

## Forestry in the southern eastern slopes

On March 8, 2017, AWA attended an information session at Spray Lake Sawmills (SLS). SLS are developing their 2018 Detailed Forest Management Plan (DFMP). This is a high level plan that, among other things, identifies harvest levels, timing of harvests, and changes to the landscape. The plan looks 20 years into the future and is updated only once every 10 years.

AWA was interested particularly to know how Spray Lake Sawmills would incorporate new government directives into its forest management plan. How will the company's DFMP accommodate the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and sub-regional plans, a drafted structure retention directive, and the current Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan's motorized access thresholds in grizzly bear habitat. The general response to these questions was: if a government initiative to place limits on forestry practices is finalized before Spray Lake Sawmills is done writing their plan, Spray Lake Sawmills will have to incorporate it into their forest planning. However, if a document remains in draft form, such as the Draft Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, Spray Lake Sawmills will not incorporate it into their forest planning until the company next updates its forest planning. This revelation is concerning, if not alarming, because there is potential for an industry with one of the largest footprints in the

area to dodge important land-use restrictions for at least another 10 years.

Further, AWA believes that it behooves Spray Lake Sawmills, a company that operates in one of the most heavily loved and used landscapes in Alberta, to be a good steward. A company with genuine concern for the environment and respect for other land users should consider adopting these policies as best practices to retain community-given social license. Alternately, Spray Lake Sawmills could commit to incorporating these directives within a reasonable window of time from when they become enacted. Spray Lake Sawmills did say that, at any point, the government has the option to tell them to revise their plan; AWA plans to insist the government do this if the measures found in any major regional, land-use, or species recovery plan were not included in the DFMP.

While this session was not a consultation activity, updates to the DFMP are one of the few occasions when forestry companies are required to consult with the public about their logging activities. The consultation process, or lack thereof, can be frustrating; when cut blocks begin to get flagged the public can do very little to voice their concerns and stop what is about to happen on public lands.

A current example of how this method of operation can be unfair to other stakeholders is the recent discovery of a clear-cut logging plan near Highwood Junction in Kananaskis Country under British Co-

lumbia-based quota holder Balcaen Consolidated Contracting Ltd. Since discovery, strong opposition from stakeholders and residents of the surrounding communities has mounted (see the April 5, 2017 editorial in the *Okotoks Western Wheel*). The area is a highly prized and used recreational area; it also provides valuable watershed and ecological services. But, as appears to be the case in so many places in the southern eastern slopes, these values come a distant second to timber. Unfortunately, the answer from government officials to these concerned citizens has simply been to say the area is getting logged, the companies are following the law, and there are procedures in place to address concerns.

This is a response very familiar to AWA's ears. It is indicative of AWA's concerns with Alberta's forestry industry at large – the regulations are outdated in that they ignore the important range of values our forests offer. Meaningful reform means we need to change the way our forests are managed. You can read AWA's vision for sustainable forestry here: <https://albertawilderness.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AWA-Recommendations-Southwest-Forests.pdf>

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*If you are concerned about the logging near Highwood House and would like to connect with like-minded individuals, you can find them at the Facebook group "Take a Stand for the Upper Highwood".*