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Vote with Your Wallets for Better Forestry Practices in Alberta

By Phil Clement, AWA Conservation Biologist

Market pressures are becoming an ever more important and necessary tool for driving the forest industry toward better practices. As Andy Marshall highlighted in our article on public consultation in our last issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate*, the government has little regard for conservationist input. Further, research shows that even the government has shied away from its leadership role in Integrated Resource Management. What are conservation groups left to do? Educate consumers and get them to think about their power as consumers.

“If the marketplace says ‘we demand certifiable forest products,’ we will have to deliver or go out of business,” says Bob Demulder of the Alberta Forest Products Association. To create such a demand, the AWA will focus energy on a marketplace strategy that encourages consumers to pressure the forest industry to abandon unsound operating practices — a strategy that has proven effective in other cases.

Home Depot, Lowe’s, and IKEA, among others, have made commitments to stop buying wood from endangered forests. And most recently, after being the target of a two-year campaign by eco-groups, the office-supply chain Staples Inc. said it intends to phase out paper made from endangered forests and increase recycled content in the papers it sells to 30 per cent, a move that environmentalists say will affect logging in Canada’s northern forests. The eco-groups “heightened our awareness” of environmental issues, said Staples vice-chairman Joseph Vassalluzzo in announcing that Staples intends to reduce its demand for virgin fibre.

“This is going to be increasingly the way of the future. While environmental protections are daily being dismantled in Washington, D.C., environmentalists have found a new way to protect forests,” said Todd Paglia, a U.S. ForestEthics representative. I think we need to say the same for the situation in Alberta.

The Alberta Wilderness Association encourages readers to vote with your wallets for better forestry practices in Alberta. Next time you’re picking up some wood for a deck, or paper for the office, ask if there is recycled content in the product or if it is Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified (see Helene Walsh’s update in this issue). Only after sufficient market pressure will business realize there is a market for FSC certified and recycled products. And their profits will probably increase too!

