

November 17, 2020

To: BMF FMP Planning Team

From: Catchacoma Forest Stewardship Committee (CFSC)

Re: Issues with Response to comments presented on review of LTMD

Thank you for your appreciation of the AFER studies that address the forest and conservation values inventoried to date in the Catchacoma Forest. Unfortunately, the response from the Planning Team did not satisfactorily address our concerns with MNR's failure to include these values within the ongoing forest management planning process. Thus, our issues associated with the preservation of these forest and conservation values in the Catchacoma Forest remain unresolved.

1. Data relevant to the ecology and of the Catchacoma Forest

The response provided to our concerns regarding the status of the Catchacoma Forest as a provincially significant old-growth eastern hemlock stand states that "*In the Crown land area being referred to as the Catchacoma Forest, Hemlock stands represent 299 hectares of a total geographic area of 568 hectares (53%)*". It also states that "*In the Catchacoma forest, 19 hectares meet the Landscape Guide definition of old growth, representing 6% of the total hemlock within the Catchacoma or 2.5% of all the hemlock old growth in unprotected Crown land within the entirety of the management unit.*"

Both of these statements use as their only reference the map provided by BMFC below (Map #1). However, the FRI data and associated GIS algorithms upon which this map is based are not provided. **Please provide us with the FRI data and associated analyses used to construct this map, or direct us to where we can access it – perhaps a “standard, basic report” is in order.** Previous FRI maps provided in FMP 2011-2021 (See maps #2 and #3) show substantially more hemlock dominance and more “late-stage” and “mature” hemlock forest than Map #1.

More importantly to the comparison of varying FRI maps, the numbers provided are not substantiated by the field studies performed by AFER, particularly the most recent study (attached), which inventoried 34 random plots across the Catchacoma Forest and found that approximately half were early stage old-growth forests (OGFs) based on Ontario provincial OGF criteria and the other half were in the late OGF stage. Ontario's *Landscape Guide* recognizes that FRI data is subject to clarification and updating based on on-the-ground observations, therefore, the AFER data should be considered more accurate. At the very least, **we request field verification of the presence of OGFs in the Catchacoma Forest by MNR prior to the FMP 2021-2031 review.**

Pursuant to this, Ontario's *Forest Information Manual* (FIM; 2020) is very clear that the identification and description of non-timber forest values may be collected and provided by **non-**

government organizations, third parties, other resource users and the public at any time during the development and implementation (during operations) of an FMP.

It also states that the best available values information is that which is supported by **“field visits, inventories, surveys, tests or studies”** (pg. 44) and that “the MNRF enters and updates values information received from sustainable forest licensees and other sources into the MNRF’s values information database (i.e., using LIO Editor) housed in a corporate data repository or information management system (i.e., Land Information Ontario Data Warehouse, GeoHub). (pg. 44). Furthermore, the FIM sets timelines for values information review, stating that **“the MNRF gives priority to those values that are potentially affected by proposed and optional areas of forest operations for the FMP under preparation”** (pg. 44), which should apply to the Catchacoma Forest, which is **located on public land.**

As such, **please indicate how and when MNRF will verify and update the values information for the Catchacoma Forest into the data repository,** as per the FIM (see Appendix A for a full reference list to values identification process set out in the FIM).

2. Issues with identification of species-at-risk habitat values

The response from the Planning Team to our concern about values associated with habitat for species-at-risk in the Catchacoma Forest stated: *“values surveys are conducted on a priority basis as per Fish and Wildlife Values Collection and Mapping in Forest Management Planning: A Southern Region Strategy (2020). Surveys target species that are likely to be impacted by forest operations and are likely to occur at a site. On the Bancroft Minden Forest, this means we primarily focus on Blanding’s turtles, American ginseng, and S1, S2, and S3 ranked species. Areas of concern are applied as necessary based on the results of these field surveys, and other verified observations. Blanding’s turtle habitat has been delineated based on an observation on County Road 507. Block 1711 was identified in the 2019 and 2020 reviews as medium potential for Blanding’s surveys based on some habitat present that could not be delineated based on known observations.”*

