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## Is Forestry in Alberta Sustainable?

By Jillian Tamblyn

In October the Sustainable Forest Management Network and the Environmental Research and Studies Centre hosted a well-attended panel discussion on the topic of sustainable forestry in Alberta. I was surprised to see that four of the five panel members had at least some concerns about the sustainability of Alberta's forests. Although I was pleased to have a confirmation of many of my thoughts on the issue, it was disconcerting that the Deputy Minister of Sustainable Resource Development was the only one on this diverse panel who felt that things were looking good.

The panel consisted of Dr. David Schindler, Killam Memorial Professor of Ecology at the University of Alberta, Edmonton; Dr. Glen Armstrong, University of Alberta Assistant Professor, Landscape Forestry and Integrated Resource Management; Dr. Bob Fessenden, Deputy Minister of Sustainable Resource Development; John Thompson, Senior Economist, Natural Resources Conservation Board; Peter Lee, Global Forest Watch.

The two questions addressed were: 1. Do you think that forestry in Alberta is on a sustainable path - Why or why not? 2. Given that we are still learning about sustainability, what do you think is the most important information/action in getting Alberta on a sustainable path, or in achieving sustainability?

Many of the speakers had similar concerns that relate not only to the sustainability of forestry as a fibre extraction industry, but also to the sustainability of Alberta's forest ecosystems. The key topics included policy, fire, multiple land uses, management and climate change.

Some of the action items suggested included changes in policy to allow for exchange of wood between mills around the province, no new allocations of forests, and better land use planning policy, including cumulative effects assessment. Ecosystem based management was a suggested solution to many of the biological concerns. Ecosystem based management generally has been accepted by the government, but most policy still works on a sustained yield or wood flow model.

Fire is a concern biologically and from the perspective of annual allowable cut (AAC). Fire is not dealt with very efficiently in the AAC and large catastrophic fires have caused serious concern with the flow of wood for some companies. Glen Armstrong pointed out that some of his research indicates that there is only a 50% chance that a rate of harvest at 85% of the AAC can be sustained past 50 years. If this is correct then we are not achieving a sustainable yield.

If industry cannot even sustain forests for wood supply, how can we expect them to sustain forests as ecosystems?

Biographies of the panellists and video streaming of the discussion are available on line at <http://sfm-1.biology.ualberta.ca/english/events/eseminar.htm>