



Crisis in our Forests

**A case study of
AbitibiBowater's
irresponsible forestry in
the English River Forest**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SFL	Sustainable Forest License
AB	AbitibiBowater
GFW	Global Forest Watch
FMP	Forest Management Plan
OMNR	Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
FMU	Forest Management Unit
NDPEG	Natural Disturbance Pattern Emulation Guide
ENGO	Environmental Non-governmental organizations
HCVF	High Conservation Value Forests



100%



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ABITIBIBOWATER BY THE NUMBERS

- Less than **35 per cent** of forest land controlled by AbitibiBowater remains intact.
- Less than **3 per cent** of the forest land where AbitibiBowater logs or manages forest is protected in Quebec; in Ontario, it is less than **6 per cent**.
- Area in Ontario under AbitibiBowater management: **8.7 million ha** (including 1,063,555 ha in the Whiskey Jack forest (of which they are divesting), out of a planning area of **45.1 million**. AbitibiBowater is engaging in forestry on almost **20%** of the eligible landbase in Ontario.
- Of the **49 Independent Forest Audits** posted on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website: **5** have received a recommendation that their Sustainable Forest Licence (SFL) not be extended for another **5 years**; two have received conditional extensions contingent on carrying out recommendations by the Independent Auditors. Of the **7 problematic** audits, **4 (57%)** belong to AbitibiBowater units.



KEY FINDINGS

- AbitibiBowater is the largest logging company in Canada and the world's largest newsprint manufacturer.
- AbitibiBowater manages the largest area of publicly owned forestland in Canada. It currently holds more than 19 million hectares of forested land¹, mostly in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia - an area larger overall than the state of New York.
- It is estimated that since AbitibiBowater began logging in the English River Forest in 1998, 80,000² hectares of intact forest has been lost. That is just under 8% of the Forest in only a decade.
- The English River Forest, covering about 10,320 square kilometers (km²), or 1,032,000 hectares - roughly the size of Jamaica or twice that of Prince Edward Island - is classic boreal or northern forest, characterized by rugged, rocky landscapes and sparkling mosaics of lakes and rivers.
- The woodland caribou population on the English River is one of the most southern in Ontario's continuous range; it can be found just one hour's drive north of the Trans Canada Highway.
- Because companies like AbitibiBowater have been pushing logging in Canada's Boreal Forest further and further north, intact forests are rapidly disappearing. Already 41 per cent of the treed area of the Canadian Boreal Forest has been fragmented by logging or industrial development and 45 per cent has been allocated for logging.³
- The rapid fragmentation of the English River Forest, which has intensified in the last 30 years, has been demonstrated with data obtained from Global Forest Watch.
- The independent forest audit of the English River Forest in 2005 revealed a substantial lack of precaution in the modeling of the future forest condition. The forest management took an approach of "harvest now, reduce later," according to auditors. The English River Forest was among the most heavily logged units in Ontario between 1989 and 2001.⁴
- Satellite image interpretation by Global Forest Watch Canada indicates that the English River Forest experienced 11.23% land-cover change due to human impacts, mostly from logging and road-building, during the aforementioned period alone.⁵

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AbitibiBowater, headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, is the largest logging company in Canada and the world's largest newsprint manufacturer. Through consolidation and corporate mergers, it has come to be the third largest pulp and paper in North America, and eighth largest in the world. AbitibiBowater manages the largest area of publicly owned forest land in Canada, currently holding more than 19 million hectares⁶ - an area larger than the state of New York- mostly in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia.

The logging giant is currently involved in an important restructuring process, having filed in both Canada and the US for bankruptcy protection in April 2009. Though AbitibiBowater is experiencing both market pressure to shift to a more ecologically sustainable model and a new case of operational flexibility, it has yet to present a coherent vision of how to move in a green direction.



This report, investigates, through a case study, the impact of years of mismanagement by AbitibiBowater and its most recent predecessors in Northwestern Ontario. It is published together with a French language report documenting similar mismanagement in Quebec. Both reports demonstrate that AbitibiBowater has failed government-mandated audits, misrepresented the amount of forest available for logging, overestimated available fibre, reduced old-growth areas, severely degraded caribou habitat, engaged in conflict with First Nations communities, and fragmented vast areas of intact Boreal Forest.

The English language report focuses on Ontario, primarily the English River Forest, which is sandwiched between the Dog River Matawin Forest and the Caribou Forest, as a site of intense fragmentation and degradation. The region is a critically important forest of large intact areas and crucial caribou habitat in the northern limits of the commercial Boreal Forest. Together, the three forests supply AbitibiBowater's Thunder Bay and Fort Frances mills located in Thunder Bay (Fort William) and Fort Frances Ontario. Products from these mills include: pulp, paper, newsprint, lumber and energy from burning wood waste⁷.



Introduction



“IT IS THE CONCLUSION OF THIS AUDIT THAT THE 2004 FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE ENGLISH RIVER FOREST, AND THAT THE PLANNING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS OF THE SFL WERE NOT MET BY THE COMPANY.”⁸

– independent forest audit for English River Forest



“The forests we manage represent not only a dynamic and renewable resource but also a legacy of aesthetic, recreational and cultural enrichment to preserve for future generations.”

“AbitibiBowater is committed to fostering the long-term well-being of the forests we manage for future generations through sustainable forest management and continual improvement of our forestry practices. We strive to balance ecological, social and economic forest values”.

— taken from the AbitibiBowater website, April 2009

Abitibi-Consolidated was created in 1997 by the merger of Abitibi-Price and Stone-Consolidated. In 2007, Abitibi-Consolidated and Bowater Incorporated merged to form AbitibiBowater. In addition to its extensive management of public lands in Canada, the company possesses the largest allocated harvest volume in Quebec and Ontario, the vast majority in the Boreal Forest. In Quebec alone, the company is licenced to cut 6.4 million cubic metres of timber annually, enough to fill Montreal's Olympic Stadium three and a half times.⁹ In Ontario, AbitibiBowater holds the licence for almost 7.5 million cubic metres.¹⁰

On April 17, 2009, the corporation filed for bankruptcy protection in Canada and the United States and is currently undergoing restructuring.

AbitibiBowater sells its products to more than 1,600 customers in nearly 70 countries. Most of these customers are located in Canada, the U.S. and Europe. In addition to being the world's leading newsprint manufacturer, the company is a major manufacturer of commercial printing paper and lumber products, with approximately 60 mills and other facilities in Canada and the United States¹¹. On an annual basis, the company produces nearly 4.3 million tonnes of newsprint, two and a half billion board feet of lumber¹² and two million tonnes of commercial paper used in catalogues, magazines, books, advertising pamphlets, and directories.

