

EXPERT BLOG · ANTHONY SWIFT

Resolute: A major step away from sustainable forestry

February 21, 2017 Anthony Swift



This is the first of a six part blog series examining issues relating to Canada's boreal forest,

Incoherent from the start.

Expert? Swift is an American lawyer based in Washington DC, NOT a forest scientist or boreal expert.

Resolute Forest Products remains an active member of FSC and maintained our existing FSC certifications throughout 2016.

At a critical moment, one of Canada's largest logging companies, Resolute Forest Products, may be stepping away from the very system that is perched to make critical gains in protection the boreal forest – the blue-green crown of towering firs and aspens at the top of North America. This forest plays a significant role in helping to regulate the global climate by holding at bay massive amounts of greenhouse gases emissions in its trees and soils, providing habitat to thousands of plant and animal species, and serving as a global freshwater storehouse, as well as being home to more than six hundred First Nations communities. It is an area containing some of the largest unbroken ecosystems on earth large enough to support complex, intact and native ecosystems.

Anyone who has looked at the underlying science knows that smart forest management actually enhances the boreal's ability to absorb greenhouse gases.

Except that by Swift's definition "degradation" includes natural disturbances like forest fires, insects, and disease, and is not synonymous with deforestation.

Logging plays a major role in the degradation of this "Serengeti of the North" and some of the most biodiverse parts of the forest are under threat. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – the world's leading independent certifier of sustainably management forests – works in a consensus manner with logging companies, environmentalists, local communities, and most importantly indigenous peoples whose traditional territories span across the boreal. FSC Canada is drafting a new boreal national standard that will better protect the direly threatened woodland caribou, intact areas and indigenous cultural landscapes, and the implementation of a consent system – known as Full Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for indigenous peoples. FSC International is working to develop guidelines for protecting intact areas and cultural landscapes under a resolution adopted in 2014 known as Motion 65. In other words, it is a key time for certificate holders (those companies certified by FSC) to be "leaning in" and participating in the development of these rules, not threatening the system as it works to accomplish these critical goals.

The "Serengeti of the North" refers to a small region in western British Columbia, well outside of Resolute's managed forests in Quebec and Ontario. And, the Serengeti in Africa is NOT a forest.

Actually, recent caribou population surveys in Quebec indicate increasing caribou populations that have already surpassed the goals for 2023.

More than 17,000 Aboriginal people work in the forest products industry, including more than 1,400 Aboriginal businesses.

Here's a clue:

Why a focus on Resolute?

While many people may have never heard of Resolute Forest Products (RFP), as one of Canada's largest logging companies it has a major footprint in Canada's boreal forest, one of the last great forests on earth. Canada's boreal forest is an ecological resource that plays a significant role in helping to regulate the global climate by holding at bay massive amounts of greenhouse gases emissions in its trees and soils, providing habitat to thousands of plant and animal species, and serving as a global freshwater storehouse, as well as being home to more than six hundred First Nations communities. It is an area containing some of the largest unbroken ecosystems on earth large enough to support complex, intact and native ecosystems.

Resolute has been an industry leader, cutting our carbon footprint by 73% since 2000.

In their own words: "WWF acknowledges Resolute's achievement of having reached its GHG emissions reductions goal in 2013, two years ahead of schedule."

- In December 2015, the World Wildlife Fund raised concerns about Resolute's engagement with FSC and end the company's participation in its Climate Savers program. Specifically, WWF stated that it would not extend its endorsement of Resolute due to its failure to reach its commitment to increase FSC certification of management forests to 80 percent by 2015.

Set the Record Straight

Time for Resolute to Take a Different Approach

Resolute's actions towards its critics and its public retreat from FSC certification make it clear that it has backed away from its commitment to forest sustainability. Their actions have resulted in an extraordinarily hostile approach to civil society organizations and reflect a striking unwillingness to positively engage to identify credible and lasting conservation solutions. Taking all of the activities outlined above together, we believe the behavior of Resolute threatens the overall protection of the Canadian boreal forest; accepted practices of the FSC system; and the capacity of civil society organizations to engage in and broaden sustainable forestry practices in Canada and around the world.

Fact: Less than 0.5% of Canada's boreal forest is harvested each year - a fraction of what is disturbed by natural causes such as forest fires, insects and disease.

OMITTED: NRDC routinely engages in lawsuits involving public discourse on environmental issues, thanks to their full-time legal department. NRDC isn't opposed to litigating disputes over environmental advocacy - they just don't like it when their allies are the defendants.

Freedom of speech is not a license to slander, libel and defame.

NRDC is calling on the U.S. marketplace to urge the logging company to drop its litigation against public interest organizations and instead focus on demonstrating its commitment to sustainable forestry and conservation. The first place to start is for Resolute to drop its litigation against public interest organizations. Cease its attacks on the FSC system, and ensure free, prior and informed consent from First Nations on their territories. Beyond this, Resolute must work to regain their FSC certification of their lands, and support efforts to establish strong woodland caribou protection plans especially in Quebec and Ontario. It is time to get back to the bigger goal of conserving the boreal forest and a real commitment to sustainable forestry.

Fact: Canada's deforestation rate is less than 0.02% and all harvested areas are required by law to be 100% regenerated.

We rely on science and best practices, developed in partnership with First Nations communities and provincial governments, to provide suitable habitat for woodland caribou in the 25% of their range that falls where harvesting activities are permitted.

The greatest threat to the boreal is misinformation spread by environmental activists, like Swift. The Canadian boreal forest is one of the best-managed in the world.