*A photographer captures images of trees for an upcoming publication.*

# Points of View

# Points of View

## "Is Canada, as a country, managing its forests sustainably?"

Since the early 1990s, Canada has been vigorously pursuing sustainable forest management supported by the efforts of government, industry and forest-related groups and organizations. Our nation's progress toward this goal of sustainability has been the topic of many debates, both at home and abroad. These debates are fuelled by a variety of opinions—some fact-based and others more driven by perception or emotion. Others are based on individuals' familiarity with the mostly second- and third-growth forests predominant in areas such as Europe, rather than on Canada's unique circumstances—vast and mostly natural forests spanning many ecozones.

Our interviewees for this Points of View section were chosen in an effort to be representative of a broad spectrum of interests, knowledge and opinions. In reading the following interview summaries, it becomes apparent that opinions on whether Canada is progressing rapidly enough toward sustainable forest management are indeed varied and even opposing. Despite this diversity however, there is consensus within the interviewees that sustainability means more than growing and harvesting trees. Biodiversity, wildlife

---

***Material contained in Points of View does not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the federal government.***

conservation, the needs of forest-dependent communities, global market competition, etc. must all be factored into any measurement of sustainability.

This diverse group generally agreed that Canada is moving toward sustainable forest management, although some suggest that Canada is not sustainably managing all its forests at this time. The interviewees also collectively called for agreement on the definition of sustainable forest management—a call which is consistent with Canada's continuing efforts to have an international convention on forests which would establish such a definition. But above all, the group identified a need for more information regarding Canada's forests and forest management activities and for continuing transparency in all actions, policies and decisions on forest management. The results should also be communicated to the public in a language it can understand.

The summary presented below expands on these solicited opinions and provides valuable insight into the varying perceptions which exist regarding Canada's progress toward sustainable forest management—be they based on factual information or personal experience and be they from the familiar domestic perspective or the less familiar international perspective.

The opinions expressed are, in each case, those of the interviewee and may not accurately reflect the policy positions and most recent initiatives of federal, provincial and territorial governments.

**Dr. Eric de Munck** is project leader of Environmental Affairs for Centrum Hout (the Dutch "Timber Information Centre") which provides information to Dutch buyers of forest products.

Is Canada managing its forests sustainably? Yes and no, according to Eric de Munck. It depends on how sustainability is defined. However, Canada is heading in the right direction, when one looks at the progress that has been made, he observed.

A forestry engineer, Dr. de Munck has seen significant change in Canadian forest management practices since visiting Canada in 1998, when he toured forestry operations in British Columbia, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

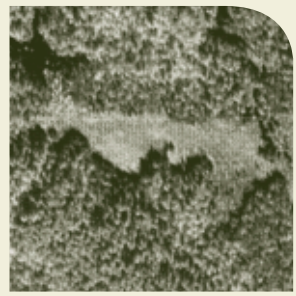
*"What struck him, as it does many other European foresters, is the immense size of Canadian forests, the many different forest types, plant species and ecological zones covered by these forests."*

What struck him, as it does many other European foresters, is the immense size of Canadian forests, the many different forest types, plant species and ecological zones covered by these forests. For any forestry professional, he says, this array presents "a totally different perspective of forest management, requiring different approaches than in Europe." He believes that in some ecological zones, clearcutting could be sustainable. However, in other forests, small group felling or even single tree felling might be a better option. He understands that the Canadian forest industry is looking at these techniques as possibly new ways to manage some forests.

He has followed the developments supported by Canadian governments, through forest practices codes, different logging operations, changed forestry practices, and a real effort by the forest industry to improve forest management systems. "I have been especially impressed by the way Canadians are dealing with the new concept of sustainable forest management coupled with certification, and the way Canadians are trying to implement several certification systems."