Since the merger of Abitibi-Consolidated and Bowater Inc., the new management of AbitibiBowater has been trying to position the company as charting a new course, in part by being more environmentally responsible. At the new company's first annual general meeting in June 2008, CEO David J. Paterson claimed,:

“We are committed to continue the growth and diversification of our product mix while positioning the Company as an industry model and the wise choice for the environmentally sensitive customer. We want to offer the best sustainable solutions to them and their consumers.”¹³

In recent months, a new suite of materials was released which promoted the company as a leader in sustainability.

The AbitibiBowater website claims “AbitibiBowater is committed to sustainable forestry practices and an environmentally sustainable approach” and to “fostering the long-term well-being of the forests [they] manage for future generations.”¹⁴ Still, the company's post-merger attempt to re-brand itself as a leader in sustainability has not succeeded. Though new CEO David J. Paterson publicly stated his desire to work collaboratively with Greenpeace to resolve the conflict resulting from Greenpeace's public markets campaign (launched in 2007), there has been little change in company operations.

Despite greater flexibility in locating future operations due to the current economic slowdown and decreased demand for forest products, things are not improving for the Boreal Forest. With tough economic times comes reduced investment in silviculture. The Ontario government and private investors are intent on replacing traditional wood products with bioenergy and biochemicals. Some analysts even suggest a rebound in demand for traditional wood products. In any scenario, the current lull in wood products is not bound to last. This report, along with a French language report about AbitibiBowater's operations in Quebec, reveals mismanagement of public forests in both provinces will continue into the future unless major shifts occur.

In the province of Quebec, this study reveals the destruction, by AbitibiBowater, of forest land in the Waswanipi-Broadback forest, in northern Quebec. Greenpeace research has revealed intense fragmentation caused by the logging roads, a lack of protected areas, conflicts with the Cree First Nations, and the destruction of critical habitat for woodland caribou, a threatened species.

Moreover, this publication underlines the consistent irresponsibility of AbitibiBowater, as demonstrated by its inadequate certification of this territory and the fact that the company is actively logging in a proposed protected area called Assinica. Decisions made by the senior management of the corporation only consider the short-term needs of regional communities such as the community of Lebel-sur-Quévillon.

The English River Forest

“THIS AREA IS GOING TO BECOME THE GLOBAL ISSUE FOR CONSERVATION I WOULD PREDICT FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS.”

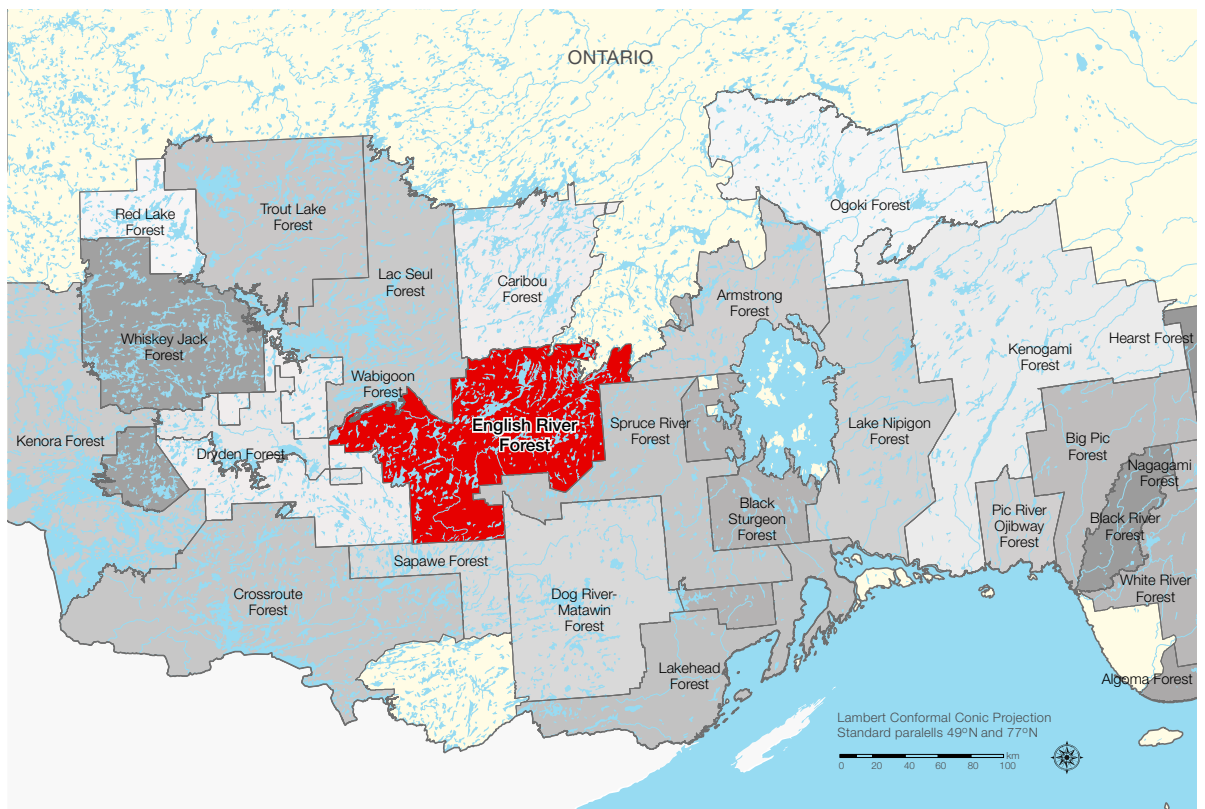
– Peter Lee, director of Global Forest Watch

The Boreal Forest has evolved for over 10,000 years into a diverse and awe inspiring landscape of granite outcrops, lakes, rivers and marshes interspersed with pine, spruce, aspen, poplar and birch forests. The Boreal also includes the forest floor covered with lichens, mosses and a wide variety of wildflowers and ferns.¹⁶ The importance of the Boreal Forest for sustaining bird populations is well established; it is home to at least one billion birds, including eagles, hawks, owls, geese. Thirty percent of North America’s songbirds and forty per cent of its waterfowl (more than 300 species in total) nest in the Boreal’s forested areas and wetlands leading bird scientists to dub the Boreal “the Nursery of the North.”^{17,18}



The English River Forest, covering about 10,320 square kilometers (km²), or 1,032,000 hectares – roughly the size of Jamaica or twice that of Prince Edward Island - is classic boreal or northern forest, characterized by rugged, rocky landscapes and sparkling mosaics of lakes and rivers. The forest is bordered by Wabakimi Provincial Park to the northeast, the Spruce River Forest to the east and south, the Dog River Matawin Forest and the Sapawe Forest to the south, the Wabagoon Forest to the west, the Lac Seul Forest to the northwest and the Caribou Forest to the North. All save Wabagoon and Lac Seul are also managed by AbitibiBowater.

