

Our Learning Journey

- Explored Alberta's forests and natural regions
- Learned about wildfire risk, biodiversity & watersheds
- Met with forestry experts and ecologists
- Learned about Indigenous perspectives and consultation
- Realized forestry is complex, scientific & highly regulated



What We Noticed

- Forestry affects a huge amount of Alberta's land
- Public understanding is low
- Misinformation spreads easily
- Sustainable vs. unsustainable practices are often confused
- Transparency varies between companies



Our Root Cause

Lack of public knowledge about sustainable forestry

This leads to:

- Misunderstandings about clear cutting and replanting
- Confusion about certifications (FSC vs. SFI)
- Distrust in industry transparency
- Missing Indigenous voices in public conversations



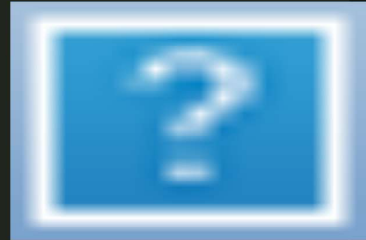
Why We Chose This Topic

- We wanted to understand what forestry companies actually do
- Forestry rarely appears in the media
- Alberta forests are heavily regulated — but few people know how or why
- We wanted to create **accessible information** for the public
- Our project helps people separate *fact* from *assumption*



Alberta Forest Facts

- Over **60% of Alberta** is forested — mostly boreal
- Companies operate under 20-year Forest Management Agreements
- Forest Management Plans must protect biodiversity & water
- All harvested areas must be replanted and monitored



Why It Matters: Climate & Environment

Forests are essential for a healthy planet:

- They store carbon and slow climate change
- They support biodiversity and wildlife habitat
- They protect watersheds and water quality
- They reduce wildfire risk when managed properly

But... lack of knowledge creates problems:

- Misinformation spreads
- People don't understand how forestry works
- Sustainable vs. unsustainable practices get blurred
- "Forest degradation" is often confused with "deforestation"



Why It Matters: Youth & Community

Forestry affects our generation the most:

- Youth voices matter in conservation and climate decisions
- Policies made today shape the forests we inherit
- Transparency builds trust between people, industry & government



What we learned firsthand:

- Forestry is more scientific than we realized
- Indigenous consultation is required but varies
- Companies must protect water, soil & biodiversity
- Our field trips showed the complexity of sustainability planning



Developing Our Action Project

- Brainstormed several ideas (education, workshops, guided walks)
- Wanted something that addressed the *root cause*: public understanding
- Decided on a **survey for forestry companies**
- Focused on transparency, sustainability & Indigenous engagement



Our Survey

We sent survey questions to **8 Alberta forestry companies** asking about:

- Indigenous consultation
- Biodiversity protection
- Wildfire risk reduction
- Replanting practices
- Certifications (FSC, SFI, etc.)
- Water quality & soil protection
- How youth can get involved

We received a full response from **Alberta-Pacific (Al-Pac)**.



What We Learned from Companies

Al-Pac (Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries):

- Only **FSC-certified** major forestry company in Alberta
- Uses biodiversity monitoring & long-term planning
- Consults with Indigenous communities
- Uses harvest patterns that mimic natural disturbances
- Replants and monitors regeneration to required standards



Millar Western & others (from secondary research):

- Harvesting patterns based on natural disturbance models
- Protect rivers, streams, migration paths & cultural sites
- Required by law to plant **3 seedlings for every tree harvested**



Certifications: FSC vs. SFI

FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)

- Strong environmental + social standards
- Requires independent audits
- Recommended by environmental groups (including CPAWS)

SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative)

- More industry-based
- Less rigorous audit requirements

Understanding this helps consumers make informed choices.



Key Takeaways

- Sustainable forestry is complex and science-based
- Transparency between industry & public isn't consistent
- Indigenous perspectives are crucial
- Forestry can help reduce wildfire risk
- Youth input encourages future-focused decision-making



Impact of Our Project

- Helped increase transparency by gathering direct responses
- Built a tool for public understanding
- Strengthened our own environmental literacy
- Encouraged conversations between youth & forestry companies



Next Steps

- Share findings through a youth-friendly report or Instagram post
- Create accessible explanations of forestry terms
- Continue encouraging companies to communicate clearly
- Possibly expand the survey in future years



Thank You

Questions?

- Let's talk sustainable forestry!

3. Is there a job position or group at your company that works to ensure that sustainable practices are incorporated, or considered?

We have a dedicated sustainability team including ecologists and certification specialists who support sustainability initiatives across the organization, but with a focus on our forest operations. There is also a separate environment team for the pulp mill itself.

