

Viewpoint

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Newsletter

INTRODUCTION

There was a lot of positive reaction to the first issue of *Viewpoint* (Winter 2004),

the national newsletter of the Canadian Forest Service (CFS) of Natural Resources Canada. We believe this second issue will be equally well received. Once again, we are focusing on Canada's boreal — not just the northern forest,

but also on the people who live and work there and who have a keen interest in an enduring, healthy forest and strong forest sector.

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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

THE BOREAL FOREST: AN ISSUE FOR CANADA AND THE WORLD



Photo: Couvrette/Ottawa

The Honourable R. John Efford Minister of Natural Resources

Welcome to the second issue of *Viewpoint*. This edition continues our in-depth examination of the boreal forest — one of the most important forest ecosystems in Canada.

As a nation rich in natural resources, Canada has a clear interest in ensuring that our forests remain strong and healthy for future generations. This is especially true for the boreal forest, which makes up 70 percent of our forest cover.

The boreal forest contributes to our quality of life, particularly for those who live and work in the mostly rural communities that often rely on the resources of a healthy forest for their livelihood and well-being. It is our responsibility to ensure that the boreal forest continues to provide the social, economic and environmental benefits that Canadians value so much.

To achieve this, we are engaging Canadians in discussions on the boreal forest. We are also determined to work with other boreal nations such as Russia, Sweden and Finland to ensure boreal areas are managed with a long-term vision.

The Boreal Forest



LOOKING BEYOND THE LABELS

TRUTHS THAT HIDE MORE THAN THEY REVEAL



Photo: Couvrette/Ottawa

Brian Emmett
 Assistant Deputy Minister
 Canadian Forest Service
 Natural Resources Canada

We call Canada a boreal nation. That is an accurate description.

It reminds me of the TV characters Bob and Doug McKenzie, who used to identify Canada as the "Great White North." Certainly Canada is large, it does have snow, and it is a northern country.

In the sense that Canada is known as the "Great White North," it is also known as a "boreal nation." As you look at the map of the boreal forest on this page, you can see that there is a huge swath of boreal forest that stretches across the northern reaches of our nation — and within it — a great expanse of trees, lakes, rivers, streams, stones and swamps. But that is only the land base.

Both of these phrases — "boreal nation" and "great white north" — depict truths that hide more than they reveal. They give one-dimensional pictures of a multi-dimensional world. They ignore the heart of the north. Along with the winter snow and the forest are

all those other human things that make Canada's north rich and vibrant. It is much more than a mythical nature preserve.

There are hundreds of long-standing communities in the north. They are linked by airports, highways and railways, as well as by canoe routes and snowmobile trails.

The people in these communities — the Aboriginal people who have lived there for thousands of years and the more recent settlers from Europe and other parts of the world who have arrived over the past 500 years — make them what they are. Within those northern communities are secular and spiritual leaders, educators, healers, artists, athletes, bosses and employees, the self-employed and the unemployed — the same cross-section of humanity that can be found in any population centre in North America with the same litany of concerns: health care, education, job security, the environment and balancing the household budget, among others.

People live and work in the northern communities for a variety of reasons. But their aspirations and concerns are as valid and important as those of people living in Montreal, New York, Vancouver or Los Angeles, especially in regards to issues that affect their communities.

Elsewhere in these pages, Ross Risvold, a long-time boreal resident, speaks from first-hand experience of the problems inflicted on a boreal community faced with, to paraphrase Mr. Risvold, court challenges directed and funded by organizations headquartered hundreds of kilometres from his community.

In another story, a spokesperson for a forest products company notes that, due to a variety of regulations and social values, "...a licence to harvest 1,000 hectares does not indicate by any means that 1,000 hectares are available to be harvested" since, in reality, much of the licenced area is protected from harvesting in some way.

