

Learning from the Past, Building for the Future

We are recklessly destroying the timber of Canada, and there is scarcely the possibility of replacing it.

PRIME MINISTER

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD 1871

Canada's Forests in 2000

- **Canada has 10% of the world's forests — covering 4.5 million square kilometres, an area larger than the landmass of Eastern and Western Europe combined.**
- **90% are publicly owned.**
- **Canadian forests help to protect 20% of the world's fresh water.**
- **Forestry employs 800,000+ Canadians.**
- **350+ communities have forestry-based economies.**
- **Of Canada's 453 million hectares of forest, 26.7 million hectares are heritage forests, protected by law to remain in their natural state and another 24 million are conservation forests protected from harvesting.**

Canada's Forest Heritage

The early pioneers who reached North America were greeted by diverse communities of indigenous peoples, living in harmony with their natural surroundings. The newcomers saw nature as something different, often inhospitable and frightening, yet also seemingly limitless. These attitudes, and the perceived need to improve their surroundings, resulted in dramatic changes to the Canadian landscape.

Large tracts of virgin timber were cleared overnight to free the land for crops and livestock. Settlers used wood for everything — tools, furniture, water buckets, sewer collectors — and they burned it for fuelwood, charcoal and potash. What they did not use, they simply tossed onto huge bonfires. Vast tracts of land were cleared for homesteading and, during the 19th century, to meet the British Navy's heavy demands for timber. Later, timber became an essential part of Canada's economy and by 1918, this country was already the world's largest producer of pulp and paper.

Today's Forests

Today, our attitudes and our treatment of the forests have changed. We recognize the essential role forests play in our health and well-being but we no longer see them as inexhaustible. Reforestation has increased steadily since the Second World War and what were once wastelands are now productive forests. Genetic research is identifying and producing healthy, faster-growing trees. Wildfires that once damaged huge tracts of forest have been reduced and the value of fire to many forest ecosystems has been recognized. And, while the demand for forest products is rising around the globe, it is balanced by a recognition that forests have many other values — environmental, social, recreational and even spiritual. We have acknowledged that, while our forests are a renewable resource, they are not indestructible.



Looking to the Future

Canadians are working to play a leading role in developing ways to manage forests sustainably, both at home and abroad. National, provincial/territorial, local and international initiatives exist, driven by improvements in our knowledge and understanding of forest ecosystems, by improvements in technology, by increasing global awareness of environmental issues and by a sincere desire by all parties to manage forests in a responsible way.

Canada Forest Accord and National Forest Strategy, 1992

Signed by national, territorial and provincial ministers responsible for forests and representatives of 15 non-government organizations, the Canada Forest Accord states that *“Our goal is to maintain and enhance the long-term health of our forest ecosystems, for the benefit of all living things both nationally and globally, while providing environmental, economic, social and cultural opportunities for the benefit of present and future generations.”* The **National Forest Strategy** identifies ways of reaching these goals and it, in turn, is translated into forest strategies at the provincial or local level.

Legislation and Regulations

Since 1992 new legislation and regulations have been put in place across the country to strengthen the protection of sensitive areas, regulate the size of timber harvests, ban harmful pesticides, and ensure the logging companies prepare their long-range plans with input from key community members.

Partnerships

Forest management partnerships are probably the most promising and exciting aspects of caring for Canada’s forests. Groups, some with widely varying interests, are now working together for the benefit of the environment. Partnerships range from small-scale projects, such as one involving local naturalists surveying birds on forest company land, to larger, more formal, multi-partner arrangements, such as those of **Canada’s Model Forests** and the **International Model Forest Network** [see pages 5 to 8].

Sharing Research and Knowledge

Although sharing information is nothing new, modern communications make it easier than ever before. There are many formal and informal research networks that work to study and improve the way our forests are managed. Sharing research is not limited to researchers and other professionals; today, schools are connected across the globe via the Internet.

Certification

Certification programs exist to identify forests or forest products that are managed in a sustainable or environmentally-friendly way. The most widely recognised of these is ISO certification. The ISO [International Organization for Standardization] consists of 100 member countries and creates globally recognised standards for industry. The **ISO 14000** series deals with international standards for environmental assessment and performance and will include Sustainable Forestry Management Certification.

Other certification programs, for example, **SmartWood^{CM}** a program of the not-for-profit Rainforest Alliance, exist and verify that wood products or forest products are managed according to established criteria. [www.smartwood.org]

Protected Forests

Millions of hectares of forests are protected from harvesting or left in their natural state because they are unique, a special part of our heritage. Some are set aside as national, provincial or territorial parks or nature reserves. Others may be designated for special protection because they have international significance.