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## Who Let Activists in Forest Boardrooms? Their agenda will cost thousands of rural jobs.

### In Brief:

- *Contrary to the views of extremists, Canada does not have a forest crisis.*
- *We produce much more wood than we consume, all under strict public scrutiny.*
- *Allowing those hostile to timber harvesting to participate in decisions is foolish.*
- *Appeasing them jeopardizes rural, resource-based employment.*

Is there a crisis in our forests? If you believed Tzeporah Berman's *Counterpoint* ("Threat to the Boreal Forest is Real," *National Post*, Feb. 7), you might head for the hills to save our trees. You'd be wasting your time. The omissions and distortions in Berman's piece were over the top. There is no threat, except to the livelihoods of thousands of Canadians who make a living by the sustainable, environmentally sound harvest of our wood resources.

Berman uses a "gee whiz" statistic -- five acres are logged every minute -- as a scare tactic, but conveniently omits statistics about the rate of boreal forest growth. It produces about one cubic metre of new wood per hectare per year. Through natural and human efforts, we are growing about 20 times more new wood a year than we harvest.



Despite the thousands of hectares annually lost to forest fires and logging, we've been at this game for nearly 100 years and still have forests to harvest. Shouldn't all of this "unsustainable" forestry have wiped out the boreal forest by now? It hasn't, and it won't. Nor does Berman mention the productive human uses for wood. At the risk of sounding churlish, may I point out that Berman uses newsprint sourced from boreal forests to spout anti-forestry dogma? And sits in a room made habitable by the use of lumber?

Berman says "there are clear economic costs to unsustainable forestry with a bad environmental reputation that is clearly subsidized by government." Really? Where does she prove that boreal forestry is unsustainable? What Berman omitted is that all forestry operations are conducted under the terms of environmental licences issued after comprehensive studies and exhaustive hearings. I know. As the former director of environmental programs for the Pine Falls Paper Company (now part of the Tembec group) that has harvested boreal forests in eastern Manitoba since 1929, I used to administer one of those licences.

Approved operations are subject to audits, performance reviews and public scrutiny at all times, especially when licences are up for renewal. Licences are granted by democratically constructed and publicly accountable agencies. If anyone has complaints about sustainability, they should direct them at the agency that grants licences and not the companies that comply with its terms and conditions. But it is more politically productive to go after these companies than their regulators.

Environmental activist groups like Berman's ForestEthics find it more expedient to attack corporations, and commonly employ such tactics. What puzzles me is the complicity of some corporations in this dirty little game. As Berman points out, "some of Canada's largest logging companies, including Tembec, Domtar and Alberta-Pacific are working with ForestEthics and others to map and protect endangered forests and move towards Forest Stewardship Council certification of their logging operations." Recent *National Post* critiques have relentlessly exposed the value-destroying myth of "corporate social responsibility."

A little digging reveals that these same companies are part of an initiative labelled the Canadian Boreal Initiative ([www.borealcanada.ca](http://www.borealcanada.ca)). That sounds good. What's wrong with saving the boreal forest? But have a look at the Web site yourself to see who these "progressive" companies are in bed with. There's Greenpeace, no defender of rural communities, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, a group that is constantly working to

eliminate commercial forestry entirely, as well as the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Sierra Club, also hostile to harvesting forests. What would the shareholders of these companies say if they were aware of their management's headlong rush over the cliff as they invite these activists into the company's boardroom?

On its home page, the Canadian Boreal Initiative slips in the phrase "frontier forests" to describe illustrative maps. One shows lots of "frontier forest" and the second shows how much it has shrunk. How terrible it looks and how dishonest it is! The map shows eastern North America as devoid of trees, and omits the incredible reforestation that has taken place. A magnificent beech-maple second-growth forest has replaced the white pine forests logged off in the 1800s. Why let the truth spoil a dramatic deforestation story?

Berman's San Francisco-based group, ForestEthics, can be added to a long list of meddlers in the affairs of Canadian governments and citizens. From animal rights activists who nearly destroyed our fur industry to groups hostile to our resource industries and rural communities depending on them, naive governments and companies are catering to these groups in the simple-minded hope that, after enough appeasement, they will just go away.

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