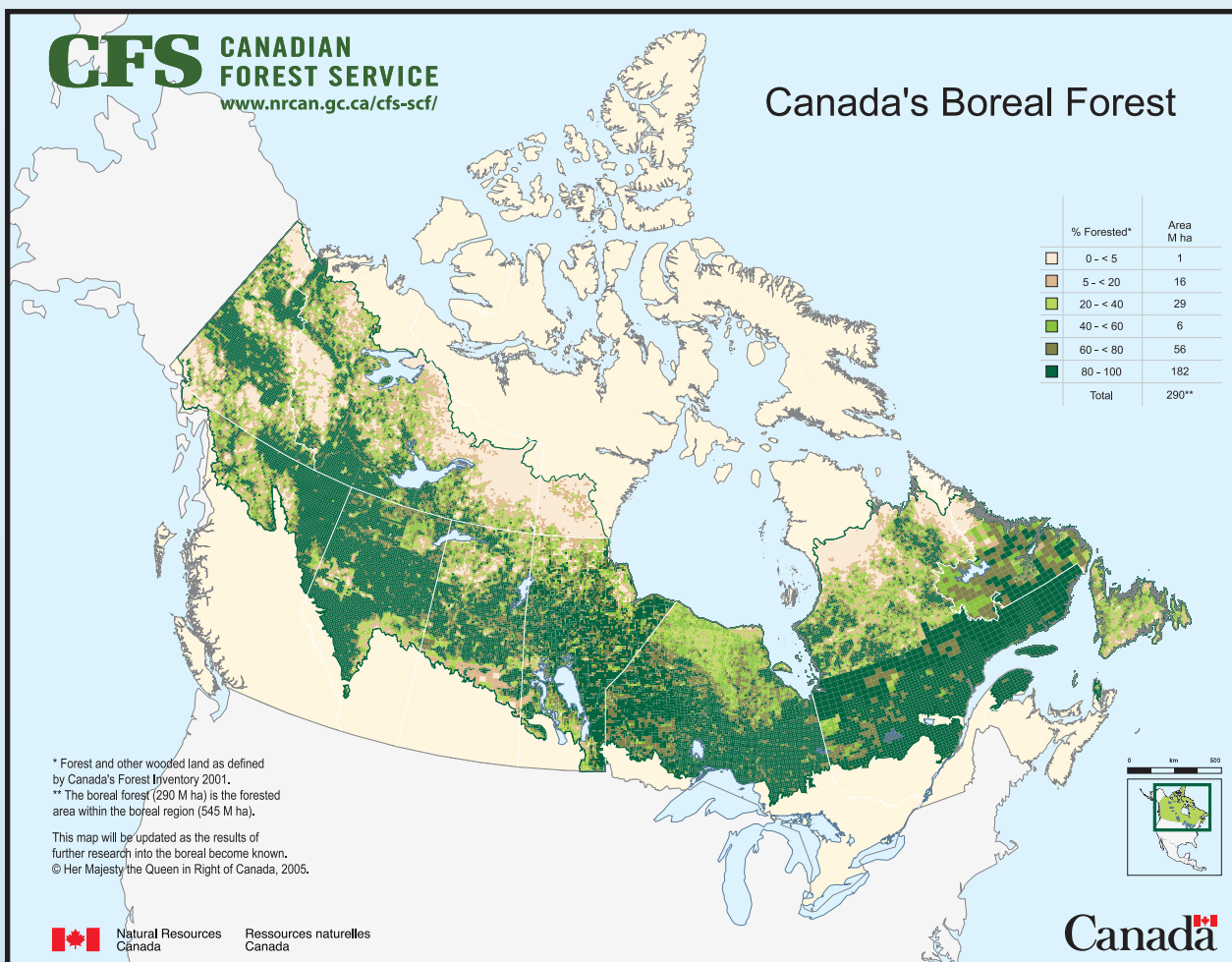
The points made by each of these people attest to issues that are fundamental to any discussion on the boreal and on what should happen to it. One is the need for the voices of the people who live there to be heard and valued; the second is definitional: what do we mean by "protected areas"? For that matter, what do we mean by "the boreal"?

Both issues are important and the CFS is working on each.

With respect to the second point, for meaningful discussion to take place, people must use common definitions. Unfortunately, the terms "boreal forest," "boreal ecosystem" and "boreal region" have tended to be used interchangeably — and that makes a big difference to everything from size to number of communities to species composition. Similarly, "protected" means different things to different people — formally "protected" as in designated parkland or "protected" by regulations and social values such as those mentioned above.

To help inform the discussion around the boreal, i.e. to help define specifically what we are talking about, the CFS has adopted the map on this page. We recognize that continuing research, as well as phenomena such as climate change, may necessitate adjustments to the boundaries in the future. But for now, this map defines the boreal region and gives a solid, geographical starting point for discussion. We are also developing a glossary of terms relating to the boreal so that people will have a common understanding that will help structure and clarify discussions.

