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CRITICAL TIME AHEAD FOR DEVELOPING CREDIBLE FSC BOREAL STANDARDS

By Philip Clement

FSC (forest Stewardship Council) Alberta Regional Committee has started into the nitty gritty of developing thresholds for FSC standards in Canada's Boreal forest. Developing these standards will depend upon a combination of science and negotiations.

Over the past two months FSC Canada (Boreal Coordinating Committee) created two Working Groups to explore the key issues contained within Principles 3, 6, and 9. Principle 3 states: "The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources shall be recognized and respected." Principle 6 states: "Forest Management shall conserve biodiversity and its associated values, water resources, soils, and unique and fragile ecosystems and landscapes, and, by so doing, maintain the ecological functions and the integrity of the forest. Principle 9 states: "Management activities in high conservation value forests shall maintain or enhance the attributes which define such forests. Decisions regarding high conservation value forests shall always be considered in the context of a precautionary approach." As one might expect, the interpretations of these principles vary among individuals.

Perhaps the priority outstanding issues, which must be resolved before FSC certification can move ahead, surround "informed consent" by Aboriginal groups. Principle/Indicator 3.1.3 states: "The applicant recognizes and respects the legal and customary rights of Indigenous Peoples over their lands, territories, and resources." To demonstrate this, the draft standards require that "The Indigenous People(s) formally indicate, clearly, unambiguously and normally in writing, that their legal and customary rights over the lands, territories and resources have been recognized and respected." Further, the Aboriginal Advisory Council to FSC, which drafted this principle, states that failure to meet 3.1.3 will result in a "major failure of principle 3." The forest industry had serious concerns with this wording and felt that it gave the Indigenous People a veto power over becoming FSC certified.

Principle 6 discussions focused on two main issues. First was the amount of contiguous core forest habitat that should be left in the forest management unit. Large cores consist primarily of mature and old forest. Forest industry representatives felt that the proportion of the management unit in large areas of core should be "guided by the outcome of the pre-industrial forest condition analysis." Other groups agreed with the forest industry with the condition that the proportion of large core areas does not fall below 20% of the forest management unit.

The second issue was the amount of residual structure retained in harvest operations. Forest industry representatives wanted to leave an average of 5% of the volume across the forest, not falling below 1% in any cut block. The environmental chamber felt that the percentage retained is to be an average of 25% by volume across the forest, not falling below 5% in any cut block. Maintaining large core forests and residual stand structure is essential to maintaining a diversity of habitat types for forest dependent species.

Other outstanding issues were: overlapping tenure between oil and gas, Forest Management Agreement holders, and quota holders; slash pile burning; area of riparian buffers; scarification; cutting down snags; and plantation forests.





The next FSC Alberta Regional Committee where these issues will be discussed will be held in May. In addition, FSC Canada is holding a forum with representatives from the regional committees in late May to further discuss, and ideally resolve, these difficult issues.

At a recent conference on certification in Vancouver, FSC was presented as the only credible forest certification system. A report by Greenpeace and others called, "On the Ground" supports this view. With consumers demanding that their purchases of wood and other forest products do not contribute to forest destruction, FSC has an opportunity to reassure consumers that they are buying socially and environmentally responsible products.

FSC encourages the interested people to become involved in the standard setting process. All FSC documents are posted on the website, www.fsccanada.org.