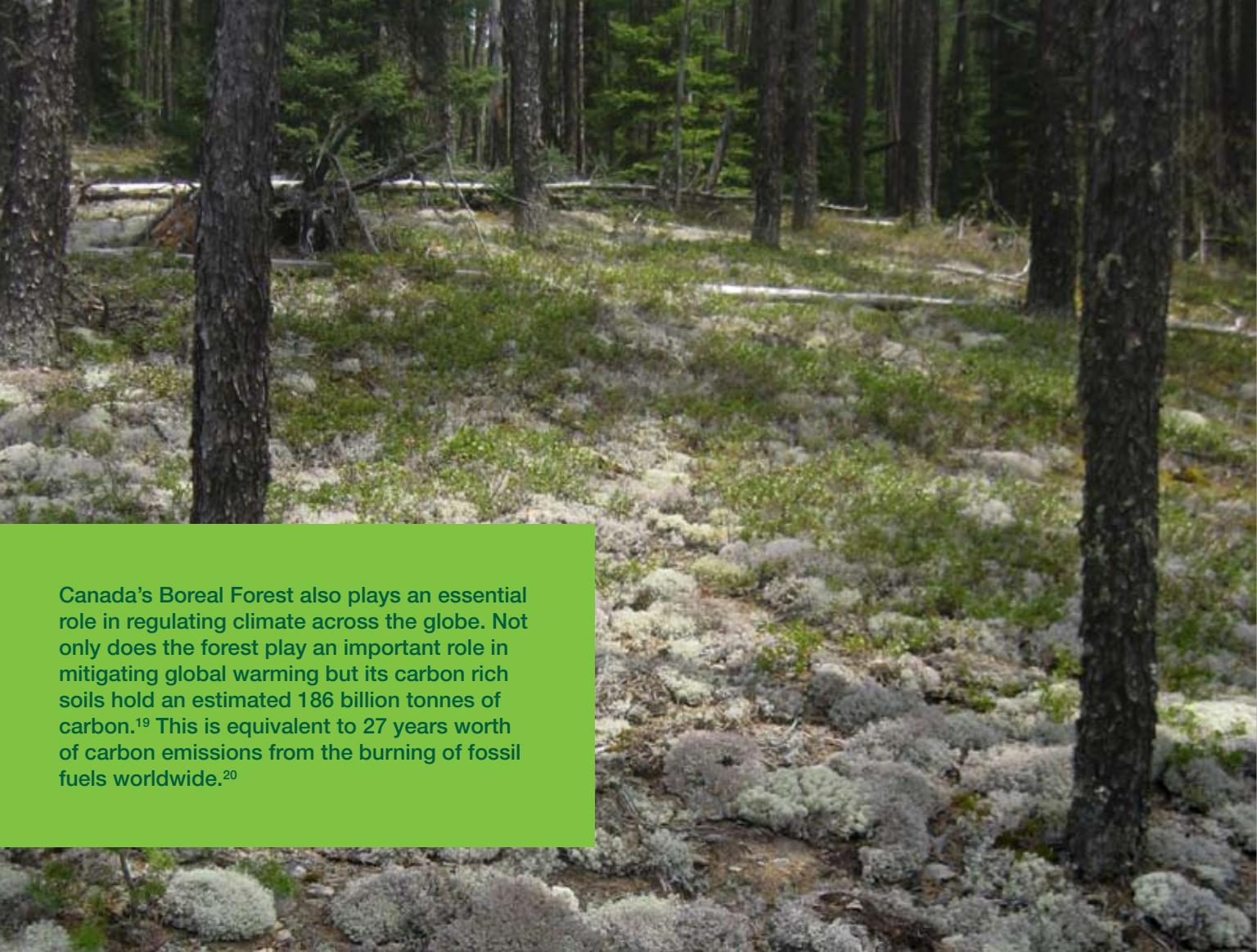
ENGLISH RIVER FOREST LOCATION IN ONTARIO



The forest, populated mostly by spruce, poplar and jack pine trees, and characterized by rugged, rocky landscapes and mosaics of lakes and rivers, is a classic representation of boreal or northern forest. Yet it is southerly enough to have scatterings of red and white pine, the forest giants more typically associated with the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region. It is significantly situated just north of the iconic Height of Land, so that its waters flow into the arctic watershed through the Albany into James Bay, or west through its namesake English River, and eventually into the Nelson River and Hudson Bay. Indeed, the English River Forest is the headwater of these important river systems.

The English River Forest is an important habitat for a number of emblematic Boreal species, including moose, wolves, and marten. The Great Grey Owl and countless species of songbirds and waterfowl breed here – as do a number of species at risk, including the woodland caribou, the bald eagle, and possibly wolverine. The woodland caribou population along the English River is one of the most southern in Ontario's continuous range and can be found one hour's drive north of the Trans Canada Highway.

The global significance of Canada's Boreal Forest, encompassing as it does a large percentage (20%) of the world's remaining intact forests, being increasingly recognized. Using key conservation values, Global Forest Watch Canada has found that Northwestern Ontario is one of the most globally significant constellation of the world's Boreal Forest conservation values. Peter Lee, director of Global Forest Watch, has said "This area is going to become the global issue for conservation I would predict for the next ten years."¹⁵



Canada's Boreal Forest also plays an essential role in regulating climate across the globe. Not only does the forest play an important role in mitigating global warming but its carbon rich soils hold an estimated 186 billion tonnes of carbon.¹⁹ This is equivalent to 27 years worth of carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels worldwide.²⁰

MISMANAGEMENT OF THE ENGLISH RIVER FOREST

Like many forest units in Ontario, the English River has a complex history, and management of the area has changed hands many times.

Logging and prospecting began in the region in 1881 when the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) opened²¹. From 1935 to 1940, Great Lakes Paper managed the area²² and by 1950, the Patricia Lumber Company Ltd had land holdings in the South-Western portion of the forest.²³ By 1963, the English River–Sowden forest was created, and was close to the size and shape of current English River Forest. Between then and 2004, through mergers and amalgamation, the former English River and Brightsands Forests have been variously resized; in 1980, the boundaries of the English River Forest were established as a Forest Management Agreement.²⁴

In 1989, the Great Lakes Forest Products company was sold and became Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd.²⁵ In 1992, Canadian Pacific Forest Products changed its name to Avenor Inc.²⁶ and in 1998, the Ontario government created the Sustainable Forest Licence.²⁷ That same year Avenor was purchased by Bowater Pulp and Paper Canada Ltd., and the SFL was transferred to Bowater.²⁸ Brightsands and the former English River Forest amalgamated into one management unit.²⁹ And, as mentioned previously, in 2007 Bowater and Abitibi Consolidated amalgamated as one company.

LOGGING HISTORY IN THE ENGLISH RIVER

Between 1965 and 1970, the development of an extensive road network led to an increase in logging in the English River portion of the licence area, away from waterways.

