



Logging on private land: Not in my own back yard!



In Alberta, money grows on trees

by Derek McColl

Every day an estimated \$1.5 million worth of Alberta timber cut from private land thunders across the border into British Columbia.

In one 24 hour period last January, Park officials stationed on the Trans-Canada Highway counted more than 200 truckloads of spruce and pine headed for B.C. mills. Since 1993, when the B.C. government cut timber allowances to pulp mills by 15-30 percent, Alberta land owners have been cashing in on high prices offered by B.C. mills desperate for affordable wood fibre. In the municipality of Bighorn, outside Banff National Park, prices soared from \$10 per cubic metre to \$40 per cubic metre. Wood that used to be burned or left to rot is now making some Alberta land owners rich.

Although timber from Crown land cannot be sold outside the province, timber from private land is open to the highest bidder. Large forestry companies from B.C. now drop brochures in the mail to prospective clients and send representatives to Alberta to solicit the sale of timber stocks. The media has reported extensively on the feeding frenzy of B.C. mills, and most woodlot owners across Alberta realize they're sitting on a gold mine.

Environmentalists concerned

about unrestricted logging of private lands have focused primarily on the southern part of the province. Areas flanking the Rocky Mountains like the County of Bighorn and Pincher Creek have seen far more extensive clear cuts than anything in central Alberta.

The most striking example of unabashed exploitation, however, is on the Stoney Indian reserve just west of Calgary. Last January, nearly 50 logging companies downed more than \$25 million worth of timber, without band permission or a federal government permit (which is required by the Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs) before the federal government stepped in and shut down operations. The situation at the Stoney reserve may have served a greater purpose in the end, however, at least for environmentalists. It focused attention on the issue, and alerted the media to the scope of problem.

At the current rate of harvest, all of Alberta's marketable timber from private lands will be exhausted within two years. Despite this, the Minister for Environmental Protection, Ty Lund, is reluctant to place restrictions on the logging of private lands, even though strict regulations exist for other resource

industries like oil and gas exploration.

Instead, the province is entrusting the responsibility of monitoring and regulating logging on private lands to municipal districts and counties. Many local governments see little need for strict regulations, although this is often determined by location. Predominantly agricultural regions of the province obviously have no need for regulations, but in areas like the municipality of Pincher Creek, where dramatic forest landscapes dominate, the issue is of paramount importance.

In response to public pressure the municipality of Pincher Creek drafted a detailed set of guidelines to curb wholesale logging of private woodlots. These guidelines limit the amount of timber that can be harvested and address the protection of watersheds and reclamation of land after logging has occurred.

Although these guidelines encourage moderation they have little substance without the power of law. They cannot be enforced, and in many cases are ignored completely. One parcel of land, almost 9000 acres, (nearly 14 square miles), is presently being "developed" in the area, and the owners refuse to allow anyone on the land to inspect logging practices.

The Pincher Creek guidelines could serve as a model for provincial legislation, but it's unlikely the Klein government is willing to enforce any restrictions on issues regarding private land use, even though they have done so in the past for the oil and gas industry. Instead, they have developed a woodlot management program, jointly funded by the provincial and federal governments, to educate woodlot owners on responsible forestry practices. The program, however, reads much like a how-to manual on how to clear-cut land, and even provides guidelines on how to draw up a contract with a logging company.

Bob Cameron, a founding member of the South Peace Environment Association, feels legislation regulating logging on private land would be ineffective without the

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Rules for logging on private land needed

By Nick Taylor, Alberta Liberal Forestry Critic

Over the past few years high lumber prices and a shortage of timber in British Columbia has led to a rapid increase in the sale of timber from private lands in Alberta. Despite growing public alarm at the number of logging trucks leaving the province, the Alberta government had no accurate figures on the volume of exports until it introduced new scaling regulations in August, 1994. Now we know the true magnitude of the problem.

Cutting on this scale is not sustainable...Fred Bradley, the government MLA for Pincher Creek, expressed his horror at the devastation caused by extensive logging operations by a British Columbia company in the Crowsnest Pass area.

In the five months from August to December 1994 approximately 500,000 cubic metres of coniferous timber and 100,000 cubic metres of deciduous timber were exported from private land in Alberta, or enough wood to build 5500 houses. To obtain this volume, over 30 square kilometres of land would need to be clear-cut. These figures exclude the volume of timber felled on Indian reserves, which, according to the government, accounted for about 30 %

month period.

