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City of Calgary Recognizes Importance of Its Watersheds

By Heinz Unger, AWA Director and Philip Clement, AWA Conservation Biologist

The City of Calgary's Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) Committee (chaired by the Mayor) dealt with the Spray Lake Sawmills (1980) Ltd. (SLS) 2001 20-year forest management agreement (FMA) in the upper Bow River sub-basins at a meeting on Dec 5, 2002 at the Calgary City Hall. The IGA passed a motion that "Council direct the Administration to provide input into the Detailed Forest Management Plan to be prepared by SLS."

Vern Hart, a city planner with the planning commission, had invited AWA to attend the meeting. He also prepared the background information contained in the Executive Report to the IGA Committee. The background information also contained a copy of a letter sent by AWA on July 10, 2001 to the then-Alderman David Bronconnier; this letter expressed serious concerns for the Bow River watershed in the light of the FMA about to be signed by the Alberta government and SLS.

SLS was represented at the IGA committee meeting by Gord Lehn, their Woodlands Manager (and current president of the Alberta Forest Products Association). He reported that the Public Advisory Committee (PAC), as required by the terms of the FMA, has been established and its members have been selected. However, no representative of the City of Calgary was included. In light of the impacts that forest management has on Calgary's water supply, it is imperative that Calgary be involved in forest management planning.

It was of great concern to the IGA members, and should be of concern to the City Council, Calgary residents, and Bow River Basin Council (BRBC) members, that there are no representatives of the city (specifically from City Waterworks and Environmental Management) on the main PAC. In fact the PAC did not include any representatives of any entities downstream of Cochrane, nor any agencies or individuals concerned with good management of the upper watershed.

Heinz Unger of the BRBC and AWA suggested to the IGA committee members, some of whom wanted to pass this matter on to the Operations and Environment committee, that good management of the city's watershed will continue to be a matter of great interest for the IGA committee since the area of the watershed is under the jurisdiction of the provincial government (and their "agreement holders"), and to a lesser degree of rural municipalities.

"This is a critical test case," said Unger, "since we're dealing here with the implementation of the first major FMA in southern Alberta covering important upper watershed areas."