In the 1970s, the Brightsands portion of the forest had not yet been significantly accessed and there was little harvest until 1976.³⁰ Access to this Northeastern section is limited relative to the rest of forest because of large water body complexes, more rugged terrain and the lack of road development. The richer sandy and clay soils³¹ and more gentle topography of the southwest have also been more attractive for road building and forestry activity over the years. Not coincidentally, the area that remains largely undisturbed due to a sparse road network is the only area in the forest unit where woodland caribou continue to persist.³²

HISTORICAL FOREST CONDITION

In the late 1800s, caribou occupied the entire English River Forest. They are now confined to a small part of the North-eastern portion. In the 'Report of the Survey and Exploration of Northern Ontario' prepared in 1900, there was already documentation of alteration to the natural forest condition. The majority of this disturbance occurred through increased fires, caused by railroads and prospectors, which caused large areas to be burned down to bedrock. These fires were likely started by prospectors to make their work easier. In areas that were unburned, there were classic examples of old growth features like moss and duff that was two feet thick.³³ At the time of the 1900 survey, the forest was dominated by small spruce and jack pine. These species were not considered fit for timber: surveyors were looking for large red and white pine, not small saw log and pulp.³⁴

The current Forest Management Plan (FMP) claims that forest composition has changed little through time; it also predicts that the English River forest will continue to have the same species composition, estimating that Spruce will be 35-50%, of population, Poplar 10-20% and Jackpine 20-40%. Other species represent various smaller percentages.³⁵

This model is questionable as an accurate predictor of future species composition, because it assumes effective silvicultural practices and no impacts from climate change. Research has demonstrated that intact Boreal Forest landscapes have greater tree species diversity than managed, second-growth Boreal landscapes³⁶ and are better able to withstand the impacts of global warming³⁷ – so it follows that a fragmented and greatly disturbed forest such as the English River Forest would not maintain the same species composition as seen historically.

FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

The English River Forest is home to a number of communities, including Ignace, and Savant Lake. The Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation (WLON) and the Saugeen First Nation (SFN) are adjacent to the Forest. These two communities and Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation (LDMLFN) have traditional territories that include the English River Forest.


The draft Forest Management Plan for the English River describes the forest as providing “important areas for trapping, hunting, angling, gathering of medicinal plants, and other traditional activities that help maintain community values and a connection with their traditions and history.”³⁸

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources is required by the Class Environmental Assessment for forest management to negotiate more equal participation in forest management by First Nations communities; paragraph 21 of the Sustainable Forest Licence requires the same. In spite of these requirements - and their active participation in the 2000 and 2004 English River plans - the 2006 Independent forest audit found that Wabigoon Lake was still not satisfied that they were sharing adequately in the benefits of forest management³⁹.

Lac Des Milles Lac, under new administrative structure, has expressed enthusiasm for engaging upcoming forest management planning.⁴⁰ The Saugeen First Nation has refused to participate in the Forest Management planning process⁴¹.

Danger: AbitibiBowater's legacy of degradation






The majority of the English River Forest has experienced widespread anthropogenic (human-caused) impacts. Between 1942 and 2006, 263,000 hectares were cut.⁴² This is the equivalent of 36.7 million m³, 1,016 square miles or more than 4 times the size of the City of Toronto (Toronto is 243.2 square miles or 629.88 square km).

Though development in the forest dates back to 1900⁴³, the last 30 years have seen a tremendous change in the forest as road building and forestry operations have moved further into the more intact parts of the forest. In the last 11 years since Bowater (and now AbitibiBowater) has been logging in the English River Forest, 80,000 hectares have been degraded and fragmented and the amount of intact forest in the licence has decreased to 314,000 ha. 80,000 hectares is just under 8% of the entire forest area and 25% of the remaining intact area left in the English River.

Though little of the English River Forest is protected (only 8%)⁴⁴, the remaining unprotected intact areas are of enormous ecological value. Yet what little remains that is intact and of high conservation value is likely to be logged in the next 30 years.



There are many reasons why it is critical to maintain and protect large intact forest areas. “Large intact forest” is defined as an area larger than 500km² (123,552 acres) unfragmented by roads, logging operations, power lines and other imposed infrastructure. Such a forest is large enough to maintain its ecological integrity and sustain healthy animal and bird populations.⁴⁵ Intact forests also help to mitigate both global warming and the impacts of a changing climate through storing massive amounts of carbon, and providing larger forests with the resiliency needed to survive ecological change which comes with a rapidly warming planet.^{46, 47}