This response fails to indicate whether a field survey for Blanding’s turtles (or other SARs) was conducted by MNRF in the Catchacoma Forest, whereas an environmental assessment study commissioned by MNRF (produced by Stantec, 2008) to evaluate a potential access road through the Catchacoma Forest found that indeed, **Blanding’s turtle habitat is present within the many small lakes, wetlands and streams located within the Catchacoma Forest landscape.** In addition, some CFSC members have documented Blanding’s turtles in the Forest area. We also remain confused about why other SARs documented in the Forest area (e.g., hognose snake, cerulean warbler) are not considered, even though **they are documented in the 2011-2021 FMP as potential considerations for AOCs and were found in the Stantec road study.**

The MNRF response further states that *“more information about the values collection and AOC delineation processes can be provided by Bancroft District MNRF staff, if desired.”* In fact, **this**

is precisely the information we have been requesting since February 2020 and have yet to receive.

Please provide data/reporting on: (1) MNR/BMFC field surveys regarding SARs habitat showing how they were conducted and what data was obtained, (2) what AOC's were delineated, and (3) the operational adjustments were made. If field surveys were not done, we again request that MNR/BMFC embark on such values information gathering prior to development of the 2021-2031 FMP.

3. Issues with old-growth forest trend prediction modelling

The Planning Team response to our concerns about the rare and declining status of old-growth eastern hemlock forest in the management unit states that the "*LTMD projects a forest condition where hemlock (HESH) forests decline in the short term with a consistent increase afterwards for the next 100 years. While not ideal, the LTMD creates a solution that must balance dozens of objectives with several individual indicators. For example, Old Growth is measured in 9 different ways, with HESH being only one element of the whole. The LTMD increases the overall Old Growth representation on BMF by over 20,000 hectares in the short term, 40,000 in the medium term and nearly 60,000 hectares in the long term. In that context, a 19 hectare drop from Plan Start in the short term for a single element of Old Growth represents a small decline in an overwhelming positive trend for Old Growth*".

This MNR/BMFC modelling fails to take into consideration the research done by AFER showing that old-growth eastern hemlock forests (and hemlock-dominated forests in general) are rare and threatened ecosystems within the management unit, and throughout the entire province. As such, the entire old-growth hemlock forest should be considered an AOC.

Ontario's *Old Growth Strategy* states that the goal for conserving old-growth conditions in forest management units is "*to identify, consider, and provide for forest age class structure needed to maintain functional old growth ecosystem conditions in forest units (ecosites) for all forest communities (provincial forest types) within their natural geographic ranges in each management unit as part of future forest conditions*". Using other OGF types to circumvent the necessity to preserve rare old-growth hemlock by "lumping it in" with all OGFs as a single category is **incompatible with this policy goal.**

With respect to the **contribution of OGFs to sequestering and storing carbon**, we point the Planning Team to a recent study done by IUCN that identifies the protection of temperate old-growth forests in Ontario as a **key to achieving climate mitigation on a national scale** (see attachment).

The MNR/BMFC response goes on to state that "*the HESH Old Growth trends show that an additional 250 hectares of Old Growth HESH will be represented on the landscape over the next 20 years and 3,000 hectares over the next 100 years, meaning that the decline is not only slight,*

but also temporary.” **Given the rare status of old-growth hemlock forest on the landscape (just over 700 ha in the total management unit), any decline is not “slight” but significant due to its limited occurrence.**

Based on the discrepancies between FRI data and AFER’s field assessments it is difficult to ascertain the accuracy of the LTMD modelling in its assertions about future projections for old-growth hemlock in the MU, especially with such a long-term timeline of 100 years. **Therefore we assert that the “precautionary principle” (see the Forest Information Manual (2020)) should be applied to all mature and old-growth hemlock stands by removing logging operations in them in order to preserve and study their responses to multiple factors including climate change, threats such as woolly adelgid, and impacts from logging, road building and road use (e.g., ATV access to remote areas).**