With regard to giving a voice to the boreal community, the CFS is currently investigating options that would assist in this matter. By the time the next issue of *Viewpoint* is published later this year, we expect to have begun implementing at least one initiative to address this issue. Stay tuned.



ABITIBI: LISTENING TO STAKEHOLDERS DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT



Francine Dorion
Vice-President
Sustainability and Environment
Abitibi-Consolidated Inc.

"Abitibi-Consolidated's motto for living up to its commitment to protect and enhance the resources in its care is Doing the right things right," says Francine Dorion.

Dorion, Vice-President, Sustainability and Environment, for the Montreal-based multinational forest products company, says: "We realize that to develop and grow and to operate as a good corporate citizen — which go hand in hand — a company needs to manage the forest entrusted to it in a way that is sustainable, economically viable and socially acceptable."

She adds that the company has learned over the years that the best way to accomplish this is through proactive dialogue with the people whose livelihood and quality of life depend on a forest that will survive in perpetuity. Before any harvesting is undertaken in an area, the company meets with groups and individuals that have a vested interest in the sustainability of the forest to seek their advice and input through the planning process.

"There are times when we even go beyond the concerns expressed by these stakeholders because we have learned over the years what it takes to maintain the viability of the forests we operate," she says. "Good examples of this are the ongoing identification, with the World Wildlife Fund, of High Conservation Value Forests and the projects we have undertaken involving Woodland Caribou habitat."

Dorion adds that each area where the company holds a licence has a different set of needs: "Before we harvest, we take a great deal of time gathering input from forest experts, non-governmental organizations and people living in the area in order to draw up a specific land-use planning guideline, built on the existing provincial Sustainable Forest Management Framework. And we are totally transparent in what we do. The public has access to information about our operation through our Web site and our annual reports.

"Sometimes, we hear that our forests are not sufficiently protected — formally set aside as parkland, for example, or not sustainably managed," she says. "But with stakeholders' input and the array of provincial and federal rules and regulations that are part of any licence agreement, you realize very quickly that forestry planning and operations are very well defined and form a solid framework to build on.

"In any given tract of land, 30 or 40 percent might be untouchable because of a variety of regulations, as well as the social values of the people of the area," she adds. "This can include riparian buffer zones around waterways, wildfowl nesting areas, Aboriginal burial grounds and culturally sensitive sites or

areas covered under other biodiversity guidelines. A licence to harvest 1,000 hectares does not indicate by any means that 1,000 hectares are available to be harvested.

"We take our responsibilities seriously and we realize that the forest is dynamic. It is ever changing, and we have to adjust our actions to a number of variables and new knowledge. Just because a company like Abitibi-Consolidated has a harvesting licence with a provincial government does not mean that we have a free ride," says Dorion.

She adds that the company is also particularly involved with research and knowledge acquisition through the Model Forest Network, the Canadian Sustainable Forest Management Framework and partnerships with several regional universities.

Summing up, Dorion says: "The forest is a renewable resource that we are committed to manage in a sustainable way. Our licence to harvest is a social licence as well. We recognize that the public and the various stakeholders have a key role in deciding what needs to be done. It is clear that, as an industry, we have a role to play and a contribution to make that is more than just applying rules and regulations. That is the way we are and that is the way we want to continue to be."



Since 1960, the CFS has published the results of 1,147 studies conducted in the boreal forest.

Woodland Caribou

Photo: Abitibi-Consolidated Inc. Masterfile



LIFE IN THE BOREAL

REMEMBERING THE OTHER TWO PILLARS OF SUSTAINABILITY



Ross Risvold

"Decisive action, not rhetoric, is what the people living in Canada's boreal forests are becoming more vocal in demanding," says Ross Risvold, former mayor of Hinton, Alberta, and one-time Chair of the Foothills Model Forest.

"The number one issue is that communities in the boreal forest truly want sustainability supported by three pillars — environmental, social and economic," says Risvold, who is still heavily involved in sustainability issues as a professional consultant.

"Right now, the social and economic aspects of sustainability are not being given the same legislative consideration as the environment. If you drew a large circle on a piece of paper and labelled it 'Environment' and then right below it, you put two dots representing the social and economic side of things, that would illustrate where the emphasis is being placed in Canada's R3 (rural, remote and resource-based) communities for research, development, policy and legislation."

