

The Values of the Catchacoma Old-growth and Mature Forest: A Report Submitted to the Forest Stewardship Council

August 25, 2020

by the Catchacoma Forest Stewardship Committee

INTRODUCTION

The *Catchacoma Forest Stewardship Committee* (CFSC) is a recently formed citizens group exploring options to pursue protection status for a 662 ha stand of crown land forest known as the “Catchacoma” forest, located north of Catchacoma Lake, west of the Kawartha Highlands Signature Park and east of Highway 507 (see attached map 1). This stand is leased under a Sustainable Forest Licence to the Bancroft Minden Forest Company (BMFC) and is identified as Block 1711 in the BMFC prescription maps (see map 2). Selection and shelterwood logging occurred in this stand in 2019-2020 and more is planned for 2020-21 according to the annual operations plan published by BMFC.

Recent ecological studies conducted by the non-profit forest research group, Ancient Forest Exploration & Research, have identified high conservation values for the Catchacoma stand, including dominant endangered old-growth eastern hemlock forest and a variety of habitats for species-at-risk. This led to the formation of the CFSC with the goal of achieving a moratorium on planned logging for 2020-21 (see map 2) while the numerous biodiversity and habitat values of this unique forest are further evaluated.

The provincially established processes for pursuing conservation or protection status for unique and representative landscapes are complicated, poorly defined and drawn out, sometimes taking decades in Ontario. Therefore, the CFSC recommends that BMFC designate the Catchacoma forest as conservation lands, which are also known as candidate protected areas (CPAs) through the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) new forest management standard 6.5.

It is our hope that the current FSC audit of BMFC will help to expedite this request, as well as the development of BMFC's process for evaluating and further developing the conservation areas network in their license region as outlined in standard 6.5. The CFSC is made up of local citizens, cottagers, AFER's lead ecologist, and a representative from the national charitable environmental organization, Wilderness Committee.

RESEARCH AND REPORTS

A portion of the Catchacoma forest was studied by AFER researchers in 2019 as part of an effort to document old-growth forests in Peterborough County with funding from a provincial Trillium Foundation grant. That preliminary research indicated high conservation values for the forest, including the [presence of dominant old-growth hemlock trees \(over 140 years\) and other old-growth qualities](#). Research focusing on Ontario forest types also revealed hemlock-dominated forests to be one of the rarest types of forest in Ontario, and on the decline (see: [AFER compared this stand to other known old-growth eastern hemlock stands and found the Catchacoma forest landscape to be potentially the largest representation of older, hemlock dominated forest stands in Canada](#). Research also uncovered [documentation for the presence of ten species-at-risk and the potential for more at-risk species in the site](#). In addition, Finally, the stand has cultural values including education, research and recreation values--including hiking trails, hunting and trapping and snowmobile trails. In fact, the natural capital (measured in dollars) was estimated to be ten times greater than the timber market values (see: https://14b54489-f611-4cf7-9e23-d1b121227c63.filesusr.com/ugd/1eacbf_bef83141700a439090323040409faa88.pdf).

REQUESTS TO BMFC AND MNRF AND POTENTIAL NON-COMPLIANCE

In February 2020, members of the Wilderness Committee and AFER held a meeting with BMFC and members of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to present AFER's research findings on the Catchacoma forest as well as concerns about the potential effect of planned harvest and logging road/landing building on species-at-risk and other areas of concern (AOC) within the management unit. As part of that meeting, the Wilderness Committee and AFER requested records for the following:

- a) records of assessment for species at risk (SARs) habitat and other AOCs for the area, including the timing of evaluation by MNRF, the timing of communication to forest managers for BMFC, and what operational AOC prescriptions were applied in the 2019-2020 road and landing building, and logging;
- b) records of past logging, including amount, species, and location of logging, as well as extent and nature of logging roads; and
- c) plans for current and future logging roads/landings.

To date, the first two of these requests for information have not been fulfilled. For the third request, the planned management for the road and landing was given as “abandonment” by the manager of BMFC in an email communication--which is worrisome as the road and landing were constructed with truckloads of large rocks and gravel, which currently present hazards to recreational uses of the forest. In addition to the gravel road and landing, the skid trails used for logging widened and degrade local hiking trails, leaving them littered with slash that make them unsafe. The CFSC is most concerned however, with the lack of response to the first request, as records of past FSC audits have raised concerns about the lack of timeliness between MNRF identification of SARs and the communication of this to BMFC (See Table below).