4. Issues with conservation being “out-of-scope” of the FMP process

The MNRF response provided to address the CFSC request for a moratorium on logging while conservation values are assessed in the Catchacoma Forest and while the CFSC pursues opportunities for protection states that, *“requests for changes to specific Crown land use policy is beyond the scope of this planning process. Crown land north of Catchacoma Lake is part of the Forest Management Plan for the Bancroft Minden Forest Management Unit and current Crown land use planning direction stipulates that forest management will occur in the area. Any long-term protection efforts targeted at changing current land use designations and activities should be redirected to land use planning mechanisms which are out of scope of the FMP process.”*

This statement is in direct opposition to the FIM, which states that, *“the MNRF may apply the precautionary principle to ensure that values are protected during forest management planning or implementation of forest management operations”* in cases where *“information is incomplete but a partial description of the features of a value is available”*. The precautionary principle *“recognizes that some forest management activities may be detrimental to the existence, integrity, and health of some values or may cause irreparable damage to values. The rationale for applying the precautionary principle is to reduce the risks of significantly affecting a value in a negative way, in the absence of conclusive information about a value”* (p. 55).

Although we disagree with MNRF that our concerns can only be addressed through the land-use policy development process as we have explained above, **we request that the MNRF direct us to the appropriate people/ministry/process that deals with developing land-use policy for the Catchacoma Forest area.**

Finally, please provide the names and contact information for the MNRF biologists charged with reviewing AFER’s data for the Catchacoma Forest, so that we can follow up with them. We are currently pursuing options for further field studies including wetland assessments, species at risk assessments and environmental assessments. In our opinion, **these are studies that**

should be undertaken by MNR or BMFC, since land management responsibility lies with them.

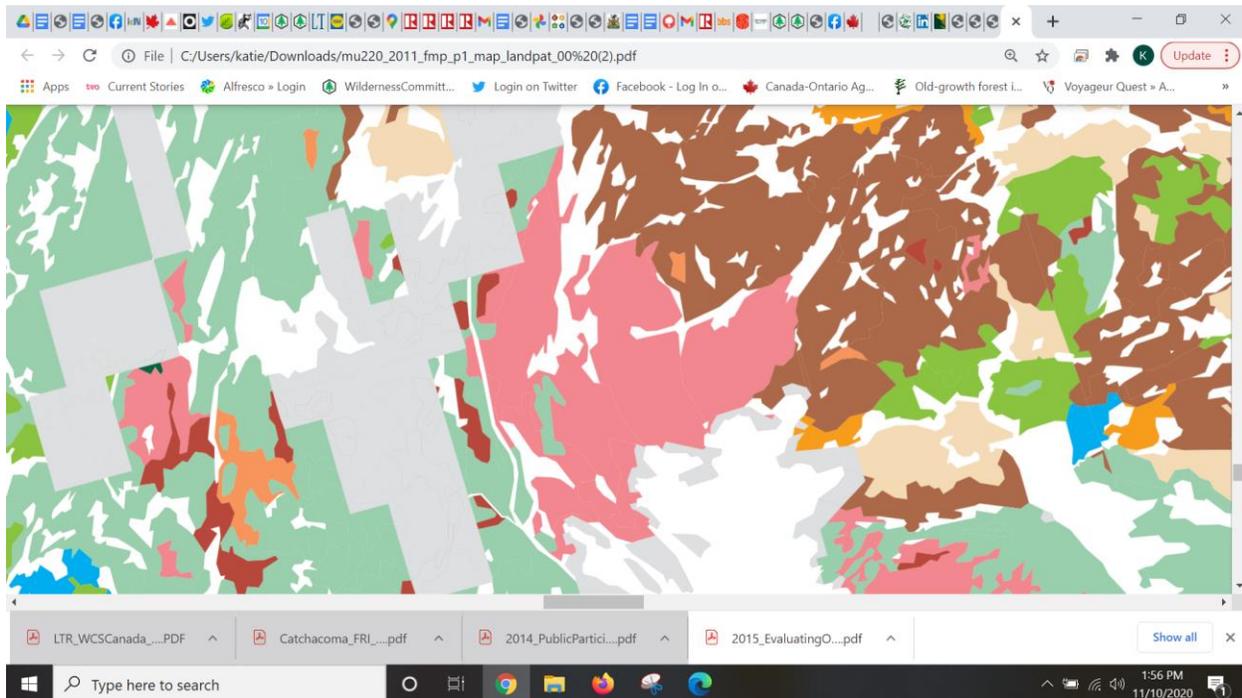
Map #1: Provided by BMFC attached to email)

