

What's Happening from **Environmental Building News**
July 1, 2010

Canadian Timber Companies in Landmark Environmental Deal

A coalition of the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC)—representing 21 Canadian forest companies—and nine environmental organizations has signed an agreement to protect 72 million hectares (180 million acres) of forest across the country.

The resulting Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement creates a three-year plan for developing and implementing sustainable forest management for an area roughly the size of Texas. The plan immediately halts all logging on nearly 29 million hectares (72 million acres) that represents almost all of the caribou habitat controlled by the 21 companies. The rest of the covered forest will be managed according to standards that will be developed by FPAC and environmental groups.

The agreement comes after nearly two years of negotiations following several effective “do not buy” campaigns by environmental groups against several FPAC member companies. Those groups, including Greenpeace and ForestEthics, have agreed to suspend their campaigns while FPAC companies are developing and implementing new forest management policies.



The Canadian Boreal Forest, which stretches across most of the country, is home to several threatened species, including caribou. Canada is the world’s largest exporter of forest products.

The agreement draws on several existing forest management practices and standards but clearly gives preference to standards developed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In developing a joint standard for managing the Canadian boreal forest, the signatories to the agreement are supposed to use elements from FSC, Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) standards. But they are also supposed to use “as a reference point the on-the-ground application of the existing FSC National Boreal Standard.” SFI and CSA standards cover the boreal region and are used throughout Canada.

In an open letter, Corey Brinkema, President of FSC–US, cited this reference as a vote of confidence in FSC standards. He also wrote, “It’s likely that many if not most FPAC members will ultimately seek FSC certification to gain consumer recognition for their improved forest management practices.” Since Canada is the world’s largest exporter of forest products, Brinkema argued, the agreement will also raise the bar for forest management practices worldwide as other countries seek to remain competitive. However, while the agreement is good news for environmental interests, FSC is one of three certifications referenced in the agreement, and there is no guarantee that any one of the three will gain more certified areas than the others.

The agreement goes into effect immediately, laying out a timeline of six months to develop a standard and 18 months to implement it. The agreement and supporting materials are available at www.canadianborealforestagreement.com.

– Allyson Wendt

IMAGE CREDITS:

1. Photo: Wayne Sawchuck, Forest Products Association of Canada