However, he believes that the inventory of Canada's total forest area needs to be improved. For example, he hopes that in addition to using aerial photos and satellites to collect data, that it is also collected "on the ground" more thoroughly and will include not only volume and species but also ecological values. Having this expanded range of information is important if policies and practices are to be based on this data. In fact, Dr. de Munck finds it significant that Canada is still focusing on volume instead of on added-value

products. "Industry needs to change its course a little to do this, which I understand some companies are beginning to do."



He believes that the international criticism of clearcutting is overdone, because the people criticizing it, in his opinion, do not usually understand what forestry is and in which ecologically appropriate settings clearcutting can be done.

He is quite impressed by the amount of available information on the progress of Canadian forest operations, but would like to see more information and statistics on the things the general public finds important.

As well, Dr. de Munck is especially impressed by the openness of the Canadian forest industry and governments about what is being done and what progress has been made toward sustainable forest management. He hopes Canadians continue to maintain this openness.

**Sven-Erik Jansson** is an outfitter in Alberta who has participated in a number of forest certification audits, forest-related task forces, committees and public consultations.

At any given time, according to Mr. Jansson, a forestry expert could say that based on reforestation numbers and yield curves, we are harvesting at sustainable levels. However, particularly in Alberta, other land uses have increased over the years, most notably by the oil and gas industry. Mr. Jansson suggests that the productive forest landbase is shrinking from encroachment at an alarming rate.

If we assume that we now have sustainable harvests, we certainly do not have sustainable forests, and we have an ongoing loss of ecological integrity. " But I don't believe that, given the direction in which we are going, harvest levels are sustainable in the long run either. If an enhanced yield can be created and maintained through silvicultural activities, it will be at the expense of biodiversity." Sustainability means so much more than harvesting trees. It also includes other uses: wildlife, recreation, mushroom and berry picking, trapping and hunting and so on. He doesn't believe it is realistic that Canada will be able to maintain all these forest values over time.

Mr. Jansson believes that criticisms of our forest practices were stronger 10 years ago than they are today. Most of the criticisms focused on clearcutting huge tracts of forested land. He labels this type of criticism simplistic because it is based on visual impressions rather than on what was really wrong with clearcutting. "We should not be looking just at what we're taking away, but we should also look at what we leave. Industry is adjusting to that. Cutblock planning, retention of structure and understory protection is quite different today than it was 10 years ago." The Canadian forest industry is good at adaptive management. This has evolved from a healthy cooperation between science, industry and the public. Canadians are prepared to adopt the latest science. As well, many more people now have input through various public forums. All this has helped, he notes, not only to change operations, but also to improve the image and understanding of forestry in general.

***"We as a society are responsible for how much we are using the resource."***

We should be careful, Mr. Jansson continues, when criticizing forest companies. They do not cut for fun, but to satisfy a market demand. We as a society are responsible for how much we are using the resource. Society's expectations may change and increase, but the industry seems to be criticized for whatever it does. Forest rotations mean cycles of 50 to 100 years, and during that time society often changes its values and scientists change their opinions. We need to talk about and explain adaptive management in a way so the public can understand the balance between economic expectations and environmental consequences. The debates should not focus on *if* forestry should occur, but rather on *how* it should be done and to what extent.

***"The Canadian forest industry is good at adaptive management. This has evolved from a healthy cooperation between science, industry and the public. "***

To that effect, both governments and forest companies need to demonstrate that they are working a little closer together and with the public and that they are operating more transparently than in the past. Some companies are still leery of opening their doors to the public, but if they demonstrate transparency, for example, by promoting certification and cooperation between all groups, then Canada can show the rest of the world that we are trying to do the best we can with the tools we have.

We should, however, be careful in promoting Canadian practices as sustainable. "I'm not so sure we are, because it depends how we define sustainable." Mr. Jansson believes the best assurance we can give is that we are as sustainable as we can be.

**Dr. Christian Mersmann** is the Director of the Programme on Forests of the United Nations Development Programme. He is also an advisor to German federal ministries on forest matters. In these capacities, Dr. Mersmann has been involved in forest issues at the national level in Europe as well as in development cooperation at the international level for the UN Intergovernmental Panel/Forum on Forests and international forest-related organizations.