4. How large of an area do you cut at one time?

Highly variable. Anywhere from a couple of hectares to over 100 ha. Any of the larger harvest areas would have large amounts of live standing trees retained within the larger area, so even though it's a large total area, the end result is a complex mosaic of patches of trees, individual standing trees, harvested areas, riparian buffer areas, etc. The overall goal of our harvest activities is to approximate the natural disturbance regime (i.e. wildfires), including the size, shape, and intensity of disturbances.

5. When you replant areas that have been cut, what species of trees/plants do you replant with? How do you determine what the species will be?

In general we re-plant with whatever was the dominant tree species that was there pre-harvest; in our area that is either **white spruce** or **black pine** in conifer blocks. In aspen harvest areas, we don't re-plant but rather leave the area for natural regeneration; aspen trees send up suckers as soon as they have been cut, and within a few months after harvest there will already be a couple of feet of growth coming back.

6. Does your company have certain policies or practices in place to reduce the risk of wildfires in areas you harvest wood from? If your answer is yes, what are they and how do you know that they are effective?

We follow [Alberta's debris disposal directive](#). Hard to prove a negative, but I don't think we have had any recent harvest areas catch fire.

7. What does your company do to support animal, fish, and plant species at risk, as well as overall biodiversity?

We have a large ecology program covering research, monitoring, and development of best management practices. A lot of what we do is based on partnerships with academics and other research institutions such as the [Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute](#). A good example of monitoring is [this report on the status of biodiversity in our Forest Management Agreement area](#) that we commission from ABMI every 5 years. Note that the link is for the 2020 report; our 2025 report will be published online in the next month or so, so keep an eye out for that if you are interested.

Quite a bit of information including species-at-risk management strategies can be found in our ["High Conservation Values" \(HCV\) report](#). Our highest priority species at risk is **[REDACTED]** and I spend a good part of my time working on caribou initiatives, including research (here are a [few recent examples](#) of research papers I've been involved with) as well as working with the Government of Alberta to develop long-term forest harvest plans that align with the federal caribou recovery strategy.



that align with the federal carbon recovery strategy.

8. Have you worked with Indigenous communities to ensure that the land is being logged in a respectful and sustainable manner? If so can you provide examples?

We have an Indigenous Relations team that manages consultations and engagement with Indigenous communities whose traditional territories overlap our FMA area. Our company has received a [Gold certification in PAIR](#) (Partnership Accreditation in Indigenous Relations, formerly known as "Progressive Aboriginal Relations" or PAR) for many years (I don't know the exact year offhand). We frequently adjust harvest area boundaries or drop blocks entirely to address concerns of communities or land-users such as trappers. See also the HCV report (Category 6) for more information on how we protect cultural values.

9. What barriers have you faced when attempting to adopt sustainable practices?

Any change in business practices can be a challenge to implement, especially when it is not solving an immediate problem but incurs a cost. E.g. building resilience to climate change is a priority for my team, but it can be difficult to implement a business-wide adaptation program when many of the impacts of climate change are either uncertain, or in the future, or are things we already deal with from time to time (e.g. warm winters, wildfires). Overall though, I have found the company to be very forward-looking on sustainability issues... which is why I like working here!

10. What, if any, sustainability certification does your company have? How does this certification ensure sustainable practices?

We have been [Forest Stewardship Council](#) certified since 2005. FSC is generally considered by environmental organizations to be the most stringent and reputable 3rd party forest certification standard in the world. While we originally chose to become FSC certified because the system aligned with Al-Pac's values and approach to responsible forest management, to a degree it works both ways; we also want to maintain our certification, which requires us to stay up to date as standards are updated and strengthened over time. As an example, when FSC Canada updated its standard with the *National Forest Stewardship Standard of Canada* in 2019, we had to make some significant changes to our practices. A big one was that we established >300,000ha of "designated conservation lands" (an FSC term) identified to address gaps in ecological representation of the existing protected areas network, and we committed to not harvest in these areas indefinitely. These areas were identified through a long-term collaborative project with Mistik management (an FSC-certified company across the border in Saskatchewan), Ducks Unlimited Canada, and CPAWS (Northern Alberta and Saskatchewan chapters). While we have always had an organizational commitment to establishing ecological benchmark areas and have advocated for areas to be removed from our tenure and protected in the past (e.g. Dillon River and Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Provincial Parks) the updated FSC standard certainly raised the bar.

11. Why should consumers purchase wood products from your company rather than other forestry companies in Alberta?

While we don't sell consumer products (we sell pulp to companies who make products like writing paper or tissues), Al-Pac - along with one of our quota holders Northland Forest Products Ltd who are certified under our group certificate - is the only FSC-certified company in Alberta. I believe that FSC certification absolutely sets us apart from other companies in the province.

