



THE COULOMBE COMMISSION CONFIRMS OVER-CUTTING OF QUÉBEC'S FORESTS

Conservation must be at the heart of the new approach

Montréal, December 15, 2004 – Following the release of the Coulombe Commission's report yesterday in Québec City, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWF-Canada) assert that protection of vast forest areas and increased conservation of biodiversity are essential components of the transformation that Mr. Coulombe recommends for the province's forests. The two organizations support the Commission's conclusions, including the recognition that Québec's forests have been massively over-cut.

The two conservation groups support the recommendations concerning ecosystem-based management and protection of Québec's forests. « We applaud the Commission for recognizing that the protection of biodiversity has not been integrated into Québec's forest policy until now, and that this needs to change, » said Gaétane Boisseau, Conservation Manager in WWF's Québec office. Québec received a failing grade for its environmental protection in a report presented to the Commission by the two groups that compared the forest management regime in Québec to those in Ontario and British Columbia.

The two groups are pleased that the Commission recommends protection of 12% of the boreal forest. «Government action to protect 12% would constitute another step towards achieving representation of Québec's forest ecosystems in a network of permanent protected areas, » stated Jean-François Gagnon, Executive Director of CPAWS Montréal. « However, it is urgent that the government protect vast areas to secure the habitat of endangered species, like Woodland Caribou ».

The Commission recognizes that independent forest certification and ecosystem-based management aimed at maintaining natural forest conditions are effective ways to respond to the serious environmental problems exposed by the report, and for which there is growing public concern.



As CPAWS and WWF-Canada pointed out to the Commission, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is the only certification system that ensures good forest management. FSC certification is an important tool for companies to position themselves favourably in a market place that is becoming increasingly conscious of environmental and social issues. « We believe that FSC certification will help the industry respond to the economic impacts that will result from a decrease in harvest levels, » said Chris Henschel, Manager of Forest Certification and Policy in the national office of CPAWS. Both CPAWS and WWF-Canada are currently working with progressive companies in Québec and elsewhere in Canada to help them achieve FSC certification.

On the other hand, the two organizations are discouraged by the Commission's proposal in support of intensified forest management. « The forests have already been over-cut for a long time, » stated Lucie Taliana, Boreal Campaign Manager. « Priority must be given to the establishment of new protected areas and the rehabilitation of forest ecosystems before identifying areas for intensive forest management. This is consistent with the *Conservation First* principle, » she added. The two groups emphasize that the applicability of intensive forest management in Québec needs to be demonstrated, especially since it is not clear that this approach will effectively yield economic benefits without significant environmental consequences.

CPAWS and WWF-Canada hope that the Québec government will take quick action to adopt and implement the Commission's recommendations to protect 12% of Québec's forests and implement improved forest management. The province needs to fundamentally transform its approach to forestry, especially given its trailing position behind Canada's other leading forestry provinces in considering ecological and environmental values

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