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Alberta Forest Policies are a Disadvantage to Forest Industry

By Jillian Tamblyn

Provincial forest policies must change if Alberta's forest industry is to remain competitive, according to a recent report by the Alberta Wilderness Association and other conservation groups. The report, *Structural Impediments to FSC Certification in Alberta: Overcoming Barriers to Well-Managed Forests*, documents how a lack of protected forests and unmanaged petroleum industry activity severely hampers the Alberta forest industry's ability to become Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified, the only certification process that has broad international support.

Three of the world's five largest wood buyers – IKEA, The Home Depot and Lowes – actively support FSC and give buying preference to suppliers who are FSC certified.

At the time the report was released in November, PriceWaterhouseCoopers was having its annual Forestry Industry Conference: Forestry in Alberta - Increasing the Value. The Global Outlook Panel mentioned certification several times. Robert Ascah from Alberta Treasury Branches felt that environmentalism and branding are a challenge for the forest industry.

Doug Hayhurst of PricewaterhouseCoopers pointed out that environmental pressures are not going away. In fact, Centex and Staples have hired PWC to design their environmental procurement policies. Catherine Mater of the Pinchot Institute for Conservation in Washington, D.C. presented forest certification as one of the five key industry trends and it was clear from her presentation that certification is strong in the marketplace.

Forestry practices need to improve in Alberta, not only for the environment, but also for forest dependent communities. This is an opportunity for companies to improve their practices significantly and gain a growing consumer market. To move FSC along we have asked the Alberta government to support three key recommendations:

1. Establish a network of protected areas for each forest ecoregion in Alberta capable of maintaining species and ecosystem biodiversity.
2. Until the network is established, allow forest companies to protect sensitive forest ecosystems from all other industrial use.
3. Reform government policies regarding the Alberta oil and gas industry forest use and ensure the petroleum and forest industries work together to properly manage forests.

The report and news release are available at AlbertaWilderness.ca. Previous articles on FSC can be found in past issues of Wild Lands Advocate.