From FSC Forest Certification Public Report, 2019 (https://files.ontario.ca/environment-and-energy/forestry/audits/audits/2011_IFABancroftMinden_AODA.pdf):

<p>Observation/Potential Non-Compliance:</p> <p>Procedures are documented but not always implemented in a timely manner to safeguard SAR species and their habitats. Special prescriptions are applied: For rare and uncommon plant and wildlife species, appropriate buffer zones or harvest modifications are applied in order to ensure their protection. But in a significant number of cases in the last year the SAR polygons were delivered from MNRF after the blocks had been laid out and marked.</p>	<p>Corrective Action Request:</p> <p>The company should seek to ensure that the standardized dataset procedures for notifying the company of new values polygons are implemented in a timely manner to safeguard SAR species and their habitats,</p>
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In light of this, it is the CFSC’s concern that SARs polygons for Block 1711 were not delivered to the forest operations team before the block was marked and roads and landings built for logging in 2019-2020. We therefore request that the current FSC audit investigate this issue of non-compliance.

In addition, the 2011 HCV assessment for BMFC (available at: <https://www.bmfci.ca/component/phocadownload/file/1-bancroft-hcv-assessment-vers2-0-2017-sep>) included various species identified as “possible HCV” (p.8), but were not identified for monitoring because no instances were recorded. Several of these overlap with species that AFER research has documented within the Catchacoma forest including: cerulean warbler, rusty blackbird, five-lined skink, and eastern hognose snake. That HCV assessment also found no occurrences of rare ecosystems or ecosystems in decline, both of which characterize the Catchacoma forest as documented by AFER. For these reasons, we recommend that a new HCV assessment, including a focus on this stand, be conducted prior to any further logging there.

OTHER ISSUES

Members of the CFSC have also noted other problems associated with the 2019-2020 forest management operations. These include:

- trees felled beyond the water buffer line in several instances (photos available upon request);
- cut black ash trees, a species at risk (federally threatened);
- signs of machinery operating within the stand beyond the stated cut-off date of March 31st, as well as machinery and gas cans left on the site over the summer, when no operations were happening (photos available upon request); and
- many trees marked for next year's cut beyond the water buffer line for "Pencil Creek" (photos available upon request).

In the last instance, communications with BMFC assured that the trees were mis-marked because the water buffer line had been moved. However, we remain concerned about this issue. In addition, communications from BMFC staff have been that there are no plans for logging on the east side of Pencil Creek, however the prescription map (see Map 2) still shows this area marked for logging.

PROCESS FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE NEW FSC STANDARD 6.5

As part of the new standard, managers of FSC-certified forests ("certificate holders") are accountable for identifying and protecting CPAs using the best available knowledge and best practices for engagement of Indigenous peoples and stakeholders ([Indicator 6.5 "Conservation Area Networks"](#)). On June 1, the CFSC emailed a statement of interested stakeholders in this process to the manager of BMFC (see . While we received confirmation of the receipt of this letter, as yet no process has been identified by BMFC towards meeting this criterion.

The new FSC standard requires certificate holders to demonstrate movement towards meeting the standard criteria by January 2021, at which point planned operations in the Catchacoma stand will likely be underway. For this reason, we request that the FSC auditor require that the management of BMFC create a plan describing the process outlined in standard criterion 6.5 and that a moratorium on logging in the Catchacoma forest be enacted until this process is completed. The signatories of the letter sent to identify stakeholders included the members of CFSC as well as others (see below). To our knowledge, the non-CFSC signatories have also not received notification regarding the process to meet standard 6.5.