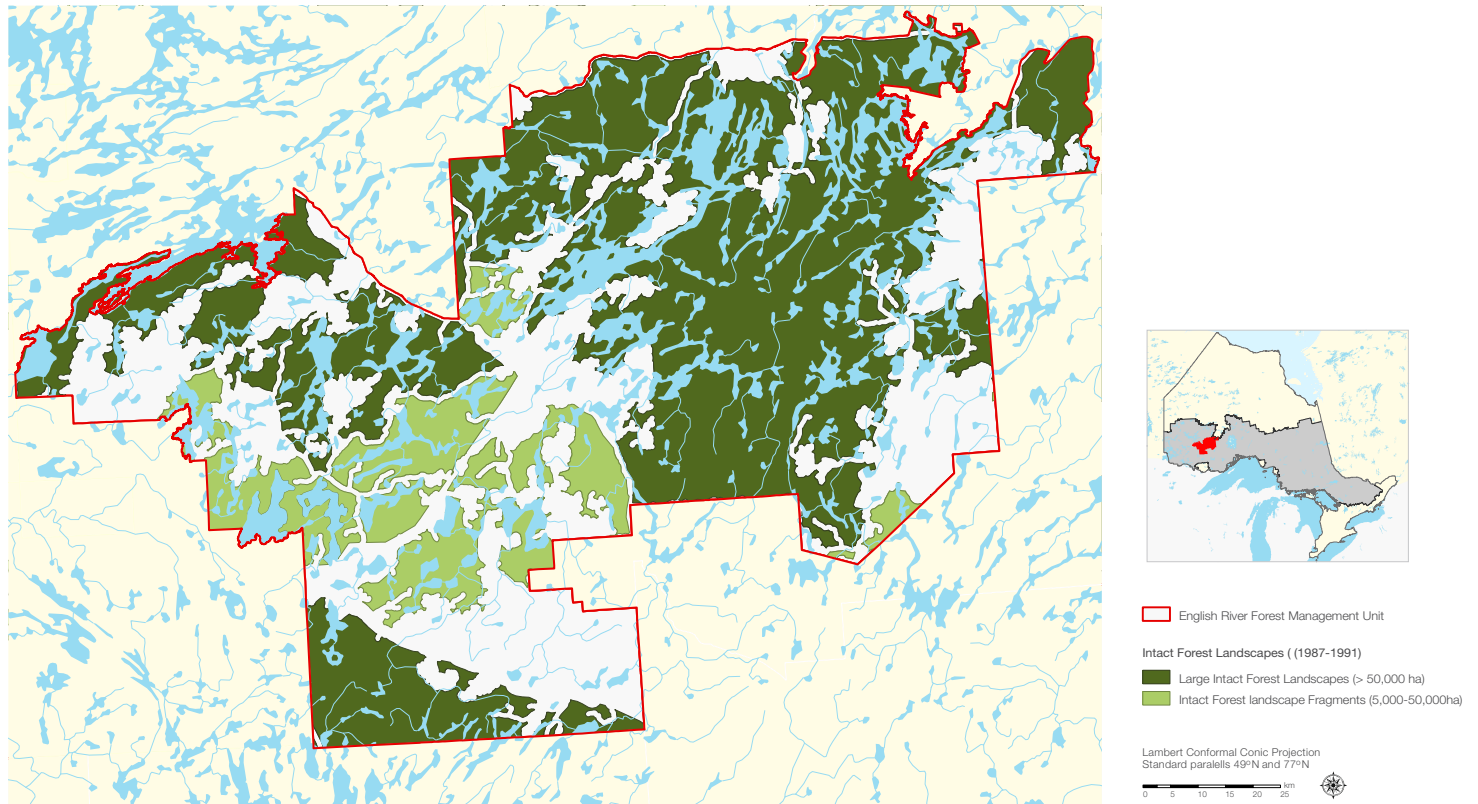
IMPORTANCE OF INTACT FORESTS

Intact forests are natural ecosystems within a forest region, essentially undisturbed by anthropogenic activity and sufficiently large to resist the majority of natural disturbances. Intact forests are extremely valuable for conservation on regional, national and global scales.

Scientific evidence overwhelmingly concludes that intactness is a critical value to maintain in forest landscapes ; it has been designated as a high conservation value which requires special management and protection within the Forest Stewardship Council's National Boreal Standard.⁴⁸ Such intact forests fit the internationally-recognized definition of Endangered Forests.⁴⁹

That the rapid fragmentation of the English River Forest has intensified in the last 30 years is demonstrated by data obtained from Global Forest Watch. It is estimated that since AbitibiBowater began logging in the English River Forest in 1998, 80,000⁵⁰ hectares of intact forest has been logged.

Intact Forest Landscapes in the English River, 1987-1991

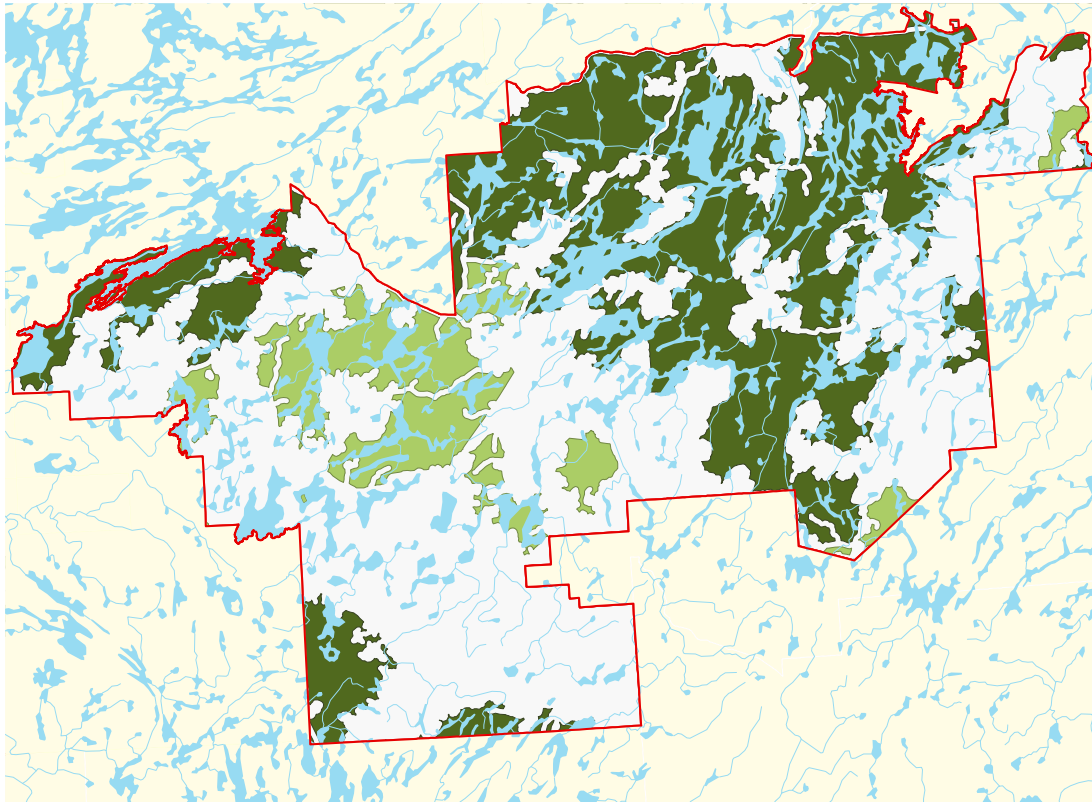


Because companies like AbitibiBowater have been pushing logging in Canada's Boreal Forest further north, intact forests are rapidly disappearing. Already 41 per cent of the treed area of the Canadian Boreal Forest has been fragmented by logging or industrial development, and 45 per cent has been allocated for logging.⁵¹ This increased fragmentation will likely push threatened species like the boreal population of the woodland caribou to the point of extinction in Northern Ontario, as well as threaten the biodiversity of Boreal Forest ecosystems generally.

Since AbitibiBowater controls some of the least-disturbed remaining intact forests in Ontario's Boreal, and has been fragmenting and degrading them for decades, they bear responsibility for the impacts of loss of intact forest.

By increasing greenhouse gas emissions and eliminating carbon storage, increased fragmentation is a key driver of climate change. By fragmenting forests, AbitibiBowater is also causing them to become more vulnerable to global warming through increased insect outbreaks and forest fires (which further increases greenhouse gas emissions).⁵²


Intact Forest Landscapes in the English River, 2000-2002



“BECAUSE COMPANIES LIKE ABITIBIOWATER HAVE BEEN PUSHING LOGGING IN CANADA’S BOREAL FOREST FURTHER NORTH, INTACT FORESTS ARE RAPIDLY DISAPPEARING.”

Wildlife at Risk





Over the last two decades, AbitibiBowater – in partnership with the Government of Ontario – has been proactively ensuring the forest is managed in a manner that supports a self-sustaining population of woodland caribou in the managed forests of Ontario.

At this time the Ministry believes there is no need to add new protected spaces for that purpose (maintaining healthy caribou populations) in the Managed Forest. They believe by managing the intervening landscape to ensure a significant portion of suitable habitat, a self-sustaining woodland caribou population will be maintained.

-FACT SHEET, AbitibiBowater and Woodland Caribou, March 26, 2009

Current range condition and extent are required to maintain potential for self-sustaining population. Further degradation of the current range may compromise the ability to meet the recovery goal.

