

News

Report highlights shortcomings of forest certification

There has been a massive decline in both publicly and privately owned forests

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Canada has the third largest forest area in the world and

is the largest exporter of forest products.

However, this \$53 billion industry is being severely hampered by the “failure of forest certification and the implications for public wealth,” states a recent, detailed report submitted by the Frontier Centre of Public Policy. The author is Elizabeth

Nickson, a Senior Fellow at the Centre and a well-known journalist and author.

“Forest certification is proving to be the destruction of the resource, the greater economy, the communities where forests are located and forestry’s once critical contribution to the public purse,” wrote Nickson.

In the 46-page report Nickson details how there has been a decline in value of 40 to 60 per cent of publicly owned woodlots and up to a 400 per cent decline in smaller, privately managed forests.

Forest certification needs reforming, “to restore Canada’s forests to a status of economic and environmental health,” wrote Nickson.

About 188 million of the 211 million hectares is active forest, with about 87 per cent of that under public ownership—owned and managed by the province for the “long-term interests of the people” she wrote. About 13 per cent—25 million hectares—are privately owned.

About 20 million hectares are owned by 450,000 rural families and five million hectares are owned by “a variety of organizations,” wrote Nickson. These include forest product companies, pension funds, foundations, endowment funds and private investors.

In the 1990s the Canadian for-

estry sector had been “actively targeted” by national and international environmentalists “that subsequently intervened in the marketplace in order to impose new social and environmental controls on forestry,” wrote Nickson.

The chief control implemented—among a variety—was the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, which would “also recognize the value and function of ecosystems.”

As a result governments at all levels, land trusts, foundations and NGOs “have placed a substantial amount of Canadian forests under some form of conservation, and it is far more than the bruited 10 per cent,” wrote Nickson.

At the end of 2014 Canada had 53 million hectares of producing forest under FSC certification and control, she wrote.

Two other certification programs have another 120 million hectares under supervision. These standards “are the soft law of the industry,” wrote Nickson. Reviewed and revised every four years, provincial legislation and regulations are revised on a 20 to 25 year scale, she wrote.

“The idea of Model Forests was floated, and after 2000, became a reality,” wrote Nickson. “FSC seeks a monopoly so it can exercise influence over for-

est policy,” wrote Nickson. It’s regular criticism, “is not specific and detailed; it is systemic and virulently anti-corporate,” she wrote.

IN 2004 FSC was now international and, “had begun its partnership with the World Bank and some countries with significant forests could only receive support from the Bank if their forests were managed to FSC standards,” she wrote.

At present 25 per cent of certified forests in the world are FSC forests, wrote Nickson. “International, national and regional foundations and larger NGOs became the drivers to move forest certification” as they are today for the aggregate and oil industry, she wrote. Taking the “precautionary principle, meaning the assumption of potential pollution or environmental harm if private industry is not tightly controlled” became the prevailing principle by which all governments started to abide.

Nickson detailed specific examples where FSC International-approved forests had huge funding provided by organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation which “have used these grants to build a larger field around the organization and to make a market for certified wood.”

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