



Release Date: July 30, 2012

Secretive 20 Year Forestry Deal Pre-empts North Saskatchewan Plan

The Government of Alberta has quietly signed a new 20 year Forest Management Agreement (FMA) with Sundre Forest Products, apparently bypassing the imminent North Saskatchewan planning process. The deal will make watershed and wildlife conservation more difficult in the FMA's 5600 km² area of North Saskatchewan and Red Deer River forested headwaters that affects the water security of over a million Albertans downstream.

"Signing a 20-year deal with a narrow 'timber supply' focus undermines cumulative effects management that imminent land use planning is supposed to address," says Carolyn Campbell of Alberta Wilderness Association. "Why has the government squandered another conservation opportunity when Albertans have told government that they want more forest protection, not less?"

The FMA area includes important grizzly bear habitat and a crucial spawning area for the 'at risk' bull trout, Alberta's provincial fish. Yet the renewed agreement adds a new barrier to responsible environmental management of these lands: it states the government can maintain and enhance fish and wildlife in these public forests "provided the Company's right to establish, grow, harvest and remove timber is not significantly impaired." It also increases government's compensation requirements on lands withdrawn from the agreement.

"These forests are public lands belonging to Albertans, not to Sundre Forest Products," says Carolyn Campbell of Alberta Wilderness Association. "To suggest fish and wildlife protection takes a back seat to a forestry company's bottom line is the wrong direction for public lands management in this province."

In March 2012 Alberta Wilderness Association formally requested that the Alberta government involve the public in this FMA renewal – which did not happen - and requested that the FMA commit to sustainable forestry and sustainable recreation within an overall priority of ecosystem-based watershed health for these headwaters public lands – which, likewise, did not occur.

For more information:

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