-Scientific Review for the Identification of Critical Habitat for Woodland Caribou, Boreal Population

In the English River Forest, species that have been identified as “threatened” or of “special concern” in the company’s own forest management plan include the woodland caribou,⁵³ the wolverine⁵⁴, and the bald eagle⁵⁵. The great grey owl is identified as a ‘featured species’.⁵⁶ The Ontario population of Boreal woodland caribou is designated as threatened and the wolverine’s status is designated as of special concern in the federal government’s species at risk registry.⁵⁷

STATUS OF WOLVERINE

Historically, the wolverine ranged across most of Ontario. By 1955, its range had receded substantially to an area just north of the English River Forest. The wolverine has been extirpated from the English River Forest since the 1950s but wolverines still occupied much of Northern Ontario, including the Caribou Forest and forests in Northeastern Ontario.⁵⁸

The wolverine’s species range in Ontario has declined by more than 50%. Wolverines, which have a very low tolerance for human activity, are experiencing an increase in resource extraction activities within their present range – and lack resiliency needed to respond, due to a low reproductive rate. As a result, preliminary recommendations from the Ontario Boreal Wolverine Project⁵⁹ have suggested that wolverines require “large tracts of undisturbed forest about 20,000km² in size.”⁶⁰

Yet since 1975, the range of the wolverine has receded significantly; they are now found in a swath of Northwestern Ontario and a small pocket in Northeastern Ontario, mainly north of the undertaking (the line that separates the commercial forest from the non-allocated forest).⁶¹

WOODLAND CARIBOU: THE CANARY IN THE COAL MINE

Though historically, woodland caribou would have once been found throughout the English River Forest, their range is now limited to the northeastern part of the forest, where there is both connectivity to a protected area and a sparse road network. The northward recession of caribou range has been well documented; the English River Forest perfectly demonstrates that when forest is disturbed, populations will suffer, and when there is little fragmentation, such as in the Northeastern region, populations will persist. AbitibiBowater is directly responsible for this loss of caribou habitat and the increase of logging that has occurred in the last 11 years.

The draft Forest Management Plan for the English River itself notes how range recession has resulted from:

“the combination of loss of coniferous mature forest habitat, increased wolf predation resulting from greater numbers of moose and deer, increase in parasitic disease, and increased human hunting and disturbance that has been directly related to the expansion of forest harvesting and access has been cited as the probable cause of their decline.”⁶²

The English River Forest Management plan also discusses how caribou currently exist year round in the English River Forest and form a component of the current southern extent of continuous range occupancy for this species in Ontario.⁶³ They have a precarious hold on their range, and large areas of suitable habitat, especially suitable winter habitat and calving habitat, are increasingly at a premium.⁶⁴

One of the effects of logging operations by AbitibiBowater and its predecessors is that there is now far less mature forest for caribou, limiting year-round use to a relatively small area which has fewer current and future opportunities for good calving sites, refuge, and wintering areas.⁶⁵



In April 2009, the Canadian government, through Environment Canada, released the “Scientific Review for the Identification of Critical Habitat for woodland caribou, Boreal Population” a legal requirement, due to the caribou’s status as a threatened species. The report examines three major questions: 1) What is the current distribution of Boreal caribou populations in Canada; 2) Where are the local populations within the current distribution; and 3) What are the habitat conditions required for the persistence of local populations?⁶⁶

The report found that, “suitable boreal caribou habitat is characterized by large tracts of mature to old conifers”⁶⁷ with some variability among regions in vegetation types used.

For local populations in Ontario, which includes both the English River Forest and the Caribou Forest, the assessment concludes that the population trend is unknown - although the population size is still above critical, the population being self sustaining is dependent on low disturbance.⁶⁸ The report claims that “population units must be identified before resiliency can be assessed.”⁶⁹ The report also notes a north/south gradient with “higher anthropogenic disturbance in southern portion of extent.”⁷⁰ With the report highlighting the precautionary principle as an important management principal, companies like AbitibiBowater should not further fragment or degrade critical caribou habitat, and must demonstrate what this latest science will mean for their forestry management. The company has a duty to shift management towards using a precautionary approach when logging in caribou range.

Unfortunately, at the time of printing, AbitibiBowater has not come forward with proposals for additional actions to protect woodland caribou and their critical habitat, or signs of how they will be incorporating the findings of the Caribou Science Panel into current and future management plans.



AbitibiBowater fails provincial audits

extended

“IT IS THE CONCLUSION OF THIS AUDIT THAT THE 2004 FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE ENGLISH RIVER FOREST, AND THAT THE PLANNING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS OF THE SFL WERE NOT MET BY THE COMPANY. FOR THESE REASONS THE AUDIT TEAM RECOMMENDS THAT THE LICENCE FOR THE ENGLISH RIVER FOREST SHOULD NOT BE EXTENDED.” ⁷³



The Ontario government requires that forest management operations in a given Forest Management Unit (FMU) be scrutinized by an independent forest audit, conducted every 5 years. The audit of the English River Forest in 2005 revealed a substantial lack of precaution in the modeling of future forest conditions. The company's forest management took an approach of "harvest now, reduce later" and certainly the English River Forest was among the heaviest logged units in Ontario between 1989 and 2001.⁷¹ Satellite image interpretation by Global Forest Watch Canada indicates that the English River Forest experienced 11.23% land-cover change due to human impacts, mostly from logging and road-building, during this period alone.⁷²

It is not then surprising that the Independent Forest Audit found the English River Forest to be managed unsustainably, so much so that the auditors recommended that Bowater's forest licence not be

The audit team stated that "the Company has increased the present harvest at the expense of the future harvest level".⁷⁴

The audit went on to state: "when the actual harvest yields that were obtained on the Brightsands Forest (125 m³/ha) and the former English River Forest (131 m³/ha) are compared with the yields expected in the 2004 Forest Management Plan, which range between 157 and 165 m³/ha through to year 2064, it is apparent that the magnitude of the overestimate is in the order of 20%."⁷⁵

That the company relied on an unreasonably high assumption of extant timber was revealed by auditors through verification of:

- (a) the yields from the original two units that the current forest contains
- (b) the yields used in adjacent forests, and
- (c) the volumes that were actually being logged compared to the numbers being used in the model.

The planning that occurred over the past two 5 year management plans has consistently overestimated the amount of area economically available for logging in this forest. Though improved, the current management plan for the English River will further affect the health of the forest. "The audit team believes that not all of the timber that was considered to be available in the 2004 FMP is economically feasible to harvest."⁷⁶ By not being more cautious, the company forces itself to make desperate choices by the end of each Plan cycle, and put premature attention on additional logging areas.

In the English River Forest, under the current management scenario, the habitat for 75% of the wildlife species (including woodland caribou and marten) is set to drop by 44% over the next four decades. This could mean the possible extirpation – if not extinction – of several key species.

