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Albertans Speak Out about Forests: Wildlife Comes First

In a recent survey of forest use in Alberta, Albertans made it clear that managing our forests should be about more than timber and fibre production. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) supports responsible ecosystem-based forest management that does not compromise wildlife and wilderness values, and this survey shows that Albertans share these values.

“The survey highlights a disconnect between how Albertans want to see our forests managed, and how the government is managing them,” says Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist. “Current forest management focuses almost exclusively on clearcutting the forest. Everything else – wildlife, recreation, clean water – comes a distant second in their management.”

The Alberta Forest Usage Survey, conducted by the Alberta Forest Products Association (AFPA) to study the ‘societal values Albertans hold towards their forestlands’, produced some surprising results. An impressive 84% of the 2881 respondents agreed that *‘Access and use of forests should be based firstly on preserving and protecting the environment and sustaining wildlife habitat at the expense of sustained economic benefits and jobs.’*

Albertans are not happy with how our forests are managed today. When asked the question “*Thinking of all the issues facing the province of Alberta today, how concerned are you about the management of Alberta’s forests?*” more than 90% of respondents were ‘extremely concerned’ or ‘concerned’.

The survey also highlighted growing concerns amongst Albertans about how wildlife habitat is being sacrificed in the continuing stampede for resource development. 62% of respondents agreed (‘completely’ or ‘somewhat’) with the statement *“I feel that no industrial activity should occur in areas which are habitat for endangered species, no matter how careful companies try to be.”*

“Once again Albertans are ahead of their government when it comes to managing our forests for wildlife,” say Cliff Wallis, AWA Past President. “They know that without properly protected habitat, there will be no grizzly bears and no caribou. With the economics of the forestry sector at devastating lows, it is time for Alberta to refocus forest management on wildlife and recreation. It’s unbelievable that the forest industry is asking the public to subsidize the destruction of wildlife habitat.”

“There are few companies in the forestry industry who have made the commitment to operate to the highest environmental standards established by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC),” says Douglas. “These forests belong to all Albertans and, given the results of the survey, it seems that FSC certification should be required for all forest companies operating in Alberta’s publicly owned forests. Increasingly this type of environmental responsibility is what consumers are demanding.” Currently Alberta’s ground rules for forest management are actually making it difficult for those companies who want to achieve FSC certification.

The Alberta Forest Usage Survey can be seen online at <http://www.yourforest.org/Survey/Results.pdf>

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