

Foothills group celebrating delay of logging in Castle area

By Delon Shurtz, September 30th, 2011

Plans to log in the Castle area of Southwest Alberta are still on schedule despite an advertising campaign by the Alberta Foothills Network saying there's been a delay.

The network, whose membership includes the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Sierra Club of Canada and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, said in a recent newspaper advertisement that, "thanks to your letters," logging by Spray Lake Sawmills of Cochrane, Alta., planned for the areas of Beaver Mines, Castle Falls and Lynx Creek, has been delayed."

But Ed Kulcsar, forestry manager for Spray Lake Sawmills, says logging will proceed as planned and will likely begin sometime this winter.

"We just haven't landed on a start date," Kulcsar says.

Earlier reports indicated logging could have begun last June, but Kulcsar says he doesn't know where that date came from. He says plans are to begin logging the Castle this harvest season.

Dianne Pachal, Alberta wild director with the Sierra Club of Canada, says the company and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development told an open house in Pincher Creek last November that road construction could begin in June. And at meeting in April, the company said its subcontractors could be ready to move in by July.

Pachal also suspects logging in Castle has been delayed because Spray Lake Sawmill's annual operating plan submitted to the government in April had not been approved as of the beginning of September. She adds the company has submitted a revised plan.

Delays or not, Pachal warns the fight against logging in the area is far from over.

"It's a delay, it's not a cancellation," Pachal says.

Pachal believes there are several reasons why the company hasn't moved into the Castle area yet. She says the market for lumber is currently down and the company has access to lumber that is closer to sawmills than the Castle area.

Pachal also believes public pressure had some impact as lumber retailers and their customers, as well as users of the Castle area, expressed concerns about cutting trees in the environmentally sensitive area.

Pachal says there's another reason why the company shouldn't log in the Castle area. She points out the company's previous five-year plan indicates it didn't clear-cut as much land in

other areas as it could have, which means it could still log in those areas and leave the Castle alone.

Kulcsar says, however, the company is simply following its general development plan, which calls for logging in the Castle area this harvest season.

The Castle, technically called the Castle Special Management Area, is one of the province's 81 designated Special Place protected areas. It's located between Waterton Lakes National Park and the Crowsnest Pass, within Alberta's portion of the international Crown of the Continent ecosystem and geotourism area.

Pachal says the government must be blamed for not following through with legislation to protect the area as it has with other Special Places, and Spray Lake Sawmills must share the blame, as well.

"The company should not be asking to log in protected areas."