Cutting on this scale is not sustainable, and raises serious concerns about the impact on both the environment and on timber supplies for sawmill operators who have traditionally relied on private sources. In December 1992, Fred Bradley, the government MLA for Pincher Creek, expressed his horror at the devastation caused by extensive logging operations by a British Columbia company in the Crowsnest Pass area. Although the problem has spread province-wide, successive ministers for the environment—Ralph Klein, Brian Evans and Ty Lund—have been unwilling to take any action. On March 1, 1995 Premier Ralph Klein appointed a Ministerial Task Force on private logging, but three months later nothing has been heard from them.

Alberta has a strong tradition of private property rights, but large scale logging on private land can have serious impacts on the environment and on the economy. While the current minister of Environmental Protection, Ty Lund, has a problem "when those enviro-cops start poking around my land", some controls are necessary.

I believe that logging on private land should be conducted according to the same rules as timber harvested on Crown land. This means having buffer zones along streams, and limiting the



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permission is obtained for a change in land use. A land owner wishing to log an extensive area should submit a plan. This would allow the government to inspect the land to determine the slope and proximity to water courses. Inspections should be made prior to cutting, as well as after it is completed. This would also allow officials to monitor for logging infringements and regeneration of forest or other vegetation.

States such as Idaho and Oregon make no distinction between forest management on private and government lands. They do not prevent conversion to other uses, but require an alternative vegetative cover "to provide continuing soil productivity and stabilization" or that "only bona fide, established and continuously maintained changes from forest uses are provided for an exemption from reforestation requirements."

A system of notification for proposed logging also benefits the land owner. The government can provide information on its woodlot program, which promotes sustainable timber management and warns about checking the credentials of logging operators. I advocate a bonding system for out-of-province operators, to ensure that logging operations comply with required standards. This would entitle

prescribed manner, and prevent abuses which have arisen with "cut and run" operators.

I do not believe that the free market for timber from private land should be curtailed, but the sale of timber should be advertised so that local sawmills could have a chance to bid on it. This would not, however, solve the problem of long-term supplies. The government has already allocated, or perhaps over-allocated, most coniferous timber on Crown land to large companies.

...the current minister of Environmental Protection, Ty Lund, has a problem "when those enviro-cops start poking around my land"...

The Alberta Forest Service needs more staff to monitor both Crown and private land to ensure good timber management and to reduce the theft of timber. Logs stolen from Crown land are often sold as logs from private land because Crown timber, being sold in a direct and controlled market, commands half the price as that of timber on the free market.

Protection of the environment must be the first priority for all forestry activity in the province.

The environment knows no

need to be clear-cut. These figures exclude the volume of timber felled on Indian reserves, which, according to the government, accounted for about 30% (not 70%, as the government once said) of total exports during the same five

years. Logging should be conducted according to the same rules as timber harvested on Crown land. This means having buffer zones along streams, and limiting the size of clear cuts. It also means reforestation of affected lands, unless

advocate a bonding system for out-of-province operators, to ensure that logging operations comply with required standards. This would entitle private landowners to compensation if logging is not carried out in the

be the first priority for all forestry activity in the province.

The environment knows no ownership boundaries.

The effects of unregulated logging on the environment

By Gray Jones, Executive Director, WCWC

Not in my own back yard! is being shouted by many rural Albertan's concerned with clear-cut, liquidation logging on private lands adjacent to their communities and homes. This issue has created a media storm and focused attention on wildland destruction, deforestation and lack of government control or direction.

In areas where clear-cut logging is now taking place on private lands, Alberta farmers and ranchers should be deeply concerned with water and soil conservation. Most of Alberta has a growing season water deficit. Massive clear-cut logging on private lands contributes initially to flooding and then results in the drying up of seasonal streams and wetland habitats, causing drought conditions during warm months. Trees and ground cover plants control hydrology and local micro-climate. Forested lands reduce local wind velocities and act as 'a natural faucet', gradually releasing stored water from trees into the atmosphere and into the ground. Deforestation of private lands increases wind and soil erosion, and reduces plant and animal habitats, as well as biodiversity. Deforestation of private lands decreases the quality of life for many rural people.

Short-term profit has compelled many farmers and ranchers to log their land. Many fail to consider alternatives like selection cutting and supplying small, local sawmills. Horse

logging, archaic as it may sound, is actually a viable alternative for small logging operators, and it results in little damage to the forest floor. Selective logging with machinery is also an option. Selective logging generally would result in several times more jobs than are created with large clear-cutting operators. Shelter-wood cutting systems eliminate most of the need for replanting, and result in minimal habitat disturbance. The natural environment can be used for profit and be truly sustainable if dealt with responsibly and with foresight.

