



## **Fish and Forests**

### *A Sustainable Vision for the Future of Alberta's Forests*

#### **Healthy Forests and Healthy Wetlands**

Alberta's Eastern Slopes forests between the mountains and the grasslands have ecological importance far greater than their physical area. **Healthy forests serve an invaluable role in collecting, storing and filtering water, and slowly releasing it into creeks and rivers.**

Once, management of these forested lands placed a firm priority on the production of a sustained and healthy water supply. More recently, this management priority has been undermined, and the primary use of forests has become the production of a sustained supply of timber.

Native fish populations including endangered bull trout and West Slope cutthroat trout need healthy forests. They need the cold, clear, shady headwater creeks that sensitive forest management provides. **We need to return to a model of ecosystem-based forest management** that nurtures Alberta's headwaters. Only then will we have a truly functioning ecosystem that will supply clean water for all Albertans to enjoy.

Insects, parasitic plants and diseases have evolved for millions of years in synchrony with our forests. Insects like the mountain pine beetle contribute to overall forest health by thinning out weaker trees. Sustainable forestry needs ecosystem-based models that allow natural control mechanisms to function.

The Eastern Slopes forests (see Map), are *public land*, administered by the provincial government on behalf of the public.

#### **Healthy Forests give us:**

##### **Wild Water**

Healthy forests ensure clean, abundant drinking water for communities across southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

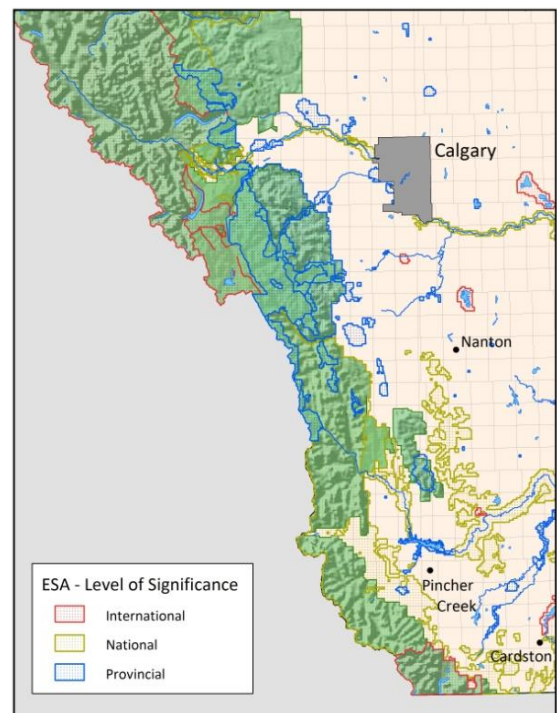
##### **Wild Lands**

Southwestern forests are a prime recreational area for more than one million Albertans.

##### **Wildlife**

Healthy forests provide habitat for a rich array of flora and fauna, including threatened and endangered species such as grizzly bear, cutthroat trout and limber pine.

Forests also supply economic resources, including timber.



*Environmentally Significant Areas from GoA, 2009.*

#### **Current Forest Management**

Current management of forestry operations in the Eastern Slopes focuses primarily on producing a continuous supply of timber, based on clearcutting to meet targeted volumes of lumber. Other forest values including watershed and wildlife health are managed as secondary objectives. **These priorities must be reversed.**





## What do Albertans Want from Our Forests?

Current forest management practices run contrary to public opinion in Alberta. For example:

- **82 percent** of respondents considered watershed protection to be “much more important” or “somewhat more important” than other uses of the Castle forests in southwest Alberta such as recreational uses. Only 21 percent of respondents to the same survey supported commercial logging in the Castle. (*April 2011, Praxis, survey of residents of Pincher Creek, Cowley, Crowsnest Pass, Piikani First Nation’s reservation and Fort Macleod*)
- **72 percent** of participants would be “willing to accept limits to Forestry development to provide for more Watershed Protection” (Alberta Government *Land-Use Framework Workbook Summary Report, 2007*)
- **69 percent** more support was given by residents of Pincher Creek for “setting aside land in an undisturbed state for habitat protection” (3.86 on a 5-point scale rating support) than for “allowing clear-cut logging” in the Castle (2.29 on the same scale). (*March 2012, Praxis, Community Values Assessment for the M.D. of Pincher Creek No. 9*)

## What Should the Future for Alberta’s Forests look like?

Current forest management in southwestern Alberta is not working. Too much emphasis on timber production has meant that other forest values – including our fish and wild waters – have suffered. And the interests of Albertans are not being represented.

### Alberta’s Fish and Forests Need...

- 1 ...forest management that conserves the ecological values of the forest.  
This includes the provision of clean, abundant water, diverse forest ecosystems, wildlife habitat and connectivity, and natural carbon capture and storage.
- 2 ...any human use of the forests limited to appropriate use.  
Appropriate human use of the same forested landscape, including appropriate recreation and tourism, and sustainable forestry, should be a secondary priority.
- 3 ...management practices that are geared to assist the recovery of species of concern.  
This includes endangered fish species such as westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout, as well as threatened land-based species like the grizzly bear.
- 4 ...forest management with clear objectives, monitoring and transparency.  
Government agencies, in order to serve the public, must better integrate forest, wildlife, watershed and recreation management with clear objectives, monitoring, and transparency.
- 5 ...accessible, accountable and transparent public consultation.
- 6 ...evidence-based forest management that is based on peer-reviewed science.  
When there is a risk of negative impacts, the precautionary principle must prevail.

*“We support the development of a forest management model that maintains healthy forest ecosystems as its primary function, and offers sustainable benefits to communities from the wise use of these forests.” – Sustainable Forest, Sustainable Communities: The Future of Alberta’s Southwest Forests*