Dr. Mersmann believes that in the recent past Canada has developed the necessary political will to manage its forests sustainably. However, he notes that no other country in the world has achieved a high degree of sustainable forest management and that some efforts, such as the Montréal Process, have not yet met expectations.

Canada is moving toward sustainability on three fronts: on-the-ground changes in forest management practices; changes in policies and legislation, including the question of decentralized decision making, which, he feels, is an established and well-working process in Canada; and Canada's involvement and participation in major global forest-related policy processes.

One of the major factors influencing Canada's progress is the strong competition in the global timber and forest products market. The increased (short-term) costs that accompany sustainable forest management have hindered Canada from making large advances in sustainable forest management. "Looking at sustainability in terms of 'goods and services' of the forest other than timber, for example, environmental services, biodiversity, landscape beauty and tourism, etc., we know that they all need to be paid for. If there isn't an international level playing ground for what criteria and indicators mean for operations, one can understand that Canada is cautious to move forward to sustainable forest management at any cost."

There is confusion outside Canada about exactly what advances Canada has made. Over the past 10 years, for example, Canada has invited foreign experts, from Europe particularly, to observe its sustainable forest management. However, some visiting forestry experts have described stopping in a forest, walking though a forest corridor and suddenly looking into a huge clearcut—a size never seen in Europe. The visitor feels cheated and doubts Canada's claims of new and more progressive approaches to sustainable forest management.

As well, foreign observers are confused by conflicting claims made by the forest industry, First Nations, and environmental and other major groups. Canada says it has a broad participatory process and the instruments to involve major groups, but Canadian non governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to claim that it does not involve them sufficiently or listen to public opinion. Canada could learn from other countries with similar forest conditions, such as Sweden and Finland, about how they have increasingly involved major stakeholders and communicated their sustainable forest management practices to the public.

*"Foreign observers are confused by conflicting claims made by the forest industry and First Nations, environmental and other major groups."*

Public participation could be done in a different and less confrontational way to draw in NGOs and increase their responsibility in the process. "It is quite obvious to an outsider that a more effective societal process needs to be in place in Canada. The forest industry is trying hard, but has not succeeded yet in swaying public opinion." For example, Dr. Mersmann singles out the Model Forest concept, which some call "an island in a sea of destruction". "Why didn't Canada declare Vancouver Island a huge model forest? I know it is expensive and difficult. However, it would have been excellent public relations at national as well as international levels."

Considering Canada's very constructive leadership role at the international level in forest-related forums, Canada should engage more visibly and strongly in international development cooperation, making sustainable forestry expertise available to developing countries. Canadian international development efforts in forestry should help define the contribution of forests to overarching agendas like sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Dr. Mersmann concludes: "We do move toward more sustainable practices through new partnerships between the North and the South and Canada should be an important partner—both at international and national levels."

**Arlin Hackman**, Vice President, Conservation, at World Wildlife Fund Canada, is a geographer, has worked in conservation for over 20 years, and coordinated WWF's Endangered Spaces Campaign during the 1990s.

Mr. Hackman does not believe Canada is presently managing its forests sustainably. "We have not shown that we can sustain, over time, the suite of forest values Canadians hold dear," he said. "Instead, we have treated our forests as a 'wood basket', establishing industrial and manufacturing demand for wood, committing woodlands to meet that demand, and only then trying to come to terms with all the other economic, social and ecological values." We often fail to replace what we extract in equal measure, changing the forest in ways that do not leave an environment as rich as the one we originally inherited.

***"Canada should show where we're doing well and talk about how to make these sustainable practices more widespread."***

Noting that no one has a simple, proven formula for ecological sustainability, he believes Canada is conducting a big experiment in the forest. "We are groping toward sustainability. As noted by the Independent Expert Evaluation Panel on Canada's National Forest Strategy, we are making headway in different ways, in different regions, at different speeds. But more scientific rigour is needed. In most regions we're still cutting the 'original' forest without an experimental design to ensure effective learning, or management discipline to ensure that such learning and adaptive management actually guide us."

