Regional Environmental Action Committee (REAC)

Presentation to the

Slave Lake Forest Public Advisory Committee

January 18, 2006

Introduction:

REAC is a member and participates on the steering committees of the Alberta Environment Network and Canadian Environment Network. Additionally, we have met in the past with Sierra Club of Canada, Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Forest Ethics and Direct Action Network.

In general, the concerns expressed in this presentation relate to a growing sense that current forest harvesting practices are not sustainable in the long term. This is a compilation of concerns expressed to REAC from the following sources:

- Local Public (including employees of all area forest products companies). The story of "A New Leaf"; video promoting selective logging produced by Western Canada Wilderness Committee in 1993 with funding provided by 'anonymous' donors from the forest products industry in Northern Alberta emphasizes these concerns. Copy of "A New Leaf" given to the SLFPAC.
- Our membership: REAC is comprised of approximately 200 members from Slave Lake, High Prairie, Sucker Creek First Nation, Enilda, Grouard, Driftpile First Nation, Faust, Kinuso, Swan River First Nation, Widewater, Smith and Wabasca.
- Other environmental groups and their memberships

Concerns expressed to REAC:

Compaction Concerns around compaction relate to heavy equipment use and road building. It is felt that the soil disturbance caused by these activities will prevent timely forest regeneration, especially of moss species used as forage by ungulates.

Herbicide use Herbicide use in forest regeneration has a large variety of concerns attached to it including the following:

- Putting toxic material into the environment on an ongoing basis is not good policy
- Accumulation of toxics can affect wildlife; local reports of lack of rabbits
- Herbicide use has proven difficult to manage (eg. 'bald spots')
- Concerns relating to herbicide placed before a rain event and a) not being effective in the required area, potentially provoking reapplication, b) entering the watershed causing stress on aquatic organisms
- Cumulative effects of widespread herbicide use with other human activities can provide an overload of stress for ecosystems and forest regeneration.

Concerns, continued…

Blow down With the current 'emulation of a fire' style of harvesting, blow down is still as much of a factor as with clearcutting. Standing trees on the periphery of a cut which are blow down destroy the original planning and create ever larger barren areas.

Waste The figure we have for Canadian forest products wood waste during harvesting and processing is 75%. This includes roots, lumber left in the bush, boughs, bark and other mill waste (burnt). This is a very high percent and causes concern. Other countries (ex. Sweden) have a much lower percentage wood wasted. Burning wood left in the bush is felt to be an increasing risk of forest or ground fire, as well as wasteful.

Value By selling raw wood and pulp, the potential value of the boreal forest is not maximized locally. Concerns regarding value generally suggest that value added endeavors such as paper making and pre-fabricated furniture making be accomplished locally. We would like to encourage everyone to consider how, through your contacts, more value added activities could be included for a robust and sustainable economy.

General practices vs. 'experiments' Concerns have been expressed with regard to some general practices such as 'mounding' and the ongoing research into and beginning use of genetically engineered tree species. It is felt that forest products industries have been given the 'go ahead' to experiment with the boreal forest. While 'mounding' was a re-planting technique that didn't work as planned, the main negative long-term impact was that the re-planted forest did not grow back as rapidly as expected. With genetic engineering, it is felt that this experiment could cause us and the forest long term grief. There exist grave concerns that untried practices or theories, when applied on the large scale that the Canadian Forest Products Industry is working may prove to be unsustainable. Another concern is that current replanting techniques will provide a "tree plantation", not the native boreal forest required by wildlife and humans.

Endangered Species Concern exists that current forest harvesting practices do not protect endangered species. Locally, we are aware of the Slave Lake caribou herd in immediate danger of extirpation. If human activities including current forest harvesting practices were truly sustainable, we would not have endangered species. FMA's speak of sustainable practices which must include all human activities in the area.

Climate change Concerns regarding climate change relate to these two aspects in a connected cycle; a) the effects of climate change on forest regeneration and b) the effects of present day harvesting practices on climate change.

a) The effects of climate change (overall drying, warmer, more wind, increased UV rays) will have a detrimental effect on forest regeneration as it is now practiced. Seedling trees have increasing challenges surviving. Areas have been replanted many times before the new trees 'took' and began to grow. Some areas have not yet succeeded in attaining new growth.
b) Present day harvesting practices have the potential to hasten climate change, particularly if the increasing challenges to re-growth continue. The concept of removing portions of the forest and then re-growing it is increasingly risky.

Consumer choices:

The concerns expressed in this presentation are widespread and reflected in the growing number of certification programs available to forest products industries. When it comes to consumer choices, many retailers have recently taken steps to ensure that their consumers have Forest Stewardship Council certified products available. This indicates that 'best practices' are indeed acknowledged by consumers. Information regarding recent Manufacturers' requests passed to the SLFPAC.

Advice from First Nations Elders:

Elders have said that the forest will grow after being harvested using current harvest practices but will not be in the same form as normal. After the second harvest, if the techniques used are the same as today, the forest will no longer regenerate.

REAC's request of local Forest Products Industries:

Your Regional Environmental Action Committee would like to make a request of all area Forest Products Industries. **Please set aside a substantial area for selective logging 'pilot' projects for each company.** The area should represent the amount of land that you would traditionally cut in twenty years. Remember; you will not have to replant, eliminating the need for herbicides. The forest will come back on its own with selective logging. All of the concerns listed in this presentation will be reversed or at least 80% reduced. In twenty years, your company could harvest that same area again.

Micro-machinery (presently used in Minnesota and New Zealand) weighs so little that ground compaction is no longer an issue. With the investment required for one micro-machine each and specialized training for the operators, the pilot projects could begin.

While REAC is working on a variety of issues from watershed to waste management and health effects of hazardous waste management, we would like to help in any way we can. Canadian Environmental Network and Alberta Environmental Network provide forestry caucus, which REAC participates in. Additionally, resources are available from the Forest Stewardship Council. REAC has also been in contact with a 'modeller' at the University of Alberta who is working on mapping cumulative effect.