

MYTHS VS. FACTS

A number of misconceptions have been widely circulated about the management of British Columbia's forests. Some of these concerns reflect information that is out-of-date. The following puts these myths into perspective and provides some facts about current forest practices.

Myth: Massive deforestation is taking place in British Columbia.

Fact: Deforestation, the conversion of large areas of forest to other uses, is not occurring in B.C., where less than half of one percent of the total productive forest is harvested annually. Since 1987, forest companies have been required by law to reforest 100 per cent of the forests harvested on Crown land within three to five years and to ensure healthy free-growing forest on all forested land within eight to 20 years. In each year since 1987, more trees have been planted in British Columbia than have been harvested. Mainly because of intensive efforts to prevent soil erosion, the survival rate of all seedlings has increased to 87 per cent from 54 per cent in 1982.

Myth: Widespread clearcutting is devastating vast tracts of land in B.C.

Fact: Because clearcutting, or removing all the trees in an area, has a significant impact on the environment in some settings, the new B.C. Forest Practices Code will reduce allowable clearcut sizes and prescribe clearcutting only on suitable sites. Clearcutting will not be allowed on unstable terrain, in critical wildlife habitat or in riparian zones. The average size of cut blocks on public land in 1993 was 77.8 acres in the interior and 58 acres on the coast, or overall less than one-eighth of a square mile.

Despite its dramatic visual impact, cutting down all the trees in a block is better suited in some areas to the tree species and the terrain than its alternative, partial cutting. Some species found in B.C.'s forests, such as coastal Douglas fir, lodgepole pine and western larch, do not grow well in shade and reestablish much better in open conditions. Partial cutting requires the harvesting of a greater forest area than clearcutting to yield the same amount of timber, and it is more dangerous for loggers.

Myth: Reforestation is done poorly in B.C., where ecologically diverse forests are being replaced by monocultures of single species that often don't survive.

Fact: The provincial reforestation program maintains the naturally occurring diversity of the forests, 29 per cent of which are monocultures of pine, fir or spruce. About 35 per cent of the reforestation is accomplished through natural regeneration and 65 per cent through a combination of replanting and natural regeneration. While some mixed forests are initially replanted with a single species, natural regeneration adds diversity to these stands.

Myth: British Columbia is cutting down an increasing number of trees to make pulp and paper for export.

Fact: About 85 per cent of B.C. pulp and paper is manufactured from residue and waste material from lumber production. The small percentage of trees that are used directly for pulp and paper manufacture are diseased or otherwise unsuitable for lumber production.

Myth: B.C. is destroying the last of its old growth forests.

Fact: Most of the province's forest land is old growth. Old growth occurs throughout the province but most of the international concern is over old growth in the coastal temperate rainforests where some of the world's tallest and oldest trees are found. British Columbia has more than 40,000 square miles of coastal temperate rainforest. Almost half of this area, some 48 per cent, is inaccessible, unsuitable for harvest or protected.

Much of the criticism of B.C.'s forest practices originates in countries where the old growth forests were stripped centuries ago. Suggestions that B.C. stop all harvesting of old growth forests do not take into account the fact that such a course would essentially mean shutting down the province's forest industry.

In May the B.C. government introduced another groundbreaking element of its resource management strategy, the first provincial Forest Practices Code, which will govern all aspects of logging, forest tending and regeneration. It establishes tough new mandatory management standards, including restrictions on road construction, a reduction in the size of clearcuts and a ban on clearcuts where necessary to protect wildlife habitat. Also part of the Code is a strict new regulatory regime, which includes independent audits of forest company operations and an increase in maximum fines up to \$1 million or more.

CLAYOQUOT SOUND

Among the most controversial aspects of British Columbia's forest management policies is the issue of logging in Clayoquot Sound, a 1,000 square-mile area of rainforest and coastal inlets on the west coast of Vancouver Island. In April 1993, after a community-based committee failed to reach agreement on the level of resource development, the provincial government announced a land-use policy for Clayoquot Sound.

The policy is supported by British Columbia's Aboriginal groups, the First Nations. In March of this year, British Columbia and the Clayoquot Sound First Nations signed an Interim Measures Agreement, under which they will jointly manage all land use and resource extraction in the Sound. The agreement will be in place for two years and can be extended. It is meant to serve as a bridge to the negotiation of a comprehensive treaty.

Under the government's 1993 land-use decision, over 33 per cent of Clayoquot Sound is now protected. The protected area includes the largest untouched watershed on Vancouver Island and 176,600 acres of coastal temperate rainforest.

Of the total land area in the Sound, 45 per cent is available to logging and other resource uses but harvesting is limited to 2,470 acres in any one year. Another 17 per cent is under special management, which allows limited logging but emphasizes protection of wildlife, biodiversity and the landscape. The rest is either Indian reserves or land claimed by the First Nations that is the subject of litigation before the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

Within both the protected and the special management areas, the government has established higher forestry and environmental standards, including smaller cut blocks to a maximum of 32 acres, less clearcutting and greater use of alternative harvesting methods on steep slopes and other sensitive areas.