Control areas are necessary for an experimental design model. In this case, we need to maintain examples of all forest types and regions in undisturbed conditions, as ecological benchmarks, in order to compare natural evolution to changes in the managed landscape. "Canada is officially committed to establishing a network of ecologically representative protected areas. However, actually completing such a network is proving difficult. This is a litmus test about how fast we are moving toward sustainability. We have moved significantly in the last decade. We aren't, however, close to the target and we are losing opportunities to complete that network."

He says that land use planning should help alleviate this problem but that it often is 'too little, too late'. "Though there are some good efforts, by now as a forest nation we should be far better and faster in completing land use planning before logging licences are awarded or renewed."

Mr. Hackman believes Canadians are pretty good at some management practices, especially at the stand level. However, from a conservation viewpoint, he says "we must recognize the importance of scale, that not all forest management questions concern the spatial scale of the stand level, or the temporal scale of the business cycle. There are multiple scales that we are learning about. Some of the toughest issues and decisions occur at the landscape or regional scale over generations. How to maintain viable populations of woodland caribou throughout the boreal forest is only one example, and thus far we're losing."

He is encouraged by the example of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence forest region, as well as parts of Vancouver Island such as Clayoquot Sound, where efforts to establish sustainable forest management practices are leading to some areas becoming independently certified as "well-managed".

***"As noted by the Independent Expert Evaluation Panel on Canada's National Forest Strategy, we are making headway in different ways, in different regions, at different speeds."***

Mr. Hackman agrees with some international criticisms and not with others. "We are still clearcutting too much across Canada. We also claim Canada can sustainably produce much more wood to meet world demand, but then say wood supplies are too tight to permit new protected areas." At the same time, he notes that some criticism is unfounded because it's not well informed, is too sweeping or simply unconstructive.

In future, he says "Canada should show where we're doing well and talk about how to make these sustainable practices more widespread. We should embrace the greening marketplace and be ready to meet the needs of our most demanding customers. One thing is certain. We are in a race against time. We are rapidly changing the forest without really knowing what the consequences will be. Our generation needs to set some limits and manage within them, extracting more value from less volume."

**Gordon Stone**, President of the Canadian Institute of Forestry, has been a forester for over 40 years.

For Mr. Stone, sustainable forest management is a continuously evolving process. However, because some people only look at the end product—the harvested forest—he feels Canada will not ever be seen to have reached the goal of sustainable forests across the nation. He emphasizes that "we must learn how to focus on the process and not on the end result. When we focus on the process, I think it shows that we are managing our forests sustainably."

Mr. Stone's long-range view of forest management is based on an ecological perspective that includes humans as part of forest ecosystems. "For too long, we have been on the outside looking in. There is a universal life force—call it energy—that is present in every ecosystem, and that includes all living and non-living components. The forest ecosystem is dynamic, with a continuous flow of energy at all levels of existence. There is energy in everything, everything is surrounded by energy. As an integral part of forest ecosystems, we need to get in touch with this energy to understand how to properly manage our forests." Viewing the forest landscape and the humans in it as an interconnected whole is the basis of how Aboriginal peoples have perceived nature for generations—a world view that is reflected in their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Mr. Stone believes if we are going to manage our forests sustainably, we must integrate TEK into our scientific knowledge.

***"We are no longer hewers of wood, we are highly trained forest practitioners."***

In Mr. Stone's opinion a lot of the criticism of Canadian forest practices is based on aesthetics. The problem, he notes, is that the forest community has not explained forestry practices in terms the public can understand. Canadians, however, have been entrusted to be responsible stewards of the land, and want to be part of the decision-making process. "We need to do continuous education in a language that everyone can understand. We need to educate the public that the forest is a complex system, that the only constant in the forest is change." People often do not understand the silvicultural requirements of a plant species or a forest-dependent animal; for example, jack pine, woodland caribou and Kirtland's warbler require clearcuts to survive. People, he explains further, need to understand ecological process to understand that we cannot preserve old-growth forests simply by fencing them off. The forest does stop growing—it falls down and dies or becomes susceptible to disease and fire. Habitat requirements are unique and must be addressed separately.

