

July 21, 2021

Forest Management in Alberta: Sustainable or Suspect?

On Saturday, July 17, the Government of Alberta announced a new Forest Management Agreement (FMA) with Crowsnest Forest Products Ltd. (affiliated with Spray Lakes Sawmills) in the forest management unit C5 west of Lethbridge. This agreement leads Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) to continue to question Alberta Forestry's commitment to sustainability given the ongoing timber-centric management of forests.

“The Government of Alberta maintains that forest management agreements ensure commitment to sustainability and biodiversity,” said Devon Earl, AWA Conservation Specialist. “This is very questionable. A genuine commitment to sustainability and biodiversity requires forest management to be ecosystem-based, not timber-centric.”

The news of this new FMA follows an announcement in May 2020, where the Government of Alberta committed to increasing the annual allowable cut (AAC) of our forests by 13%; the government also hinted it could increase the AAC by as much as 33%. AWA expressed concerns about the possibility that the increase in AAC would mean harvesting more timber in areas that are ecologically sensitive or difficult to recover, such as old-growth forests, riparian areas, or steep slopes. AWA also requested clarification from the government on where the increase in AAC would come from. The government never responded. How this 13% increase in AAC will be sustainable and will maintain biodiversity and other ecosystem values remains unclear. To our knowledge, this increase in AAC seems to be a purely economic decision; it does not further ecosystem values.

“For the most part, the government and Spray Lakes Sawmills applaud the new C5 FMA for its economic and fibre access benefits,” said Earl. “The details they offer about those benefits are nowhere to be found when their news release mentions vital ecological objectives such as biodiversity.”

In order to realize a genuine commitment to sustainability, Alberta needs to shift from a timber-centric forest management regime to an ecosystem-based one. Forests need to be recognized as ecosystems that are intrinsically valuable, and provide important services outside of timber production such as water filtration, flood mitigation, and wildlife habitat. Until this happens, Alberta Forestry needs to stop making claims that they are being environmentally responsible and start acknowledging that the economic and fibre access benefits of Alberta’s forests trump all else.

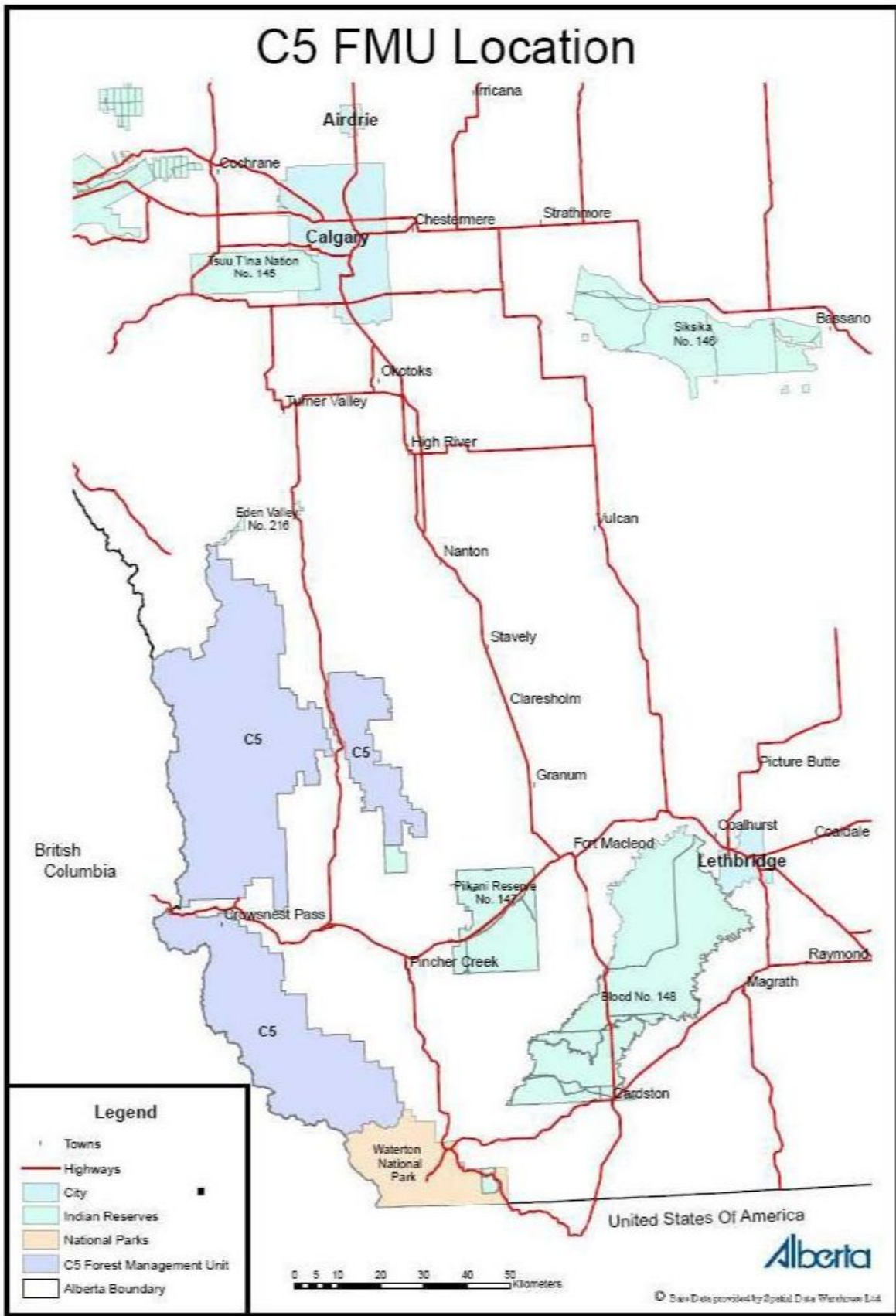
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C5 FMU Location





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