

Logging is destroying Canada's Largest Ecosystem

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Greenpeace is working to protect the Boreal forest for future generations. © McAllister

*The Boreal forest is an awe-inspiring and diverse wilderness of lakes, forests, rivers and marshes. It is the largest intact forest ecosystem in North America.
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Canada's Bountiful Boreal Forest

Canada's Boreal forest is an ancient forest that stretches across the country, from Canada's most western province to the east coast of the country. It is Canada's largest ecosystem and encompasses almost 53 per cent of the country's total landmass. The magnificent Boreal forest is part of a green crown, circling the top of the world, extending across Western Europe, Russia, Alaska and, of course, Canada.

Canada's Boreal forest has been evolving for over 10,000 years and is the largest tract of ancient forest left in North America. Almost 80 per cent of the world's original forests have been degraded or completely destroyed, making the protection of the Boreal forest all the more important. Representing 25 per cent of the world's remaining ancient forests, Canada's Boreal forest is a truly a global treasure.

Critical as a carbon sink for battling climate change as well as being home to hundreds of wide-ranging wildlife species, the Canadian Boreal forest provides the ecological link between the northern tundra and the southern grasslands and more southerly forest ecosystems. It is a diverse and awe-inspiring landscape of granite outcrops, lakes, rivers, and marshes interspersed with pine, spruce, aspen and poplar forests.

The Boreal forest also contains a rich cultural legacy and is a source of sustenance for indigenous peoples of Canada – First Nations and Métis¹. Almost 80 per cent of Canada's more than 1-million aboriginal people live in more than 600 communities in Canada's forest regions and many depend on wilderness lands, waters, and wildlife for their livelihood and spiritual well-being.

Moose, caribou, lynx, bear and wolves depend on the wide Boreal expanses, while eagles, hawks, owls, geese and 30 per cent of North America's songbirds and 40 per cent of its waterfowl nest in these forests and wetlands. In fact, nearly 5-billion birds migrate north to breed after wintering in warmer climates. Because of its immense size the Boreal forest represents one of the best opportunities for conservation of large intact forests.

Industrial Commercial Logging Threatens the Boreal Forest

In Canada, large corporations log ancient forests like the Boreal forest to produce a variety of products including toilet paper, facial tissue, printing and office paper, magazines, newspapers, lumber, and wood flooring. According to its federal government, Canada produced approximately 24.9-million tons of wood pulp, 69.9-million cubic meters of lumber, and 8.3-million tons of newsprint



*Hundreds of thousands of hectares of Boreal forest are clearcut each year to create products like toilet paper, newspapers, catalogues, and office paper even though recycled alternatives exist.
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¹ Born of a mixture of European and First Nations peoples, the Métis developed as a separate aboriginal people in Canada. The Métis Nation identifies as a distinct First Nation.

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in 2001. This makes Canada one of the largest pulp and lumber producing countries in the world. Unfortunately this has had a devastating effect on ancient forests in Canada. Since 1975, logging companies in Canada have cut 25-million hectares of forest, an area larger in size than the United Kingdom.

Although the overwhelming majority of the Boreal forest is owned by the people of Canada, rather than by private interests, already half of it has been allocated or licensed to logging companies under long-term tenures. The heaviest development is concentrated in the southern reaches of the Boreal forest, which also provides the most productive wildlife habitat. Over 90% of this area is logged via clearcuts, with individual clearcuts sometimes extending over 10,000 hectares, or approximately the size of 17,000 football fields. These are some of the largest clearcuts in the world. Even more shocking is that the amount of forest that is cut each year in Canada has increased dramatically in the last 30 years. In 1975, 569,000 hectares were clearcut. In the year 2000 this number climbed to 945,000 hectares.

The rate and size of the clearcutting is threatening the survival of many species that inhabit it. Already, the Labrador marten, wolverine, woodland caribou, eastern wolf and hundreds of other species are listed on endangered species lists in Canada. Tragically, many of these endangered species receive no, or extremely limited, protection under Canadian law. The overall amount of land protected from large-scale industrial development by either federal or provincial law remains insufficient to ensure the survival of these species.

Credible, independent certification could, potentially, help some of these species, but despite the fact that Canada's logging industry is one of the largest in the world, very few of these operations are certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – the only certification system with adequate social and environmental safeguards. So, while current Canadian laws and low levels of protection do not protect these species' homes, destructive logging continues to encroach upon the remaining habitat these species need to survive. In other words, in many areas of the Canada the ecological situation is worsening.

The Fate of the Boreal forest is on the Line

While some logging and energy companies have even supported a call for more than 50 per cent of the Boreal forest to be protected, at present less than 8 per cent is actually in protected status. Few governments are moving quickly to create new, large areas of protected intact forest or help logging companies become more sustainable through financial or planning incentives.

Discussions are taking place now in virtually every Canadian province and territory that will largely determine the fate of Canada's forests in the coming years. The policies that decide the future of Canada's forests should consider the country's unique opportunity to preserve some of the last remaining ancient and endangered forests in the world, rather than view these forests as simply a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. Current government policies are sending these wild spaces into extinction, and threatening the future of the species that depend upon them. Reversing this trend and becoming leaders in conservation and sustainable development is one of the most important environmental challenges facing Canadian governments, industries, First Nations, and communities.

Protect Life on Earth

Life on the planet is rapidly disappearing, our forests are being destroyed and our oceans are being depleted. Local peoples are being robbed of the natural resources they need for their survival. At this year's CBD governments must stop this destruction and honour the commitments they have already made to stop the trend of biodiversity loss. Governments must provide money for this urgently needed protection instead of wasting it on wars and activities that ultimately end life rather than protect it. Instead of having endless discussions about the devastation, governments must stop the destruction now. As the future guardians of the planet, we have the right to receive a planet rich in life.



Over 90% of the logging that takes place in the Boreal forest is clearcutting.
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Many Boreal wildlife species like the Woodland Caribou are threatened with extinction due to habitat loss from logging.
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