Map #2: Screen shot of Catchacoma Forest, taken from FMP 2011-2021 Maps: Landscape Pattern 00--Forest Landscape Pattern

Pink represents Hesel Forest Unit

Accessed from

<https://www.efmp.lrc.gov.on.ca/eFMP/viewFmuPlan.do?fmu=220&fid=100064&type=CURRENT&pid=100064&sid=8356&pn=FP&ppyf=2011&ppyt=2021&ptyf=2011&ptyt=2016&phase=P1>



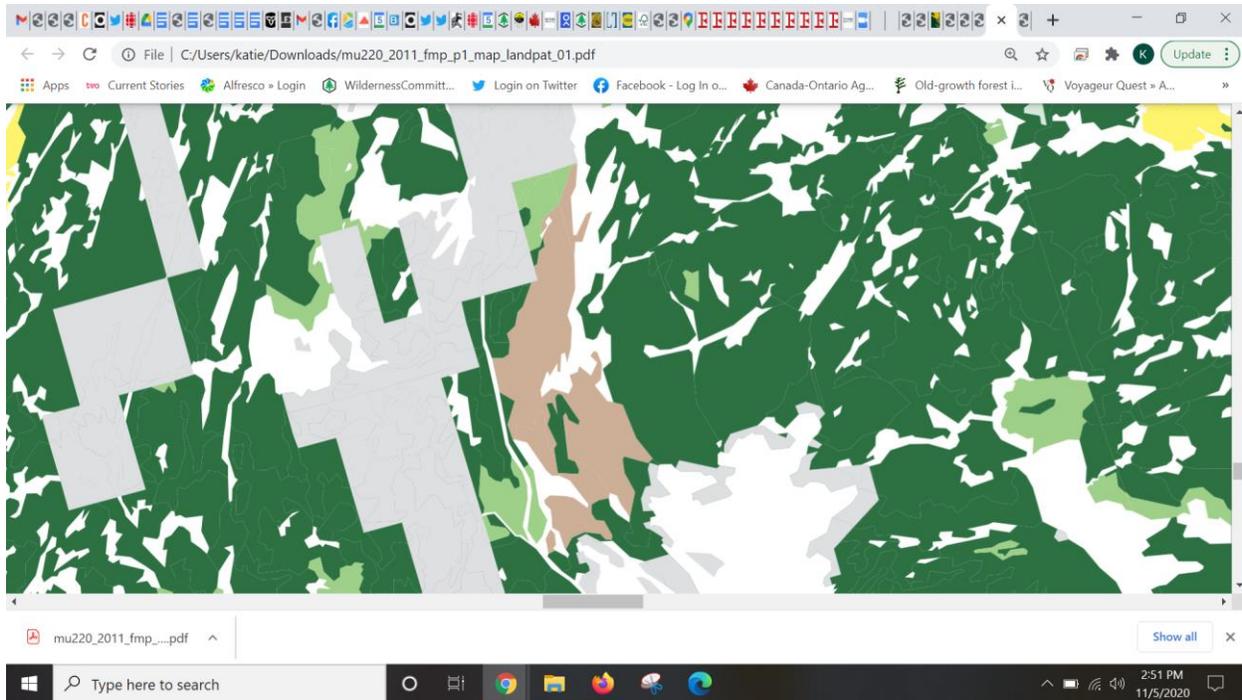
Map #3 Screenshot of Catchacoma Forest

Taken from FMP 2011-2021 Maps: Landscape Pattern 01--Seral Stages

The light pink indicates "Late" seral stage and the dark green indicates "Mature"

Accessed from:

<https://www.efmp.lrc.gov.on.ca/eFMP/viewFmuPlan.do?fmu=220&fid=100064&type=CURRENT&pid=100064&sid=8356&pn=FP&ppyf=2011&ppyt=2021&ptyf=2011&ptyt=2016&phase=P1>