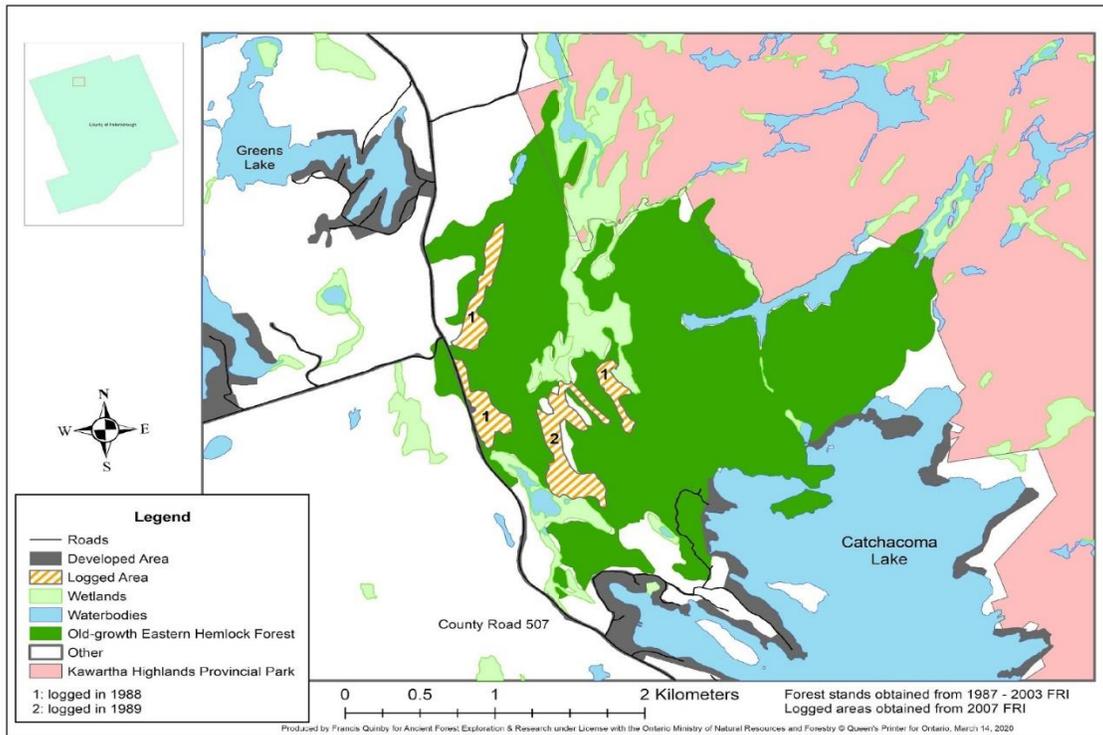
CFSC members:

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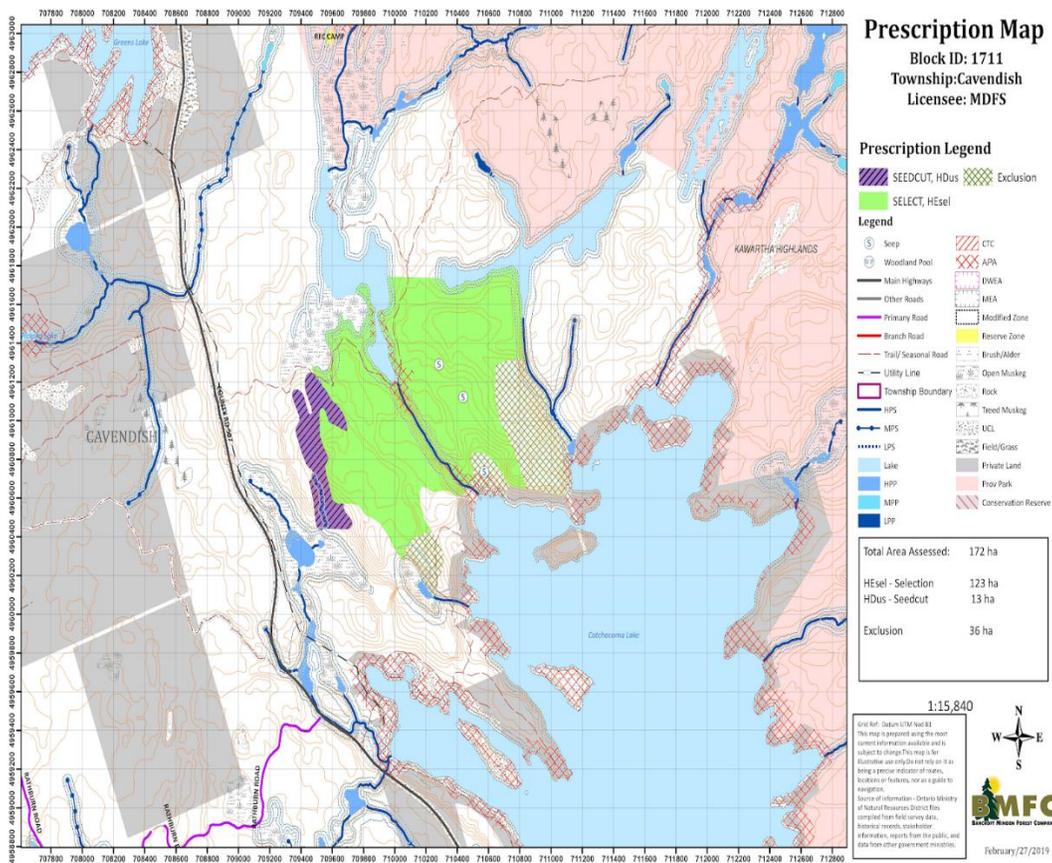
Other Signatories:

Warren Dunlop, President, North Pigeon Lake Association president.npla@gmail.com
Mitty van der Velden, President Catchacoma Cottagers Association, mittyvan@gmail.com
Leora Berman, Founder and COO of the Land Between National Charity info@thelandbetween.ca
Radoslaw (Radek) Odolczyk, ecologist radoslawodolczyk@gmail.com

Map 1: Approximate extent of the 662 ha Catchacoma older growth hemlock forest, with previously logged areas (produced by AFER, using MNRF FRI data)



Map 2: showing planned logging area for Catchacoma Forest, from BMFC Annual Operations Plan 2020-2021:



Letter of statement of interested stakeholders

June 1, 2020

To: Svetlana Zeran General Manager, Bancroft Minden Forest Company

RE: FSC new Forest Management Standard 6.5

As you are no doubt aware, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) of Canada launched a new Forest Management Standard to support certification for responsible forest management in June 2019. The new standard came into effect on January 1, 2020. We are writing to express interest in Bancroft Minden Forest Company's progress towards implementation of the standard [Indicator 6.5 "Conservation Area Networks"](#).

This indicator requires that FSC-certified organizations "identify and protect representative sample areas of native ecosystems" in an effort to fill gaps in the existing conservation area networks within their management unit. These designated conservation lands, previously known as candidate protected areas, are "to be managed through the exclusion of forest management activities in recognition of their ecological and/or cultural values". The standard further clarifies the long-term objective of designated conservation lands is to transition them to legal protected status and that the company must work from within its sphere of influence to achieve that objective.

In pursuit of the achievement of the standard, FSC requires companies to **initiate a process to identify gaps in the conservation area network, including a gap analysis by one or more independent experts and a peer review**. For forests managed on public land, it requires the company **undertake an engagement process with Indigenous Peoples and self-identified stakeholders regarding the analysis, designation and management of new conservation areas, including a process to achieve consensus**.

In light of this standard, the individual and organizational signatories to this letter wish to identify themselves as interested stakeholders for involvement in this process within the Bancroft Minden Forest Company management unit. We are interested in the process in general, and in particular, we are interested in proposing the Catchacoma forest (block 1711) of the management unit for consideration as a designated conservation land. We believe this stand to have high conservation values including the presence of various species at risk, as well as representing a rare and declining native ecosystem with old-growth qualities. Its location as adjacent to other already protected areas could add to landscape connectivity. The forest also has cultural values. The accessible location has proved to have educational value within the community; it has been employed for learning opportunities and research by Youth Leadership for Sustainability highschool classes as well as by non-profit group Ancient Forest Exploration & Research. It is also used locally for hiking, trapping, fishing and snowmobiling.

While the FSC standard cites 10% of the management unit as a minimum goal for the size of the Conservation Area Network, it also stresses that the 10% goal should not be interpreted as a maximum or necessarily desirable level. It explicitly acknowledges that there may be instances in which a more extensive network is warranted based on factors considered in the gap analysis and other high conservation values. These efforts should also consider that the federal government has committed to increasing the amount of protected area in Canada to 30% of the landscape.

Considering that the [2011 independent audit of BMFC](#) states that "the Bancroft-Minden Forest may be home to more species-at-risk than any other forest in the province", we feel that the Conservation Area Network within this unit may warrant a larger percentage of designated conservation lands. At the very least, a new gap analysis is required that includes High Conservation Values and High Conservation Value Areas (FSC Standards, 2019, 6.5.2).

We would like to commend Bancroft Minden Forest Company on its commitment to responsible management through FSC certification, and we look forward to contributing to the process of identifying ways to add to the conservation network.

Signed,

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Peter Quinby, Ancient Forest Exploration & Research, pquinby@ancientforest.org

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