In the past, some forest companies clearcut vast tracts of land and were especially criticized for it. "However, we are no longer hewers of wood, we are highly trained forest practitioners." Mr. Stone continues: like forest ecosystems, sustainable forest management practices evolve. What we do need to do is to manage our forests on a much broader scale that includes entire landscapes and that is based on a full understanding of the ecological processes of that landscape. "I believe we are constantly learning. We continually improve how we manage forest ecosystems. However, it takes time to grow a forest."

The public, he feels, needs to be an informed public. The public needs to learn all they can about sustainable forest management, look at what the forest industry is actually doing, and then decide whether their criticism is valid and knowledgeable. "Part of the problem is that people expect a quick solution for very complex situations. This is not realistic."

He believes Canadians are known internationally for advancing the yardstick and continuously moving toward sustainable forest management. "Leaders are always criticized. We are not going to please everyone, but we must continue to set the example."

Mr. Stone concludes we must continue to be leaders and continue the dialogue among industry, the public and environmentalists. It is a huge challenge to maintain the partnerships necessary to advance toward sustainable forest management. Above all, he says, we need to build partnerships with the land.

## **Tamara Stark**, Forest Campaign Coordinator, Greenpeace Canada, for seven years has been responsible for overseeing the organization's work on forest issues as well as managing forest campaigns.

Canada is not managing its forests sustainably, according to Tamara Stark. She estimates that across Canada in any forestry jurisdiction, the level of logging—the annual allowable cut—is far higher than what governments themselves estimate to be a long-term sustainable harvest level. This being the case, the level of cut set by provincial chief foresters thus implies that to meet these harvest levels, we will liquidate our old growth and convert the commercial forest base into second- or third-growth ecosystems. At this rate Canada will not be able to protect the biodiversity of any of our forest types in the long term.

In Ms. Stark's opinion, another blow to sustainability is that the federal government and many provincial governments have failed to introduce effective endangered species legislation. She also claims that every year, provincial government reports show rapidly decreasing numbers of species and that little is being done to safeguard species' habitats. For example, effective riparian zone management has not been adopted that would secure habitats where species are at risk, such as the salmon habitats in British Columbia. The Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, a government agency, has recommended that logging not occur in old-growth forests on British Columbia's central coast because salmon stocks are declining in the rivers running through these areas. "Although it is a respected agency, we don't see governments acting to endorse or adopt those kinds of regulations. This is a prime example of 'disconnect' between the academic bodies within government and the political level of action implementing recommendations." Ironically, Canada was one of the first nations to ratify the biodiversity convention. "If we cannot sufficiently act to protect wildlife and biodiversity, then there is no possibility that other countries will do so. We have a responsibility and opportunity to become a world leader that shows the way forward to protecting the health of the planet for future generations."

***"We are producing the best timber quality in the world, but are shipping it elsewhere to be manufactured into finished products."***

Ms. Stark also suggests that the economic aspect of sustainable forest management is under threat as we move from a nation reliant on the logging industry to a more diverse economy. However, Canadians are still managing the forests as if they were tree farm licences or as a timber resource rather than looking at the broader array of criteria and indicators that can lead to a healthier economic picture in the future. Nor are we sufficiently investing in value-added manufacturing or diversifying rural communities. "We are producing the best quality timber in the world, but are shipping it elsewhere to be manufactured into finished products. This is a contradiction of what Canada needs to prosper."

However, Ms. Stark sees some positive movement toward sustainable forest management. She feels there is growing recognition by politicians and other decision makers that species truly are at risk, but says that this recognition is not being supported by strong actions. As well, there is now more official recognition that some of our larger national parks have failed to protect endangered species.