Appendix A – Relevant Excerpts from the Forest Information Manual (2020)

<https://files.ontario.ca/mnrf-forest-information-manual-may-2020-en-2020-07-23.pdf>

Pg 43 – “**Values information** can be provided by any person or party at any time. The public consultation process set out in the FMPM, Part A, supports the collection and provision of information about values at any time during the development and implementation of a FMP. Information about values normally comes from the MNRF or other government staff; sustainable forest licensees and their operators; non-government organizations; third parties; other resource users; and the public. The quality of values information is related to the method used to identify and collect the information. The number of identified and confirmed values is expected to increase, and the quality of information about those values is expected to improve with each successive FMP.”

Pg 44 – “A value is considered to be a known value when sufficient information to describe its geographic location and its basic features exist. Known values will be considered in forest management planning. The MNRF determines if a value can be treated as a known value”.

Pg 44 – “the MNRF gives priority to those values that are potentially affected by proposed and optional areas of forest operations for the FMP under preparation. The MNRF provides the best available values information to planning teams for forest management planning purposes and made available throughout the planning process. The maps and information will include the values within the forest management unit for the FMP that is being written, and values that are adjacent to the forest management unit that may be affected by forest operations.

Pg 44 – “Values that are considered in forest management planning are supported by further information gathered or created from field visits, inventories, surveys, tests, or studies. The MNRF

enters and updates values information received from sustainable forest licensees and other sources into the MNRF's values information database (i.e., using LIO Editor) housed in a corporate data repository or information management system (i.e., Land Information Ontario Data Warehouse, GeoHub). The MNRF may enter into data collection arrangements with sustainable forest licensees or third parties for the purpose of obtaining values information or for confirming existing values information."

Pg 45 – "Sustainable forest licensees will identify information for new values and corrections to information about known values that are encountered during the implementation of forest management operations and provide this information to the MNRF for values database updating and for consideration in future planning initiatives and operational activities. Sustainable forest licensees are to provide this information to MNRF within the timelines and conditions set out in Part B, Section 3.3, and in detail in FIM Base and Values Technical Specifications."

Pg 45 – "Planning teams will determine and use the most current values information and determine and use updates to values information set out in Part B, Section 3.2 and Section 3.3."

Pg 50 – "The descriptive features of a value will provide sufficient detail for planning teams to determine the appropriate area of concern prescriptions and conditions to protect the existence, integrity, and health of a value. The descriptive features of a value will consist of the following information:

- (a) method, survey type, locational accuracy, or source of information that was used to identify and describe the value;
- (b) position title or stakeholder type of person(s) who discovered, collected, and provided information about the value;
- (c) date the values information was collected; and
- (d) identification of the type of value, specific enough to help with the protection of the value should it be impacted by forest operations.

Meeting these minimum requirements in declaring a value as a known value serves to identify the presence of a value and to afford it protection if necessary. The MNRF may complete additional field inspections or data collection to confirm the value and to make a complete entry into the values information database (e.g., LIO)."

Pg 52 – "There are two categories of timelines for providing values information. The first category of is associated with the FMP development and implementation; a continual update of values information data holdings. This timeline is set out in Part B, Section 3.3.1. The second category of timelines is associated with values encountered during active forest operations, in accordance with Part B, Section 9 3.3.2. The activity of value identification and confirmation is more stringent in the second category. Also, when prioritizing effort and allocation of resources, a higher priority will go to the collection of values information associated with the second category of timelines. The timing of forest management operations that may adversely impact values determines when information about those values will be exchanged between the sustainable forest licensees and the MNRF. The timelines provided in the following sections should be viewed in conjunction with the specific timelines and details provided in the FIM Base and Values Technical Specifications."

Pg 56 – “Active operations are defined as forest management operations identified in an AWS. As per the FMPM, updated information on the location and description of values that were previously unidentified (i.e., new values), incorrectly located, incorrectly described, or that no longer exist, will be exchanged between the sustainable forest licensee and the MNRF. The timelines associated with values information exchange, where active operations are involved, is provided in the FIM Base and Values Technical Specifications. The responsibilities and procedures associated with values information sharing and exchange are set out below for the two situations with defined timelines provided in the FIM technical specifications.