Risvold is speaking from experience. As mayor of Hinton, he fought a losing battle when an existing coal mining company began running out of accessible resources and was thwarted in its attempts at developing another source of supply.

Risvold says the market went elsewhere thanks to successful delays by environmentally spearheaded court challenges, which were directed and funded by organizations that resided hundreds, if not thousands of kilometres from his community. He says Hinton's economy and families suffered as a result.

"If you go to court over development issues, all [that] judges can consider is environmental legislation," says Risvold. "They can't even consider the social and economic ramifications. This legislative silo approach is unacceptable to R3 community sustainability."

Hinton is on its way back due to natural gas exploration in the vicinity, but Risvold still bristles over the attitude of many people when the community first got into social and economic trouble — people, he suggests, who didn't have a vested interest in the area because they didn't live there.

"Every time you have a situation like we had in Hinton, people suggest that you change the focus to ecotourism," he says. "Well, there probably isn't a place in the world that isn't looking at ecotourism, and there are only so many tourist dollars available."

Risvold says that in his continued work with mayors and other officials in forest-based communities, he is finding more and more frustration in their midst with the influence that the large urban areas have at senior government levels in determining what is good for the smaller communities in the boreal forest region.

"They're angry at the unlimited influence many environmental groups can bring to the table because of the funding they're getting both from within Canada and from elsewhere," he says. "Many say there is too much one-sided American environmental influence on Canadian forest policy and legislation. People in the smaller communities don't have the resources or the capacity to try to ensure that social and economic health is treated equally."

He adds that if environmentalists are serious in their desire for sustainability within the boreal forest, they should be as adamant as anyone about including all the values of sustainability — and that includes the social and economic pillars equally.

A positive model for sustainability, Risvold says, is Canada's Model Forest Program, adding that a great lesson could be learned from studying this concept, where local stakeholders have an equal say in the future of the resources they oversee.

"They could build on the Model Forest Program, a very successful program, and say: 'Okay, how can we expand on community-driven research?' But you have to provide these communities with the resources and networks so they can learn about the best way to identify and implement sustainability that treats all three pillars equally."

Risvold adds that the one thing the people of forest-based communities do not want is "a whole lot more studies that just measure their condition, with nothing else happening."

"Two critical things must happen," he says. "One, the development of decision support systems for social and economic sustainability, and two, the integration of this knowledge and these tools into policy and legislation. If research and its integration into policy doesn't happen, you can kiss goodbye the culture of the people living in these communities because they will be forced to move to mega-centres — and mega-centres can mean mega-problems."

Risvold says there is a need for real commitment from senior levels of government because the people who have the greatest influence live in big cities and usually have agendas that give little thought to the plight or the social and economic health of individuals who live in the boreal forest.

Photo: J. David Andrews

Photo: J. David Andrews



At this time, the CFS has approximately 145 research projects underway in the boreal forest.

AIMING FOR A HEALTHY WATERSHED

HEALTHY BOREAL FOREST = HEALTHY WATERSHED



Photo: Innovation Alberta

Interview with Gary Stewart
Regional Manager of Conservation Programs
Ducks Unlimited Canada

What are the main issues in the boreal forest from your perspective?

With so many lakes, rivers and wetlands, Canada's boreal forest is a water-dominated system, and there is a strong connection between the health of the boreal forest and the health of the watershed. The quality and quantity of water moving across and under the land is affected by land use, and the health of these watersheds is vitally important. Much of the drinking water upon which Canada's northern inhabitants depend is directly linked to boreal watersheds. However, advances in forestry, oil, gas and mineral extraction, as well as expanding agriculture, hydropower developments and global warming, increase the need to ensure that habitats and ecosystems within this region are conserved.

What are you doing to address those issues?

Conservation planning and delivery in the boreal forest is often limited by a lack of quality and current landscape-level data sets that are necessary to help advance sustainable development practices and proactive conservation measures. To this end,

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has established a multinational, partnership-based approach that combines industry, government, universities, Aboriginal groups and other not-for-profit conservation agencies to improve boreal water and wetland science. These partners produce landscape-level inventories including: state-of-the-art, satellite-based earth cover mapping; water bird and riparian bird surveys; traditional land use information; and water chemistry analyses. Using this information, DUC has been working with partners to help advance sustainable development and protect key wetland systems in Canada's western boreal forest since 1997. We are also initiating similar boreal conservation activities in Quebec, Ontario and Atlantic Canada.