Additionally, targets for the amount of old growth areas in the Forest Management Unit have also been set precariously low which could result in additional impacts on old-growth dependent species. This was noted by the audit team, which "has concerns that the process used to identify old growth targets, and the targets themselves, are deficient".⁷⁷

The final conclusion of the audit team was serious and unusually reprimanding: "It is the conclusion of this audit that the 2004 Forest Management Plan does not provide for sustainable management of the English River Forest, and that the planning and reporting requirements of the SFL were not met by the Company."⁷⁸

Given the severity and number of issues with Forest management planning in this forest, there are many changes that need to occur to reinstate AbitibiBowater's social licence to continue logging in this heavily fragmented forest region.

Inadequate Protection



Though there is still some debate about the minimum size of a protected area that is required to maintain ecological integrity, there is a consensus that Ontario's current level of protection is not adequate. Currently, less than 10% percent of Ontario's land base is protected from logging. It has been suggested by some of the latest Caribou science that "the need for refugia for woodland caribou situated at large distances from human landscape disturbances" would require more protection as "even the largest protected areas, such as Woodland Caribou Provincial Park (4,500 km²) and Wabakimi Provincial Park (8,920 km²), may be insufficient in themselves for maintaining woodland caribou in northern Ontario."⁷⁹

This assessment sits in stark contrast to AbitibiBowater's perspective on protected areas. The company has a long history of fighting the creation of new protected areas, of not protecting forests, and of not putting forth proposals for protected areas. Currently less than 6 per cent of the forest land where AbitibiBowater holds a permit is protected in Ontario. AbitibiBowater's unwillingness to propose deferrals and protection is particularly bleak in comparison to their proportion of harvest and volume.

Within the context of protected areas in Ontario, the English River Forest has very little protection, only 8 %. If the Boreal Population of woodland caribou have a chance of persisting in the English River Forest, then the remaining intact areas in the former Brightsands Forest must be set aside as a new protected area.

ABITIBIBOWATER PREVENTS FOREST PROTECTION

The Room to Grow framework, first developed as part of the Ontario Forest Accord, was an agreement between government, industry and conservation organizations which led to the Ontario's Living Legacy land use plan. The framework was endorsed by the Minister of Natural Resources in 2002 when he accepted the final recommendations of the Ontario Forest Accord Advisory Board. In July 2003, Room to Grow was officially adopted as part of Ontario's forest management rules, under the Declaration Order passed by the provincial cabinet. It replaced the 1994 Class Environmental Assessment for Timber Management on Crown lands in Ontario.

Prior to the Room to Grow framework, the tension between industrial demand for wood and the need to complete Ontario's protected areas system was high and often led to site-specific controversies. Room to Grow was intended to change the nature of this process, making it cooperative, predictable and balanced – setting a tremendous precedent. Conservation groups in Ontario accepted this commitment at face value and, in cooperation with Ministry and forest industry staff, have invested a significant amount of staff time and resources in the identification of candidate protected areas in response to Room to Grow triggers, particularly with Bowater (now AbitibiBowater) and LongLac.

ROOM TO GROW TRIGGERS

The Room to Grow process is intended to be initiated when one or more of the following occurs:

- “There is a permanent increase in wood supply above a benchmark;
- There is industrial expansion that results in additional harvesting;
- The forest industry voluntarily initiates the process, e.g. to pursue certification; or
- There is a mill closure and fibre used by the mill returns to the Crown for distribution.”

From ROOM TO GROW LESSONS LEARNED BASED ON BOWATER AND LONGLAC TRIGGERS Ontario Nature

One of the conditions for AbitibiBowater being granted a new licence in 2001 was that the company would identify new protected areas in its tenures by finishing their commitments to the Room to Grow process. At the beginning of the process, AbitibiBowater expressed agreement in filling both major and moderate gaps in representation, but late in the process (2006) the company claimed they were unsure whether they would fill both categories of protection gaps. Eight years later, the process of expanding the network of protected areas has been abandoned.

HIGH CONSERVATION VALUES IN THE ENGLISH RIVER FOREST

Because AbitibiBowater has done so little work on identifying high conservation value areas and making proposals for protection based on that research, Greenpeace commissioned Global Forest Watch to develop maps that highlight priority areas for deferrals and protection in the intact Boreal Forest. The maps were created using ecological values and the most current landsat data.

Forest landscapes that remain ecologically intact (>50,000 ha) and the remaining intact forest landscape fragments (5,000-50,000 ha for boreal ecozones; 1,000-50,000 ha for temperate ecozones) were initially selected as the primary units of analysis. A short list of nine key ecological values were selected based on the availability of geospatial data:

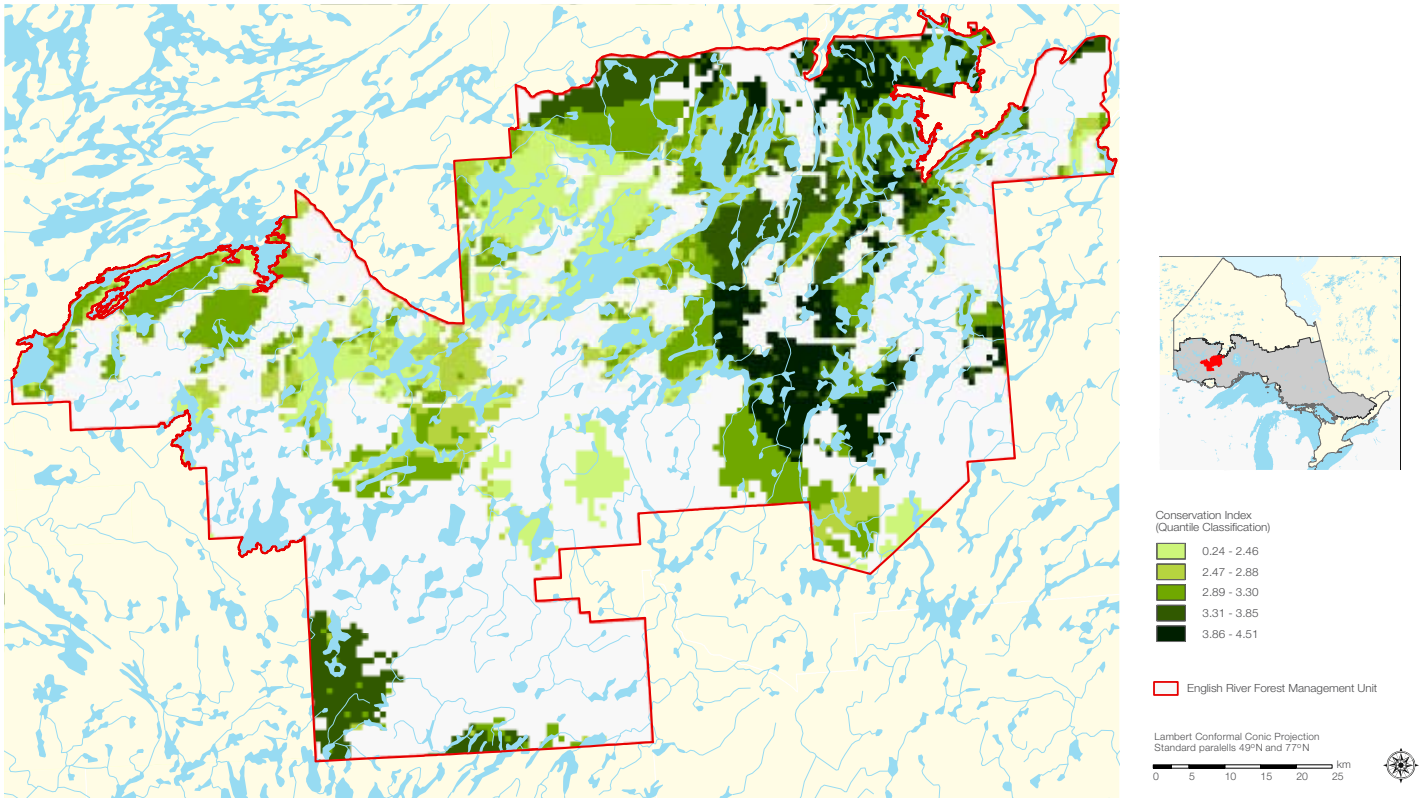
1. Relative Size of Intact Forest Landscapes;
2. Soil Organic Carbon;
3. Net Biome Productivity;
4. Species Diversity – Combined Trees, Birds, Mammals, Reptiles and Amphibians;
5. Key focal species – woodland caribou;
6. Potential Old-growth;
7. Aquatic density per watershed;
8. Wetlands, and;
9. Proximity to Protected areas

