

Increasing Timber Harvest in Alberta's Forests

In May of this year, Minister of Forestry Devin Dreeshen announced that provincial Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) will be

increased by up to 13 percent for Alberta's forestry companies.

The announcement was foreshadowed by the Minister's comments during the October 2019 budget debate where he hinted

he was considering a drastic 33 percent increase in provincial cut. At the time, AWA wrote to the Minister to express our concerns and to ask for clarification on where this additional cut would be sourced within the province's already over-allocated forests. We never received a response.

The Minister intends to facilitate the re-assessed target of 13 percent largely using existing policy levers. AWA is particularly concerned about the plans to open up two new forest management units (FMUs) in Alberta's boreal forest. These new FMUs fall within the range for endangered woodland caribou and habitat for barred owl. AWA supports the government's goal to increase Indigenous participation in and benefits from forest management. But, we also believe that, instead of new allocations in over-allocated forests, Alberta should promote meaningful Indigenous partnerships through more sustainable harvest allocations and practices, ecological stewardship, and increased habitat restoration programs.

We are also deeply concerned about the potential harvest of more ecologically-sensitive or difficult to recover areas, such as steep slopes or stands of black spruce. If Alberta forest companies continue to harvest at unsustainable rates, we likely could see further habitat degradation for valued wild-



Many of Alberta's forested public lands are at their limits for timber allocation. Pictured, a recent harvest as seen from Mesa Butte. PHOTO: © J. HOPE

life including old-forest migratory birds, threatened native fish, and endangered woodland caribou.

AAC needs to be determined on a case by case basis to ensure that the increased cut won't negatively impact water quality, drought and flood risks, or wildlife habitat. Alberta forests already have high levels of industrial fragmentation and provincial regulations generally only require three to five percent retention rates within har-

vest stands. These rates are far below the levels needed to retain healthy biodiversity. While the recently proposed *Forests Amendment Act* would have you believe that Alberta is a world leader in sustainable forest management, this seemingly arbitrary increase of 13 percent AAC doesn't align with sustainably managing Alberta's forest ecosystems.

- Grace Wark