What are the main obstacles to resolving those issues?

A key obstacle is the lack of resources to expand traditional ecological knowledge, western science, and inventory and monitoring programs. DUC believes that better information is a key factor in better land use decisions. Also, there is an increasingly urgent need for governments and interested parties to provide leadership to ensure conservation efforts balance economic, social and environmental needs for Canada's boreal forest.

How would you rate Canada's management of the boreal in comparison to other boreal nations?

While we watch global boreal issues with interest, DUC's focus at this point is with Canada's boreal forest as opposed to the state of management in other boreal nations. In our southern commercial forests, I believe Canada's management is superior to Russia's, where current social and economic challenges

overwhelm sustainable forest management efforts. On a continental scale, however, because of our close working relationships with the USDA Forest Service, the U.S. Ducks Unlimited organization and other U.S. partners, I am aware that Alaska's boreal encompasses millions of hectares of wetlands that have been permanently protected from industrial development.

With many hundreds of communities and thousands of people living in Canada's boreal depending on it for economic, environmental, recreational and spiritual values, what do you see as the best way to achieve balance?

Northern decisions must reflect northern values. Aboriginal communities have acquired a wealth of knowledge from living in boreal landscapes. This knowledge is integral to the successful conservation and sustainable development of Canada's boreal forest. We also recognize its economic importance and understand how industry can affect social and environmental health. DUC is a science-based organization that strongly adheres to a cooperative approach, and our science allows us to do that. Our experience suggests all stakeholders need to be at the table with the best information available, discussing land use decisions openly, honestly and transparently. The Boreal Leadership Council (BLC) of the Canadian Boreal Initiative serves as a good model. The BLC brought together leaders from various groups to work together to support a bold vision of conservation for Canada's boreal forest. DUC welcomes increased opportunities to bring our wetland and watershed expertise, leading-edge science, resources and 67-year track record of common sense conservation to the table to help achieve that elusive balance.



White-winged Scoter
Photo: © Ducks Unlimited Canada (Flynn)

AL-PAC BALANCES VALUES

BALANCING VALUES IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER



Interview with Shawn Wasel
 Director, Environmental Resources
 Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc.

What are the main issues in the boreal forest from your perspective?

There are multiple and often competing environmental, social, cultural and economic values that are significant to the boreal forest, and we must take great care to balance these values in a sustainable manner that meets everyone's needs. For example, there are significant losses to the forest land base and forest habitat from cumulative effects due to resource development (oil, gas, forestry and mining), agricultural expansion and urban sprawl. In addition, future water quantity and quality depend on our ability to manage our effects on the boreal ecosystem.

What are you doing to address those issues?

We recognize that addressing these issues requires a versatile approach, from the way we operate on the forest land base to the partnerships we go into to better understand the boreal forest and the science-based best practices we develop.

Our forest management practices are based on a triad approach that attempts to balance all values of the forest through ecology-based forestry practices on this extensive land base (managing activities around all values in the working forest), intensive forestry (producing fibre through poplar farms), and a network of protected areas to benchmark our practices.

This approach, along with research partnerships such as the Boreal Conservation Project (BCP), which combines industry, Aboriginal groups, governments, universities, Ducks Unlimited Canada and not-for-profit conservation groups, will help us find solutions to these issues. Through the BCP, we are working to better understand boreal forest watershed and wetland ecosystems, and to develop watershed-based forest planning.

Our focus on further improving our forest management practices also led us to partner with the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI), to look at the Canadian boreal forest and to find proactive ways to address what has become an international issue. We support the CBI's vision and goals of sustaining the ecological and cultural integrity of the boreal region, as well as conserving the cultural, sustainable, economic and natural values of the entire region.

What are the main obstacles to resolving those issues?

We need to develop a clear common vision between all stakeholders, including Aboriginal people, governments, the public, conservation agencies and industry, and this takes time to accomplish.

How would you rate Canada's management of the boreal forest in comparison to other boreal nations?

The forest industry in Canada is relatively young in comparison to other boreal nations, particularly Scandinavia. This gives us a great opportunity to do the right things and truly puts us in a strong position to deliver on the promise of sustainable development across the boreal forest.