These ecological values included: physical and biological components, a range of species groups, a focus on climate amelioration values and a selection of wetland, aquatic and terrestrial values.

By ranking the remaining intact forest areas based on their ecological significance, we were able to determine priority areas for conservation.

The following map highlights the areas in the English River Forest of the highest conservation value that should be placed under immediate deferral and prioritized for permanent protection.

| High Conservation Value Map for the English River Forest



CLEARCUT SIZE

The province of Ontario uses a Natural Disturbance Pattern Emulation Guide (NDPEG) which requires that 80% of clearcuts in the Boreal Forest are less than 260 hectares in size.

The clearcut size regulations are consistently disregarded in forest management plans, and in the case of the English River Forest, the requirements have not been met – with only 73 per cent (96 of 131) of the planned clearcuts being less than 260 hectares in size. This failure was a result of finding compromise with conflicting plan objectives. The 2009-2019 plan outlines 35 clearcuts larger than 260 ha, ranging in size from 269 to 15, 897 hectares. 89% of the total area planned for harvest for the next 5 years (28,658 ha) is within clearcuts greater than 260 hectares. The maximum size of clearcut area is 15, 897 hectares; the average size is 1, 984 hectares.⁸⁰

The average size of protected areas outside of Wabakimi Provincial Park is 13,151 ha⁸¹, smaller than some of the largest clearcuts.

A photograph of a logging site. In the foreground, several large, cut logs are piled up, showing their grey bark and light-colored wood. The background shows a cleared area with some remaining trees and a cloudy sky. The overall scene suggests a forest under pressure or degradation.

Multiple forests under pressure: AbitibiBowater's legacy of degradation in the Caribou Forest & the Dog River Matawin Forest



The three forest tenures managed and operated by AbitibiBowater which feed the Thunder Bay Mill form a north-south block. The Dog River Matawin Forest, to the south of The English River Forest, has virtually no intact forest left. Its most recent audit concluded that the forest management plan was not being adhered to and the audit team recommended that AbitibiBowater's licence not be extended. The Dog River Matawin forest has no large intact areas left and woodland caribou have been entirely extirpated from the forest.

To the north of the English River unit is the Caribou Forest, where there is still substantial intact forest left in place and where caribou populations are relatively healthy. Along with the Ogoki Forest, the Caribou Forest has the highest proportion of intactness and high conservation values in Ontario. This forest borders both the unallocated Boreal Forest and Wabakimi Provincial Park, making it an important area for connectivity to a protected area and critically important for many other conservation values due to its high proportion of large, healthy, intact areas.

Unfortunately, the Caribou Forest is seeing rapid fragmentation, despite relatively little logging activity at this time. Both the north-west and the south-east corners have been heavily logged and fragmented; there are currently plans to build new primary logging roads in the centre of the Forest, in close proximity to the St. Raphael Signature Site, further degrading this important protected area.

Based on past practice in both the Dog River Matawin Forest and the English River Forest, there are reasons for great concern over what kind of logging practices will be employed in the Caribou Forest. Although AbitibiBowater has applied for Forest Stewardship Council certification in this tenure, they have yet to propose new protected areas and it is unclear if the high conservation values associated with large remaining intact areas will be protected. Certainly, the company's plans to build new roads through intact forest and caribou habitat are a major concern. If similar practices as seen in AbitibiBowater's other tenures in this region are employed, we can expect to see large scale and rapid fragmentation in one of the most ecologically valuable forests in the allocated Boreal forest region.



Conclusion



The English River Forest has gone from a healthy, largely intact forest of classic Boreal characterized by beautiful rugged landscapes, sparkling mosaics of lakes and rivers, spruce, poplar and jack pine forests, to a heavily fragmented forest unlikely to be able to support woodland caribou and possibly other important wildlife species in the near future. Through a decade of mismanagement by AbitibiBowater, the English River Forest has been degraded to a point where the ecological integrity of the forest is greatly compromised.

Because companies like AbitibiBowater have been pushing logging in Canada's Boreal Forest further and further north, intact forests are rapidly disappearing. Already 41 per cent of the treed area of the Boreal Forest has been fragmented by logging or industrial development, and 45 per cent has been allocated for logging.⁸² This increased fragmentation will likely push threatened species to extinction in Northern Ontario, and threaten the biodiversity of Boreal Forest ecosystems generally.

AbitibiBowater bears much responsibility for this degradation; the company must take responsibility for ensuring that what remains of intact and high conservation value forest is protected for the long term. It can do so by applying the following principles to the English River and other forests under its management:

1. Identify all existing intact forests
2. Defer logging in these areas to allow time to develop comprehensive High Conservation Value Forest analyses
3. Work with ENGOs such as Greenpeace to identify candidate areas for protection of sufficient size to protect woodland caribou.
4. Lobby government, jointly with ENGOs, to have these areas formally protected.

We cannot afford to let AbitibiBowater repeat the mistakes of their past in the English River or other forests they control. As we've seen, AbitibiBowater has failed multiple government-mandated audits in multiple tenures; audit teams have even recommended that their licence be revoked. This history of proven mismanagement should be a clear warning that forest of high ecological value cannot be left to companies who have relinquished their social and ecological licence to operate.

THROUGH A DECADE OF MISMANAGEMENT BY ABITIBIBOWATER, THE ENGLISH RIVER FOREST HAS BEEN DEGRADED TO A POINT WHERE THE ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF THE FOREST IS GREATLY COMPROMISED.

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