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## Alberta Forests Deserve More than the “Forests (Growing Alberta’s Forest Sector) Amendment Act”

On October 22, without any public consultation, the Alberta government introduced a bill to change the *Forests Act*. By late November, it had almost completed its passage through the legislature. It received Royal Assent on December 9, 2020 and will come generally into force on May 1, 2021. AWA believes the *Forests Act* changes have missed a key opportunity for needed reforms to support forest ecosystems and transparent, inclusive forest management.

The *Forests Act* is a law from the 1970s that mainly sets rules for commercial timber supply. Over the years, some of the

planning standards under this law have added some ecosystem considerations. But, Alberta’s forest management system retains its outdated, timber-supply centred focus. In practice, there is also very limited transparency or public involvement in important stages of forestry allocation, planning, and accountability.

Forest management decisions affect soils, wetlands, water, and wildlife on Alberta public lands. Climate change pressures upon our forests are intensifying, areas of intact older forests are shrinking, and forest biodiversity is declining, including at-risk populations of woodland caribou, old-forest birds and native fish. The need to better manage Alberta’s forests as resilient ecosystems is clear.

From the Legislature debates on this bill, AWA learned that between February and August 2019, the government consulted with 41 different forestry companies about the changes they wanted to the *Forests Act*.

### The Timber Beast

By Henry Stelfox

The lumber king, the timber beast,  
Is on the rampage all the time,  
Slaughtering the hardwood,  
The poplar, spruce and pine.

He is the despoiler of our North woods,  
Who lays waste God’s handiwork,  
A person who despoils your heritage,  
Is one, who all men should shirk.

There was no public consultation, nor was any evidence presented during the debates of any meaningful Indigenous consultation.

The government's changes include adding a preamble that mentions forest ecological values and climate change, as well as timber supply access. Preambles can resolve ambiguities in the interpretation of a law, but they don't have the same power as enforceable sections. AWA doesn't see enforceable *Forests Act* changes to support forest ecosystems or to increase public participation; we only see revisions to facilitate forest commercial interests.

After issuing an October 28 news release to make these points, on November 13 we also posted our proposed amendments to improve the environmental and participatory aspects of the *Forests Act*. We sent these to Agriculture and Forestry Minister Dreeshen and Environment and Parks Minister Nixon, requesting them to reply to our recommendations. We haven't received any replies as of yet.

One change to the *Forests Act* will enable the Minister to make regulations about the standard clauses and the 'matters that must be addressed' in important 20-year long Forest Management Agreements (FMAs). These FMAs cover most of Alberta's public forests. This may be the best opportunity left to modernize our forest management



*Loading Aspen for a Pulp Mill, northern Alberta, 2017. Forests Act changes to meet industry requests are about to be adopted, without public or Indigenous consultation. PHOTO: © ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION*

system to increase its participatory and ecosystem attributes anytime soon.

Since citizens were not consulted on *Forests Act* changes, AWA asks the Alberta government to ensure that there is meaningful public and Indigenous consultation on the upcoming FMA regulations. We will request that provisions for environmentally

sustainable forestry, transparency, and public and Indigenous participation be included in the 'matters that must be addressed' in these key regulations for our public forest management.

- Carolyn Campbell