

4. STATUS OF INTACT NATURAL AREAS IN CANADA

Canada is just 125 years old, yet in this comparatively short period of time Canadians have had tremendous impact on an enormous land area through the logging of forests, damming of waterways, drainage of wetlands, cultivation of the Prairies, extensive roading, urban settlement, as well as air, land and water pollution. Even though there are only 28 million of us, the technology which affords Canadians one of the highest standards of living on Earth, has dramatically accentuated our impact upon the land. Enormous shovel excavators turn mountains into open pit mines; mechanized snippers and feller bunchers can cut 30 hectares of timber per day; huge bulldozers can build roads through even the most difficult of terrain. Not surprisingly, most of the development of the Canadian land area has been done in the last half century since the end of World War Two. Hence the urgency for completing our pristine areas system within the next few years. The following discussion summarizes the effects of development on various zones of the Canadian land base.

FOREST LANDSCAPES

Canada encompasses 4,533,000 km² of forested land. Of this, a little more than half (2,440,000 km²) is classified as commercial forest. These are the stands that are most sought after by industry because they exist on the most productive growing sites, sites which are economical to harvest. They also represent some of the ecologically richest forest habitats in Canada.

To date, only 3.8% of Canada's "productive forests" are protected in National or Provincial parks, and even some of these are potentially available for future harvest (e.g., in some Manitoba Provincial Parks and Ontario's Algonquin Park). In 1990, approximately 10,000 km² of forests were harvested in Canada. By contrast, virtually no new preserved areas were established over productive forested areas that year, despite the fact that many of these forest types are not yet adequately represented by pristine areas. In 1991-92 of the nearly 100,000 km² of land protected, less than 1% of this (1,000 km²) was on productive forested lands, most of which was restricted to a single site in B.C.

In fact, much of the productive forest land in Canada is unavailable for pristine areas as it is already claimed by the forest industry through a variety of tenure or leasing arrangements with governments. Excluding the territories, the provinces have within their jurisdiction 3,645,000 km² of forest lands (productive and non-productive). A minimum estimate