

Action urged on Castle lumber

By Kelly Cryderman, April 29, 2011

As logging in the Castle region is set to begin, environmental groups have launched a campaign asking retailers and consumers to spurn wood products from that part of southwestern Alberta.

"We would like there to be no commercial logging in the Castle (region)," said Sarah Elmeligi, senior conservation planner for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

The environmental groups are calling for better timber harvesting practices in general for the region, and for Cochrane-based Spray Lake Sawmills Ltd. -the company doing the logging -to have its practices evaluated by a third party.

The conservation groups say they don't want any logging in the Castle region, just south of the Crowsnest Pass near the tiny community of Beaver Mines. The first phase of logging, to begin this summer, will see almost seven square kilometres harvested.

Elmeligi and others say not only does the region support important headwaters and habitat for wildlife, such as grizzly bears, but a burgeoning local tourism and recreation industry will be hurt with large patches of trees cut out of the panorama.

The groups call their campaign to have consumers by other lumber and retailers not to carry product from the region a "market action" rather than boycott.

"We're taking market action to protect future, long-term jobs," said Dianne Pachal of Sierra Club Canada.

Gord Lehn, a spokesman for Spray Lake Sawmills, said it remains to be seen whether the campaign has an effect on its sales, and he insisted the company will not change its plans due to any outside pressure.

"I believe what we're doing is good forest management down there," Lehn said.

At Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, the provincial ministry responsible for logging, spokesman Dave Ealey said the region has been cut numerous times over the past century and the watershed is still in good condition.

"We're already addressing social and environmental matters for that forest," Ealey said.

Officials have long insisted the logging plan is an issue of forest health, with logging helping to prevent the spread of mountain pine beetle.

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They add that decades of fire suppression efforts mean old forest growth has not been properly cleared -leading to greater fire risk.

Local MLA Evan Berger said he believes it's "heavy-handed" for environmentalists to target a company that employs people with families.

Berger, a Conservative who represents the riding of LivingstoneMacleod, also argues the logging is part of keeping the forest of varied age.

"It's not going to stop tourism or anything, in the long run," he said.

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