



Alberta Forest Management is Not Sustainable or Inclusive: Recommended Changes

Provincial Forestry Key Issues:

- The **Forests Act** and its regulations and policies operate on a sustained yield basis, which aims to sustain a constant level of timber on the landscape, rather than to sustain forest ecosystems. Some nominal environmental protections exist, but these are insufficient and often not based on any conservation science.
- Indigenous rights holders and the public do not have **adequate opportunity to engage** with and understand forestry practices and impacts due to shortcomings in the legislation regarding participation and transparency.
- Forest-dependent **species at risk** such as endangered native trout don't have adequate habitat protection such as large enough buffers for forestry activities around water bodies, so populations continue to decline.
- Current forestry practices such as widespread industrial clearcutting and the use of glyphosate to suppress deciduous tree growth are contributing to **wildfire risk**.

Provincial Forestry Recommendations:

- The *Forests Act* and regulations should be reformed to improve forest stewardship, participation, and transparency.
 - **Ecological principles** such as connectivity, retaining complex habitats, limits on linear and spatial disturbance, watershed protection, protection of species at risk, and ecological boundaries should be **incorporated into the legislation**ⁱ.
 - Reform should require that **Indigenous people** and the **public** are **consulted** prior to important decisions being made, such as Forest Management Agreement renewal, setting or increasing annual allowable cut, rotation length, and the preparation of timber harvest plans.
 - Relevant forest management planning information, including ecological implications of scenarios, should be **online for public review** before annual allowable cut, spatial harvest sequence and other key decisions are made.
 - The public should have timely access to harvest maps and reports, Alberta Vegetation Inventory data, contraventions, audits and inspections, and reforestation and reclamation dataⁱⁱ.
- **Operating ground rules**, including for in-stand retention and for buffers around waterbodies should be based on the best available **scientific evidence** and the **precautionary principle**. For example, the Alberta Timber Harvest Planning and Operating Ground Rules (OGRs) require only a minimum of 3-5 percent dispersed and island retention within harvest areasⁱⁱⁱ. Studies indicate that at least 10 percent structural retention is necessary for maintaining biodiversity of late-seral species^{iv}.
- The role of industrial clearcutting in intensifying wildfire and flood risk must be recognized, and forests must instead be managed with a mixture of prescribed and traditional burning, and ecologically sustainable levels of forestry in appropriate areas. The use of glyphosate to suppress the growth of more fire-resistant deciduous trees must be ceased.





ⁱ Brenda Heelan Powell, “Managing Forests Not Forestry: Law and Policy Recommendations for Ecosystem-Based Management of Alberta’s Forests” (Environmental Law Centre, December 2021), https://elc.ab.ca/sdm_downloads/managing-forests-not-forestry-law-and-policy-recommendations-for-ecosystem-based-management-of-albertas-forests/.

ⁱⁱ Heelan Powell.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Alberta Timber Harvest Planning and Operating Ground Rules” (Government of Alberta, December 19, 2022), <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/5c8defce-89da-49d5-865f-54d95d02d328/resource/6b08fcb0-26db-4823-ade2-3ceefe486a07/download/fpt-alberta-timber-harvest-planning-and-operating-ground-rules-2022-12.pdf>.

^{iv} Caroline Franklin, S. Macdonald, and Scott Nielsen, “Can Retention Harvests Help Conserve Wildlife? Evidence for Vertebrates in the Boreal Forest,” *Ecosphere* 10 (March 1, 2019): e02632, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.2632>.