A) Sustainable forest licensee reports a new value, corrects location or description of previously identified value, or confirms a value no longer exists. Where the sustainable forest licensee identifies that new information about a value (e.g., new value, changed value, non-existent value) will result in the addition or change to an area of concern prescription or condition, they will provide the MNRF with the necessary documentation of the change. The MNRF updates the values database to reflect this change and notifies the sustainable forest licensee when it has occurred. The MNRF confirmation of the value no longer existing is required in instances of values associated with species at risk and where a third party is associated with the value and/or area of concern (e.g., cultural heritage, First Nation, Métis, tourism value).

B) The MNRF identifies a new value, corrects location or description of previously identified value, or confirms a value no longer exists. When the MNRF identifies and confirms the location and description of values previously unidentified (i.e., unmapped) or incorrectly located, incorrectly described, or that no longer exist, they notify the licensee. The MNRF notification provides enough detail to allow the sustainable forest licensee to assess when operations may be impacted. Subsequently, the sustainable forest licensee notifies the MNRF of the results of their assessment (e.g., timing of the operations and potential impacts). The MNRF collects and provides additional information and updates the values database in a timeline reflective of the sustainable forest licensee notification.

The above procedures, and timelines as per the FIM Base and Values Technical Specifications, are valid where area of concern planning requirements described in the FMPM have been met. In instances where a FMP amendment or a revision to an AWS is required; the above timelines will be adjusted as per the timelines associated with the amendment or revision.

Sustainable forest licensees will provide the MNRF with information about values, set out in the FIM Base and Values Technical Specifications, and the MNRF provides sustainable forest licensees with information about values for the purpose of forest management planning. If the provision of information or the location of classified values could threaten the existence, integrity, or health of a value, the Minister may withhold such information. The MNRF, in consultation with the planning team, will determine the kind of protection for such a value.”

Pg 55 – “The geographic location and basic description of a value will be available for the value to be considered as a known value. If a value does not have a geographic location, or if the basic description information about the features of a value does not exist or is insufficient to meet the minimum requirements of Section 3.1.6, then the value will not be considered as a known value and will not normally be considered in forest management planning. In some cases, although the information is incomplete, a general location or partial description of the features of a value may be

available. In such cases the MNRF may apply the precautionary principle to ensure that values are protected during forest management planning or implementation of forest management operations. The precautionary principle is defined as follows: 'In the absence of conclusive information to confirm the presence or features of a value, this principle requires the consideration of the value in the planning of road locations and area of concern prescriptions in order to ensure that the value is protected, based on the high probability of its presence and the potential that it may be affected by forest management operations in a significant and negative way.

The precautionary principle recognizes that some forest management activities may be detrimental to the existence, integrity, and health of some values or may cause irreparable damage to values. The rationale for applying the precautionary principle is to reduce the risks of significantly affecting a value in a negative way, in the absence of conclusive information about a value, by considering values in forest management planning using the best available information about those values. Members of the planning team will consider the available information and may make recommendations as to whether sufficient information exists to treat the value as a known value. Members of the planning team may also make recommendations regarding the applicability of the precautionary principle and the extent that the precautionary principle should be applied to ensure the protection of the value.

Using planning team recommendations and assessing the available information against the standards set out in Part B, Section 3.1, the MNRF determines the values that will be considered in forest management planning and to what extent the precautionary principle may apply. The MNRF may exercise reasonable latitude to designate a value as a known value, based on the availability of sufficient information, to ensure that it can be considered in forest management planning. In designating a value as a known value based on applying the precautionary principle, the MNRF provides sustainable forest licensees with this decision, an explanation of the concerns related to potential impacts from forest management, the rationale to support the decision, and the available information about the value. The MNRF makes these decisions and ensures that these decisions are carried out by the planning team. The precautionary principle is not designed to make sustainable forest licensees become the de facto collector of values information. The precautionary principle is not to be applied in circumstances where it is reasonably possible to collect field information that meets the minimum standards of section 3.1.6 to declare that a value should be considered a known value.”