

Castle supporters want Redford to keep promise

By Dave Mabell, October 15th, 2011

While campaigning for the premier's job, Alison Redford promised to return \$107 million stripped from school boards' budgets earlier this year. She also promised Albertans would be heard on sensitive land-use issues, a citizens' group points out.

Redford has found the money for the schools. Now the environmentalists are hoping the premier will live up to another promise and hear southern Albertans' views on logging the Castle River recreational area. Dianne Pachal, an Alberta director of the Sierra Club Canada, is waiting for Redford to act.

During the leadership campaign, she says, Redford used the Castle River controversy as an example of how the Ed Stelmach government had not been listening to Albertans. The premier's office in Edmonton, contacted by The Herald for comment, has not replied.

Before she was sworn in as premier, however, Pachal says Sustainable Resource Development officials gave the logging company, Spray Lakes Sawmills, permission to go ahead with its timber cutting.

Woodsmen can "proceed anytime the company wishes, between now and April 30 next year, with their first year of clear-cut logging in the heart of the Castle Special Place protected area." That protection, however, does not rule out logging.

"They also issued the company a larger logging licence, expanding the logging area eastward to include three more valleys."

Those are the Gladstone, Mill and Whitney valleys, Pachal says.

At the same time, she adds, a further year has been added to the company's cutting schedule.

"That expands logging to three years," Pachal says, allowing an estimated 4,737 truckloads of logs to be hauled out of the Castle area.

Spray Lakes bought and closed the sawmill in the Crowsnest Pass, so they'll be trucked to the company's mill in Cochrane. The company also holds cutting rights in other areas of the Rockies.

"The Castle logging amounts to eight per cent of the supply for their Cochrane mill during the duration of the company's current five-year plan," she says.