As it is now, however, the sounds of nature are being overwhelmed by the roar of feller-bunchers and logging trucks as landowners cash in on the windfall profits from B.C. and Montana mills paying almost twice as much as Alberta mills.

Our forested crown lands are almost totally dominated by timber hungry trans-nationals. A handful of companies, including Louisiana-Pacific, Al-Pac/Mitsubishi, Weyerhaeuser and Daishowa literally control the destiny of our northern forests. Members of the Alberta Forest Service have publicly admitted that the government had over-allocated crown land leases to these giants. These companies have been promised more than the government has to give.

The long-term implications are even more shocking if one considers that 38% of crown land harvested to date have not regenerated

successfully. It's an enormous stretch of the imagination to call this a renewable resource. But the pressure on private land comes from several angles. As forest fires rage across the province crown land allocations are shrinking. Already over-allocated timber leases are bound to be even more stressed by this. Similarly, as agricultural groups like ranchers and lobby groups like ATV enthusiasts gain momentum, more forested private lands will be liquidated. Taking all of this into account, the pressure on mills to find timber will increase dramatically, and private land resources are the natural choice.

Alberta's huge oil and gas industry has already fragmented 1/6 of the forest landscape of Alberta. The Alberta government has abrogated its responsibility for monitoring and policing crown lands to the oil and gas and forestry companies and they refuse to establish regulations and controls for logging on private lands.

Outside of our National Parks, only 2.8% of our forests are protected, leaving our boreal forests wide-open for business with almost no protection.

Alberta's myriad forest ecosystems flow through crown lands and over-stressed national parks and onto private lands, which are being pillaged. Animal species, including the grizzly and woodland caribou, do not recognize forest jurisdictional boundaries. They wander free but run a gamut of forest fragmentation and forest industrial overload.

Old growth trees on private lands are significant habitats for old-growth dependant species, including various wood warblers, pileated woodpeckers, martens, flying squirrels and others. The forests on private lands are important as wildlife corridors and refuges for many bird and animal species, which live in

and travel through our parks and industry-dominated crown lands.

A forestry meeting, the largest ever in Alberta, was held recently in that community. Over 400 people showed up to voice their concerns. These people were not so-called tree-huggers, but represented a wide spectrum of interests, including loggers, ranchers, guides and outfitters. They all voiced one common concern: the need for regulations for logging on private land.

Residents and local politicians in the

Albertan's need to speak out. Not in my own back yard! should ring out across the province, just as it has in the Cochrane area, where residents refuse to bow to the pressures of greed and opportunism.

Pincher Creek area have also stood up to be heard. Strict guidelines exist for logging on private land in the municipal district of Pincher Creek, and although they have no force and effect in law, they serve as a model for what should be done, and represent the will of the those directly affected by wholesale devastation of their forests.

The government of Alberta, despite the media coverage, and the obvious need for regulations for logging on private land, remains reticent to perform the task of government where needed. Instead, they will continue to allow the liquidation of Alberta's forests.

The great Alberta timber rush

By Andrew Nikiforuk (excerpts taken from an article which appeared in the "Georgia Strait")

• Throughout Alberta, log purchasers from British Columbia (and Montana) have begun a concerted run on the province's private timber supply. Because of a growing scarcity of Crown or public wood in "Beautiful British Columbia", Alberta's privately owned timber has suddenly become the hottest of commodities. It's not unusual for an Alberta rancher to find in the mailbox the latest sales pitch from a tree starved British Columbia firm or contractor: "Attention Land Owners-Wanted: Standing Timber."

• The pace and scale of Alberta's timber rush has been feverish and grand. More than \$3 million worth of timber now rumbles off to B.C. sawmills every two days. That's more than three hundred truckloads of spruce, pine and fir per day, and that represents enough wood to employ 10 Alberta forest workers for a year.

• The technological and financial pressures that have sent forestry companies...on 2,000-mile-long fibre-hunting trips are varied and complex. Rising pulp prices are certainly one driving force, but so is the province's (B.C.'s) liberal supply of sawmills and pulp mills. "In essence, the B.C. mills have more capacity than allowable timber cuts available," notes Ron Hammerstedt, a forestry consultant in McBride,

everyday, the central issue is simply unfair competition. Because the same big corporate players operate in both provinces and can afford higher prices (given their access to cheap Crown timber), many small businesses fear they will be squeezed out of the industry altogether because they don't enjoy the same level of access to Crown lands.

