

Alberta fails at forestry, Sierra Club report says

Province defends current practices

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Alberta needs to improve many forestry practices, including the way it protects old growth forests, says a report to be released today by the Sierra Club of Canada.

The environmental organization looked at 12 forestry practices across the country and evaluated the progress of each province and territory that signed the Canada Forest Accord last year. The accord is designed to maintain and enhance the country's forests and encourage ecologically and socially sustainable forest management.

Alberta and Quebec were the only provinces that did not sign the accord. Quebec insisted on its own version of the agreement.

The forestry practices examined include habitat protection, harvesting patterns and preservation of old growth forests.

Alberta earned one "good" rating because it insists forestry companies leave a wide strip of standing trees around lakes, streams and rivers. It was graded "average" for guidelines that ensure some dead trees are left standing for such animals as woodpeckers.

In the other 10 categories, Alberta was marked as "poor."

"Alberta knows these are challenges, but they're reticent," said Rachel Plotkin, the Sierra Club's director of forests and biodiversity. "Alberta is a province where industry comes before commitments to protect wildlife habitat."

The comment infuriated Parker Hogan, spokesman for the Alberta Forest Products Association. A peer reviewed report released last year by a Yale scientist concluded Alberta's forestry regulations ranked among the most stringent in North America, he said.

The Sierra Club points out that Alberta has the extra challenge of having to deal with oil and gas activity in forests as well as the forestry industry.

In her recently revised book, *At the Cutting Edge*, Sierra Club's executive director Elizabeth May notes a study that showed the petroleum sector cleared 11,000 hectares in a forestry management area leased by Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries, while the forestry company logged 16,000 hectares.

Hogan said various sectors of the province's economy, including oil and gas, forestry, agriculture and mining are currently working on an integrated land-management strategy to resolve this issue.

The government also disagrees with the report, but it's difficult to comment on the specifics because the report does not show how the results were compiled, said Donna Babchishin, spokeswoman for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

The Sierra Club's database on provincial and territorial performances is available to the public at www.sierraforestwatch.ca.

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