

General Forest Values

As important as forest resources are to the Canadian economy, they are absolutely essential to the cycle of life. From an ecological perspective, forests are vital to carbon-dioxide and nitrogen cycles,⁶ as well as to the production of oxygen, which is essential to the life process. Moreover, it is well known that forests, by their very presence, minimize soil erosion, regulate the flow of water, improve air and water quality, reduce temperature variations and serve as an indispensable habitat for countless species of animals and plants. It is estimated that approximately 20% of the world's freshwater resources have their headwaters in Canada's forested regions alone.⁷ There is no doubt whatsoever that forests represent an enormous pool of genetic variety and variability which is important to the evolution of species and in turn to the welfare and quality of life for mankind. These realities confirm how crucial it is to ensure that our forests are managed and used in ways that do not threaten their ecological integrity.

In Canada, species losses, species extinctions, are not nearly the issue that they are in many other parts of the world, but losses of habitat, reductions in biological diversity and genetic diversity, losses of populations, are very important issues.

When we talk about biological diversity it is important to know that it is not a vague, nebulous idea. It is something very concrete which we can define in a variety of ways, with particular meanings. When I talk about it today I would like you to think about it in almost a hierarchy of levels; first, genetic variation within a species among different individuals; then, species diversity, the variation in number of individuals in different communities, and then if you go to the bottom, ecosystem level diversity in different places on the landscape tend to develop different characteristic communities which identify them as being a particular kind of place. — Ken Lertzman, Associate Professor, Natural Resources Management Program, Simon Fraser University. (Environment Issue 33:51).

Forests have always been basic to such activities as fishing, hunting and trapping. Even though relatively few Canadians carry out these activities today for subsistence purposes, with the exception of some native peoples, they nevertheless remain extremely popular recreational pursuits enjoyed by important segments of the population. Similarly, the public's passion for outdoor activities has grown over the past twenty years, a situation that has resulted in an even more diverse utilization of forests across Canada. Activities include wildlife and nature observation, hiking, cross-country skiing and canoe-camping, to name