With many hundreds of communities and thousands of people living in Canada's boreal, depending on it for economic, environmental, recreational and spiritual values, what do you see as the best way to achieve balance?

Ensuring the sustainability of the boreal forest does not fall on the shoulders of any one group. We all have a responsibility and we must collaborate and communicate to develop solutions that meet everyone's needs, including those of Mother Nature. We need to continue to focus on partnerships that help us better understand the boreal and that lead us to science-based best practices that sustain the ecological, cultural and economic integrity of the working forest.



Photo: J. David Andrews



Photo: J. David Andrews

BIRDS IN THE BOREAL

BILLIONS OF BOREAL BIRDS

Multi-partner research projects currently underway in Canada's boreal forest should provide some needed answers about how forest management affects bird habitat in the boreal.

"The boreal forest is not a homogeneous ecosystem. It is large and dynamic, and it is constantly undergoing change," says Ian Thompson, a research scientist with the Great Lakes Forestry Centre (GLFC) of the Canadian Forest Service (CFS), who is concerned about oversimplifying a complex issue. "It is composed of many ecosystems — each with its own pattern of regeneration. Bird populations will respond to the available habitat and to its changes over time.

"You cannot even talk about boreal song birds as a single unit," Thompson adds. "They are all individual species responding differently to various habitat features so it is difficult to generalize with respect to the effects of forest management.

"We are still learning about the life histories of most of these species of song birds in the boreal and about their population demography, detailed nest site selection, rates of predation on them or success rates of breeding in various habitats," says Thompson.

"The number of birds is staggering," says Steve Holmes, a colleague of Thompson's at GLFC, who is also studying boreal birds. "We are talking about an estimated one to three billion breeding birds and five billion migrants." Holmes says he prefers the phrase "land birds" to "song birds" since his study also involves species such as woodpeckers and jays.

The five billion or so migratory birds spend about 70 percent of their annual cycle in countries much closer to the equator.

Declining habitat in those wintering grounds and in areas used during migration seem to be as much, if not more, of a factor in any population decline, he notes.

"At present, the vast majority of the boreal, which in this country comprises an area 12 times the size of California, is still largely intact — at least Canada's part of it," says Holmes.

Some of the research he and his colleagues are doing may well assist in keeping it that way. Their work will increase our understanding of how some of the more than 200 boreal bird species respond to forest management practices and mitigate the pressures on the boreal that come from climate change, oil and gas exploration, mining and logging.

Holmes says another GLFC scientist, Lisa Venier, is conducting studies in Pukaskwa National Park, the Canadian Shield's ancient landscape on Lake Superior's north shore.

"Venier is using the park as a reference to study bird communities both inside the park and in the logging areas beyond its boundaries," he says. "One of my projects is set nearby, just south of White River, in the riparian areas along rivers and streams.

"We are evaluating whether it is possible to harvest within those protected riparian zones and still maintain the environmental values these buffers (varying from 30 m to 90 m) were set up to protect. We are in the process of harvesting some blocks where we clear-cut the upland, which is standard practice, then remove 50 percent of the wood from the riparian section to see whether this has any effect on bird population, fish, insects, and so on."

Depending on the results, this treatment could allow industry access to wood that is closer to a mill, but which is currently unavailable. It would potentially protect untouched boreal forest because harvesters would not have to go into new, remote territories to get their fibre.



Common Yellow-throat
Photo: © Ducks Unlimited Canada (Wolitski)

"We certainly would not suggest it if there was any major kind of impact," says Holmes. "But wood has to come from somewhere, and it would be better if it came from areas closer to the mill that are already somewhat disturbed rather than from areas further into the boreal that have not been encroached. Or, we may discover that the environmental values of the riparian zones are compromised with that treatment and that other options to secure close-at-hand fibre supply — plantations are one possibility — have to be explored."

The project to study the effects of intensive forest management on biodiversity in the northeastern boreal and Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest regions is headed by Thompson. Partnering with the CFS in the project are the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) and its Ontario Forest Research Institute, the Canadian Ecology Centre, and Tembec, one of Canada's major forest products companies. The partners in Holmes' project are the OMNR, Domtar and Trent University.

Evening Grosbeak
Photo: © Ducks Unlimited Canada (Faucher)



Canada is home to more than 200 boreal bird species. At least six billion breeding or migratory birds pass through the boreal in a given year.