• Robert Essau, a farmer and mill operator in Flatbush in northern Alberta, says he may well be one such casualty by early spring. In the past three years, he has witnessed the price of timber increase from \$30 per cubic metre to \$163 per cubic metre.

• Essau cuts two million board feet per year, employing 10 people for 150 days of the year and another 20 during the winter. "It's no great shakes, but it's better than welfare and for me, as well." But unless the government intervenes and makes it more difficult for big mills to bid for private timber or local commercial timber permits - the lifeblood of small operators - his labour-intensive operation will die. "The big mills

have tried to eradicate the small woodlot guys for years," he says. "We have always been a thorn in their side. Unless there is some help by spring, I don't think there will be a little mill left."

• Perhaps the most drastic and immediate solution to the rush on privately owned timber would be an outright ban on the export of raw logs. Crown timber, for example, can't cross a provincial border unless it has been modified by a mill blade. "If Alberta put in a ban, the rush would be over like that," says Hammerstedt.

"No matter how you look at it, it's a price war the little guy can't win."

• Since the beginning of the timber rush, Alberta Environment Minister Ty Lund has steadfastly defended the right of Albertans to pillage their own land. He even blamed B.C. Forests Minister Andrew Petter for establishing forestry policies "that are causing us trouble".

• To keep short-term thinking at a minimum, the municipality of Pincher Creek in southern Alberta has responded with a model bylaw designed, in the words of development officer Doug Pickell, to address "the current surge [of] cutting frenzy in our back yards." He says the bylaw encourages simplicity and neighbourliness. With a dramatic landscape characterized by steep slopes, high winds, and highly erodible soil, neither Pincher Creek nor its tourism industry can afford clear-cutting - where loggers denuded the land 100 years ago, nothing has grown back.

• If adopted throughout the province, though, Pincher Creek's bylaw would bring Alberta into the 21st century and enhance woodlot management. Nearly every European country has some restrictions on the cutting of timber on private land. So do most other provinces, particularly in the east, where small, privately owned woodlots play a major role in the forestry industry.



capacity than allowable timber cuts available," notes Ron Hammerstedt, a forestry consultant in McBride, B.C. "They simply have to go out of province to ante up these mills."

- Ten years ago, British Columbia was a net exporter of wood, says Charles Widman, a Vancouver forestry analyst and the publisher of *World Wood Review*. "But now we are a net importer. The scramble for fibre is going to get worse, not better. And the pressure on Alberta's wood is going to increase."

The Alberta advantage comes in two forms: unregulated private timber (pillaging is permitted) and cheap prices.

- Compared to B.C. wood, Alberta's Crown timber is grossly under priced, due in part to government concessions and low stumpage fees granted to Japanese pulp mills in the boreal forest. (The price of Crown wood traditionally sets the price of private wood.) "Relative to the cost of logs in B.C., Alberta's wood is less expensive," notes Victor Komori, logging foreman at Slocan Forest Products in Valemount. Even with hauling charges, Alberta wood comes with a \$20- to \$40-per-cubic-metre price difference. Komori adds that if Alberta changed its stumpage fees to bring Crown wood up to a more competitive price, "the private logs would stop at the border."

- To local (Alberta) mill operators, who see their futures, like bird's nests, being exported to B.C.



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mechanisms to police such activities. He also disagrees that regulatory responsibility should fall on the shoulders of local government. In Cameron's opinion, lack of commitment and self-interest would stand in the way of effective bylaw enforcement.

Instead, Cameron advocates "an international effort to change land owners perception of the value of treed properties. British Columbia has a lot of community forest boards, generated by land owners. This comes from the difference in the perceived value of forested lands."

British Columbians, he adds, place a higher value on treed land because they can see it. The

geography is more dramatic, and areas where dense forests exist are populated,

Without speedy government intervention, including adequate policing mechanisms, Albertan's might have to get used to not being able to see the forest for the cut blocks.

whereas much of Alberta's forests are found in isolated, relatively unpopulated areas. This goes a long way to explaining why the municipality of Pincher Creek is active in curbing wholesale logging of private lands. Residents there can see what is left after the machines have mowed down the forest, and it isn't pretty.

To believe that Albertan's will change their thinking before all private woodlots are turned into pulp is to believe in the power of positive thinking while sitting on the deck of the Titanic. Optimism can only take you so far. Without speedy government intervention, including adequate policing mechanisms, Albertan's might have to get used to not being able to see the forest for the cut blocks.

Support conservation of forests on Alberta's private lands



WCWC File Photo

Ralph Klein
Premier of Alberta
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Fax 427-1349

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Thank You!