



Wild Lands Advocate 9(4): 9, August 2001

Alberta's Environmental Concerns Must Be Solved Before Trade

By Jillian Tamblyn

During the last few months I have been looking into the issues around lumber trade in Alberta to develop a position for the Alberta Wilderness Association. Why should we care about all the politics surrounding the Softwood Lumber Agreement and other trade agreements?

Trade issues surrounding our natural resources, such as the Softwood Lumber Agreement, are putting a spotlight on Canada's Forestry Practices. To date, Alberta has missed much of the turmoil and focus, as its forest industry is dwarfed by the controversy and scale next door in BC. With a 586% increase in the volume of timber harvested in Alberta since 1961 and three billion dollars in exports in 1999, the forest industry in Alberta is becoming hard to ignore. Alberta has serious environmental concerns with land use management and forestry that need to be addressed.

The Alberta Government's policy for our forests continues to be based on a sustained yield of timber, not on sustained ecosystems. As a result the continued supply of timber is the primary value of our forests. Natural forests with ecological, recreation and tourism values as well as water protection capabilities are being lost under required cutting levels.

With the Alberta Government's blessing, few if any of the environmental costs of forestry are being incurred by the logging companies. As a result, the public and the environment are bearing the costs of the logging of our forests. The lack of strong environmental regulations, and cumulative effects assessments reduce industry operating costs, this in effect produces a subsidy. As taxpayers, we end up paying the price down the road when we need clean drinking water or lose tourism because of devastated landscapes.

If we want to see more parks and the protection of our water, we need strong policies to make it possible. We also need to include the true environmental costs in production. If industry is not required to pay for habitat destruction or to participate in cumulative effects assessment, there is no incentive to change their practices. If Alberta is going to have sustainable future the government and industry has to deal with these problems before trade agreements are signed and environmental and social concerns must be included in trade agreements.

The Alberta Wilderness Associations full position statement is available at www.albertawilderness.ca/news/press/press2001.htm

