

# Reprint **Island Tides**

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## **The real deal—or a sham?** ~ Patrick Brown

Nine environmental organizations, and 21 forest products companies, have signed a landmark agreement which would see the forest companies adopting new environmental standards for their operations in the boreal forests of northern Canada, would see their products certified as being environmentally friendly, and would see the environmental organizations halting their efforts to paint the forest companies as destructive and environmentally irresponsible.

Not much is known about the details of the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA), and it is surrounded by a cloud of suspicion (excerpts from the Agreement are shown in BOXES). Criticism ranges from: 'the environmentalists have sold out,' to 'the forest companies have given in to blackmail'.

Some would say that this Agreement is the successful conclusion to the ENGO campaign. Others say that the only thing the ENGOs have accomplished is a short-term moratorium on logging in some of the caribou habitat. What does it all mean?

### **A Truce In The Boreal**

For some years now, a group of environmental organizations (referred to as ENGOs) have carried on a campaign to impede the marketing of forest products from Canada's boreal forests. The campaign sought to influence customers of forest companies harvesting in the boreal that the companies were not environmentally

responsible, so customers should not buy their products.

This is all to end with the CBFA, signed on May 18. The environmental organizations agree to cease their efforts to discourage customers from dealing with the companies, and the companies agree to work towards improving their environmental practices and the certification of their

products.

### **The Boreal and the Caribou**

The boreal forest worldwide occupies a 1,000 kilometre wide belt between the Arctic tundra and the temperate grasslands to the south. Some 60% of the boreal is in Russia; Canada has some 30%, about 307 million hectares; this is about 77% of Canada's forests.

Much of Canada's boreal forest, which ranges from Newfoundland to the Yukon, has been designated as boreal caribou habitat. The agreement generally

recognizes boreal caribou as the indicator species of the boreal's wide range of mammals, not to mention half of Canada's 450 bird species.

### **A 'Solutions Space'**

To provide time to work out more details of the Agreement (such as specific certification requirements), a three year 'solutions space' has been set. Starting on April

### **ENGO Advocacy Work**

'ENGO Advocacy Work' means any advocacy or communication activities by ENGOs that are generic and/or global in scope that seek as their primary intent to inform and mobilize individuals and organizations on the importance of the conservation of forest ecosystems and services including boreal forest ecosystems and services, and/or to encourage individuals and organizations to take actions that will ensure this objective is met.

Work will include activities such as: global engagement of wood and paper customers/consumers concerning the importance of forest ecosystems and their role in helping conserve them; working with wood and paper customers/consumers in developing and implementing environmental initiatives. ENGOs also take actions in the market place to promote: FSC protection and conservation of species at risk, wood and paper recovery, use of recycled forest products, agriculture residue; and other potential low impact alternatives, promote use reduction, raise awareness of biodiversity conservation issues, and raise awareness and promote solutions in relation to climate change.

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1, 2009, the companies have agreed not to log or build new roads in 29 million hectares of their tenures in the boreal. (This represents about 40% of their boreal tenures, which total 72 million hectares). These lands are thought to be caribou range. The total caribou range is about half of the boreal, but most of it does not lie within forest tenures.

The majority of the area where logging and roadbuilding activity has been initially restricted is in Manitoba, Quebec, and Ontario. In BC, some 9.8 million hectares of the province's 32 million hectares of 'commercial forest' will come under the CBFA. Of this, 1.4 million hectares, licensed to Canfor and Louisiana-Pacific, has been designated as boreal caribou range, where activity will be initially restricted. This area is in the far northeast corner of the province.

### Goals of the Agreement

To quote directly from the agreement draft :

'The CBFA is designed to achieve six strategic goals. These are:

(a) World-leading 'on the ground' sustainable forest management practices based on the principle of ecosystem based management, active adaptive management, and third party verification;

#### Active Adaptive Management

'Active adaptive management' involves an explicit recognition of uncertainty about the outcome of some management activities and the need to learn by doing that includes careful observation of the effects to guide change over time. In most cases, this would involve (a) testing alternative management in controlled environment; (b) monitoring the alternative practices against both a conventional practices and a natural condition baseline; (c) analyzing results against stated performance objectives and documents unexpected ancillary effects; or when any are encountered and deemed acceptable.

(b) The completion of a network of protected areas that, taken as a whole, represents the diversity of ecosystems within the boreal region and serves as ecological benchmarks;

(c) The recovery of species at risk within the boreal forests including species such as boreal caribou

(d) Reducing GHG emissions along the full life cycle from the forest to the end of product life;

(e) Improved prosperity of the Canadian forest sector

and the communities that depend on it; and

(f) recognition by the market place (eg: customers, investors, consumers) of the CBFA and its implementation in ways that demonstrably benefit FPAC members and their products from the boreal.'

### The Details

The 39-page Agreement attempts to set out a basis for 'good faith' co-operation in an atmosphere of considerable uncertainty and, undoubtedly, some scepticism. But basically it is a tradeoff; the industry agrees to improve their environmental performance to achieve certification of their products, and the ENGOS agree to stop their campaigns to impede the marketing of those products.

#### The Boreal Forest Agreement

'Canadian Boreal Initiative, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Canopy, David Suzuki Foundation, ForestEthics, Greenpeace, The Nature Conservancy, Pew Environment Group International Boreal Conservation Campaign, and Ivey Foundation (hereafter referred to as the 'ENGOS')

and:

AbitibiBowater Inc, Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc, AV Group, Canfor Corporation, Canfor Pulp Limited Partnership, Cariboo Pulp & Paper Company, Cascades inc., Daishowa-Marubeni International Ltd, FF Soucy Inc, Howe Sound Pulp and Paper Limited Partnership, Kruger Inc, Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd, Mercer International, Mill & Timber Products Ltd, NewPage Corporation, Papier Masson Ltée, SFK Pâte, Tembec, Tolko Industries Ltd, West Fraser Timber Company Ltd, and Weyerhaeuser Company Limited (hereafter referred to as the 'FPAC Members')

and:

Forest Products Association of Canada (hereafter referred to as 'FPAC').

Have signed an Agreement that seeks to address sometimes conflicting social, economic, and environmental imperatives in a manner that captures the economic opportunities that are emerging for forest products of the highest environmental quality.

The company and environmental organization signatories have chosen to work together in addressing this challenge. They will work jointly in the marketplace and on the ground with leading practices and to support governments in their task of ensuring a fully functioning boreal ecosystem and world-competitive sustainable forest industry.

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Just what this means may best be understood by reading the accompanying BOXES, which contain text copied directly from a draft of the Agreement.

‘Active adaptive management’ explains what the companies plan to do to change their operations to improve their environmental performance. ‘ENGO Advocacy work’ explains what the ENGOs agree to stop doing. The key to the success of the agreement depends on whether its objectives can be achieved this way.

It is clear from reading these definitions from the Agreement that, in a very real sense, ‘the devil is in the details’. Clearly, the forest companies have decided that co-operating with the ENGOs is better than fighting them. The ENGOs, for their part, have signed an agreement that relieves them of their most effective weapon against the companies; will their environmental objectives be met? 