

The Sustainable Management of Forests

INTRODUCTION

The sustainable management of forests is one of Canada's top priorities. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), through Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the UNCED Statement of Forest Principles, Canada committed to continue to manage, conserve, and develop its forests in a sustainable manner. Those efforts have taken place in the context of a shift from management based on sustained yield to one based on forest ecosystems. In this monograph, Canada describes how forest management policies and practices have evolved, with particular emphasis on the period since UNCED. The monograph also suggests next steps in this process at the domestic and international level.

CANADA—A LAND OF FORESTS

Of Canada's 921.5 million hectares of land area, forests cover 417.6 million hectares, or about 45 percent. Thirty-seven percent of Canada's forested land area is open forests, composed of muskeg, marshes, and sparse tree cover.

More than 12 percent of Canada's forests have been protected from harvesting by policy or legislation. This large area of protected forests is roughly equivalent to the total forest land in Finland, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, combined. Although about 57 percent of the forest in Canada is considered commercial forest, capable of producing both timber and non-timber products, only about half of the commercial forest is currently managed for timber purposes.

The Canadian public owns 94 percent of the nation's forests. The remaining 6 percent is the private property of more than