Another positive sign that supports sustainable forest management is that unlike the US, the Canadian forest industry is not heavily reliant on genetically modified trees. "We need to safeguard this." As well, some forest companies are increasingly interested in accepting independent certification, in particular by certification systems such as that of the Forest Stewardship Council.

Given next year is the tenth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit and the tenth anniversary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, this would be an opportunity for Canada to play more of a leadership role both in conservation initiatives and in defining what sustainable logging practices are.

Ms. Stark concludes by noting the best thing Canada can do to demonstrate its commitment to move closer toward sustainable forest management is to be honest about our failings—what we have done wrong—and then take significant steps to address these issues.

## **Dr. Noriyuki Kobayashi** is the General Manager of the environmental research and development division of Sumitomo Forestry Co., Ltd., based in Tokyo, Japan.

Dr. Kobayashi believes Canada is managing its forests sustainably. He bases his opinions on his latest visit to Canada in July 2000 as part of an International Forest Partnership Program (IFPP) tour of Canadian forest operations in British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec, sponsored by the federal, provincial and territorial governments. On that trip he spoke with government officials, NGOs and Canadians concerned about their forests. He also keeps in touch with his company's Canadian customers and he is well aware of the latest research and programs supporting sustainable forest management.

He feels supporting policy is well established and sustainable forest management practices are being implemented. He singled out British Columbia's Forest Practice Code as a good example of Canada's move toward sustainable forest management. Most of the top management in Canadian forest companies have a good understanding of the importance of environmental issues and have incorporated this understanding into their company's business strategies. As well, the environmental departments in many of these companies are making sincere efforts to discuss the issues with environmental groups. Overall, forestry practices have improved: there is less clearcutting, more reforestation and more attention to First Nations concerns.

Dr. Kobayashi does not agree with all criticism made by environmental groups about Canadian forest practices. Some environmental groups do not listen enough; some do not like to participate in dialogue; and some insist only on their own opinions. Often criticism is based on misunderstandings and on the concepts of clearcutting and preserving old-growth forests. However, he notes that the definitions of these two concepts are not clear. Scientists and

researchers themselves have not agreed on the definitions. "We don't know what size of clearcut—one, five, or 10 hectares—is best and how each size will affect the environment."

As for old growth, he notes that the last time he was in British Columbia, he visited some forests that were logged 70-100 years ago. Today, through natural regeneration, they look like natural forests. The government was going to open these forests to be logged. However, environmentalists say this is old growth and cannot be cut. He would like to see Canadians agree on the definitions of the two terms in order to stop the arguments between industry and environmental groups.

***"Often criticism is based on misunderstandings and on the concepts of clearcutting and preserving old-growth forests."***

Canada is the most advanced country in the world regarding certification systems. "The policy of the Canadian government is good because it strongly supports market-oriented policy and prefers the existence of many certification systems." Some Canadian companies can be praised for achieving ISO 14001 environmental management certification. He also hopes that not only will the ISO 14001 continue to improve, but that environmental groups would also accept these standards. He also hopes that the disputes between environmental groups and the Canadian forest industry will be resolved in Canada through such organizations, initiatives and environmental standards programs. When Canadian environmental groups take their anti-logging campaigns international and into Japan, Japanese customers of Canadian paper products are confused. "We purchase Canadian lumber products because we believe the producing company is working properly under Canada law, legislation and practices, and some under forest certification. Some Japanese paper consumers, for example small printing businesses, receive letters saying not to buy Canadian lumber products. These customers say don't give us the problem, the matter is for Canadians to resolve."

***"Japanese customers are becoming more interested in environmental issues than before and need more information to make informed purchasing decisions."***

Dr. Kobayashi would like more information about Canadian forest practices from all viewpoints available in Japan for the end user—either on special Web sites, in the newspapers or on television. Japanese customers are becoming more interested in environmental issues than before and need more information to make informed purchasing decisions.

Dr. Kobayashi concludes by thanking Canada for the opportunity to visit its forests through the IFPP, where he said he learned very much. In fact, Sumitomo Forest Co., Ltd., has begun an exchange program between its foresters and those in Canada.