backyard," Phillips said. "Global warming is going to impact the sugar maple industry and it's going to affect the fall foliage. The thing is, people can do something about it by taking responsibility for climate change and stop our greenhouse gas emissions."

Phillips feels that beyond 2025 sugar maples in southern New Brunswick and in northern Nova Scotia will encounter less than ideal growing conditions brought on by climate change and the resulting incidence of insects and disease.

"This has ecological cascading effects. It's not only going to impact the sugar maple industry, but it's going to affect the owl population because they like to nest in old hollowed out sugar maples. Those trees die and they'll lose their habitat," he said, adding lichens and moss that grow on those trees will also be lost.

Phillips' study, which included taking core samples from trees in 10 locations including Nappan and Coleville near Antigonish, was conservative in its outlook and its predictions. At present, the planet is warming at a much faster pace than anyone predicted. If it continues, the stress placed on the maple trees, and the industry, will be much greater and much quicker.

See MAPLE - Page 2

Mount Allison University Masters student Ben Phillips examines a sample from a maple tree. He recently completed a two-year study that suggests the maple industry in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia could be at risk because of climate change brought on by global warming. Submitted.

Maple industry...

From Page 1

In his study, Phillips compared sugar maple growth over the past 100 years looking at climate data to determine what climate factors helped or hurt their growth. He was able to look into the future by using future climate forecasts to predict how climate change will impact the trees.

"The better we understand how climate affects these trees the better our mitigation techniques can be," he said.

Phillips found that sugar maple growth is connected to ocean temperatures in the North Atlantic.

He found that fluctuations in temperature and growth have been cyclical, but he fears that as oceans warm and temperatures

moderate, the weather conditions required for sap production could also be impacted.

"We've had a little bit of warming and that's going to continue to increase.

"As we get into more warmer temperatures we're going to see certain insects move further north," he said. "The northern areas are going to experience disease and insects they've never seen before. Combined with winter conditions, it's going to have a devastating effect on the trees."

While he hasn't seen Phillips' study, Dale McIsaac from the Maple Producers' Association of Nova Scotia is not surprised and suggested it's something the organization needs to look at.

"It's definitely something our

producers are thinking about, how this is going to impact them," McIsaac said, adding it's a question the association may put to its membership in its next survey.

McIsaac said some of Phillips' predictions about the expansion of insects northward is already happening in sugar maples in the United States.

There are about 70 commercial maple producers in Nova Scotia.

They have about 330,000 taps and produce about 140,000 litres of maple syrup annually. Seventy-five per cent of the producers are located in Cumberland County.

Besides syrup, the sap is made into butter, cream, jelly and sugar.