

# Sustainable Forests and Communities:

## *Calling for the Sustainable Future of Southern Alberta's Headwaters*

September 2017

Throughout the past six years, we, the undersigned, have prepared and delivered documents to the Government of Alberta in hopes of generating meaningful public participation regarding well reasoned change to how our forests are managed. We have not seen the improvements we expected; we have not seen a sincere and concerted transition to sustainably managing<sup>1</sup> the forests of Alberta's southern headwaters.

Current forestry operations and management priorities threaten many values and benefits the forests in southern Alberta could provide. Factors such as the following demand immediate changes to forest management in Alberta:

- For the last twenty years Alberta's major planning initiatives and related documents have called for changes to forest management practices or, in some cases, mistakenly asserted that ecological values such as watershed management and headwaters protection guide Alberta policy<sup>2</sup>;
- Southern Alberta's headwaters are essential to the quality of life on Canada's prairies, as the forests of the mountains and foothills provide clean water for millions of Canadians downstream.
- Climate change makes maintaining the quality and quantity of our water resources increasingly important and challenging. A changing climate is expected to increase water scarcity and drought while simultaneously increasing the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, including major floods. Intact forests are known to reduce the severity of these events;
- There are widespread, justified public concerns over industrial clearcutting in the headwaters of southern Alberta. Substantive concerns about landscape impacts are compounded by a lack of meaningful public engagement and transparency in forest management on public lands;
- There is little to no evidence that the basic principles of sustainable forestry are being followed in southern Alberta.

Recognizing the primary value of this landscape for water production, recreation, and biodiversity, we respectfully call on the Alberta government to stop unsustainable logging practices and adopt instead an ecologically-based strategy of forest management.

The irreplaceable value of southern Alberta's forested headwaters demands thoughtful review and significant change in the way they are managed. Ecologically-based forest management is possible if the following principles are embraced and implemented:

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable forestry demands that forests are managed in a way that does not degrade the future environmental, social, or economic values and benefits of the landscape.

<sup>2</sup> According to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (2017), "Forests are managed with watershed management and headwaters protection as the highest priority." The Government of Alberta's Eastern Slopes Policy (1984), Bull Trout Conservation Management Plan (2012-2017), Alberta Westslope Cutthroat Trout Recovery Plan (2012-2017), Forest Reserves Act (2000), Water Act (2000), Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone under the Special Places Act (1998), and Land-Use Framework (2008) all call for a change in current management practices.

- **Promote the ecological values and benefits of conserving forests**  
Albertans value the ecological goods and services of our forests, including provision of water management and supply for the majority of southern Alberta. The importance they attach to these benefits demands strengthening ecosystem-based management objectives in Alberta's forest management foundation. Forest Management Agreements, based on the traditional foundation of maintaining a continuous supply of timber, are no longer acceptable. Their unacceptability is magnified when industrial logging disrupts patterns of biodiversity by fundamentally altering the natural age structure and spatial pattern of forests at broad levels.
- **Develop ecologically-appropriate recreation, tourism, and forestry practices**  
Appropriate land use in Alberta's southwestern forests must address the cumulative impacts on the landscape of a range of industrial and recreational uses. Further degradation of ecological integrity must stop. Restoration must be a top priority.
- **Integrate responsibility for forest, wildlife, watershed, and recreation management**  
Actively manage Alberta's forests in the best interest of current and future Albertans. Forest management should not be delegated to for-profit companies; the Alberta Government must take responsibility and be accountable to the public. Community-based forest tenures should be permitted and encouraged.
- **Creation of an independent forest management board**  
Forest management decisions must be transparent, decided by a public board whose members are at arm's length from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry and forestry companies.
- **Conduct accessible, accountable, transparent and meaningful public consultation**  
The decision making process must be transparent and accountable to the public. The process must include public input and illustrate clear rationale describing how and why a decision has been made. A comprehensive sampling of stakeholders should be included in all consultation.
- **Use the best available, peer-reviewed science to make forest management decisions**  
Ensuring that forest management is sustainable requires that management decisions are based on sound science and best-available knowledge about the ecological and geophysical attributes of the forest. When scientific knowledge is incomplete, manage through a precautionary approach; it should not be assumed that there will be a solution when a problem is discovered. To effectively respond to problems, an increased emphasis must be put on research and monitoring. Management strategies should incorporate a method of adapting to new research and monitored outcomes.
- **Assist species at risk recovery**  
Forestry management plans need to be consistent with the recovery of species at risk. In addition to landscape-scale approaches, there must be special consideration at a fine-scale for individual species that have already passed the threshold of persistent populations.

## Endorsements

We, the undersigned, endorse these principles and respectfully request the government of Alberta take appropriate action and transition to ecologically-based forest management.

Alberta Backcountry Hunters and Anglers  
Alberta Wilderness Association  
Athabasca Bio-regional Society  
Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition  
Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition  
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Southern Alberta Chapter  
Ghost Valley Community  
Take a Stand for Kananaskis and the Upper Highwood  
Trout Unlimited Canada  
Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative

Ralph Cartar, Associate Professor, University of Calgary  
Bruce P. Dancik, Professor Emeritus, Renewable Resources, University of Alberta, Editor-in-Chief  
Emeritus, Canadian Science Publishing  
Lorne Fitch, Professional Biologist, Fish and Wildlife Biologist (retired)  
Shaun Fluker, Associate Professor of Law, University of Calgary  
Carl Hunt, Biologist (retired)  
Patricia Johnson  
Arlene Kwasniak, Professor Emerita of Law, University of Calgary  
Peter Lee, Biologist, Geographer (retired)  
David Mayhood, MSc, Aquatic Ecologist, FWR Freshwater Research Limited  
Diane McIvor, naturalist and conservationist  
Mike McIvor, naturalist and conservationist  
Richard P. Pharis, FRSC, Emeritus Professor of Botany, University of Calgary  
Vivian M. Pharis, BSc (Hons.) Long-time wilderness conservation advocate  
Peter Sherrington, Research Director of the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation  
Jim Stelfox, Senior Fisheries Biologist (retired)  
Kevin Van Tighem, Landscape Ecologist and Author  
Cliff Wallis, Professional Biologist  
Helene Walsh  
Gustave J. Yaki, life-long naturalist; organizer of Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society  
Social Birding