A Canadian ENGO Vision for Boreal FSC Certification
September 6, 2002

Stretching across most of the country's north, Canada's boreal forest is one of the largest frontier forests on the planet. It contains some of the wildest, most intact and healthy natural ecosystems in the world. The more southern reaches of this northern forest are already developed with extensive logging operations, roads, and settlements. The northern boreal remains largely untouched by industrial development. Throughout the boreal, the opportunity and the need exists to protect this important forest from the impacts of logging and development and to protect natural ecosystems and the communities that depend upon them.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international organization that develops standards for well-managed forests through the participation of its four constituent groups: the Aboriginal, economic, environmental and social chambers.

This document expresses the Canadian environmental community's vision of what FSC standards need to accomplish to set a high bar for forest management. A strong FSC standard is an important component of a boreal forest conservation strategy that includes putting conservation first, and maintaining the health and integrity of our boreal forest and the people and communities that depend on it.

Meeting this vision will ensure that forest management treats the boreal forest carefully and that proper ecosystem-based land-use planning precedes development; protected areas are established; harvest levels are ecologically sustainable; critical forest habitat is retained; environmental impacts are minimized; Aboriginal rights are recognized; and community benefits are ensured. Our vision is expressed with goals relating to fourteen areas we believe are critical to maintaining and improving the health of our boreal forest.

1. Ecosystem-based land-use planning

GOAL: Ecosystem-based land-use planning must occur prior to expanding forest-harvesting activities into wilderness areas that have not been allocated to industry as of 2002. Such planning must also be introduced retroactively in areas currently under management

An ecosystem-based plan is a strategy for planning a forest landscape that makes ecological sustainability the primary management goal. It differs from forest management planning because it considers and accommodates a wide variety of land uses in an equal and balanced way. It is based on the concept that ecological sustainability is fundamental to social and economic sustainability for current and future generations and includes long-term planning horizons of up to 250 years or more. An ecosystem-based land use plan requires the delineation of zones for various uses (like protected areas, traditional use areas, forestry areas, etc.) and planning and implementing economic diversification strategies and forest practices that maintain the ecosystem components and processes that allow the land, water and air to sustain life, productivity and the capacity to adapt to change. Ecosystem-based land-use planning in the boreal forest should involve full

consultation and support from Aboriginal Peoples, conservation groups and affected communities and the identification of non-timber land uses (e.g. protected areas, traditional uses, remote tourism).

2. Protected areas

GOAL: The completion of an ecologically representative network of protected areas.

Industrial development, logging, mining and urban sprawl erode wild spaces and alter the composition, structure and function of forest ecosystems across Canada. Conservationists have long been engaged in a campaign to complete a network of protected areas that exclude industrial activity, represent the biological diversity of Canada's numerous natural regions, and are large enough to accommodate natural disturbances such as fire and wind and that can support viable wildlife populations. Forest managers in the boreal forest must ensure that their activities are not foreclosing on opportunities to complete the protected areas network. They must conduct a credible analysis, which is supported by the ENGO community, of where gaps in the protected areas system exist within their management area as well as opportunities for protection. They should also engage in meaningful consultation with environmental and non-governmental organizations, local communities and Aboriginal Peoples regarding the selection of appropriate protected area candidate sites. Once these candidate sites have been identified, they must be placed under logging and road building moratoriums until they can be permanently protected through regulation.

3. Rate of Cut

GOAL: The rate of cut (often called the annual allowable cut, or AAC) is set at a level that will maintain the ecological integrity of the forest, and is the credible outcome of a planning process that considers the full range of ecological, social and economic (timber and non-timber) values.

Current methods of calculating the rate of cut lack sufficient emphasis on environmental protection and instead strive to maintain the flow of wood to mills. As a result, overcutting based on artificially high rates of cut has led to projected shortages of wood supply and ecosystem degradation across Canada. The process for determining the rate of cut should focus first on maintaining the ecological integrity of the forest. The determination of harvest volume should be an outcome of this determination, accommodate non-timber land uses, and should be substantially below the long-term sustained yield of the forest ecosystem.

4. **Logging Methods**

*GOAL: **Forestry practices** are used that retain and protect important habitat and site characteristics.*

Traditional clearcutting practices have focused on taking wood out of the forest with little regard for what is left behind. These logging methods need to change — forestry practices in the boreal must ensure that the critical characteristics of the forest ecosystem

are not altered by resource extraction. This can be accomplished at the forest stand level by maintaining or restoring natural structures such as trees used by wildlife, standing dead trees (snags), individual live trees and residual tree patches and coarse woody debris (fallen branches, logs, etc.) in sufficient quantities and distribution to fulfil their functions within the ecosystem. Harvesting techniques and equipment that maintain the naturally uneven-aged nature of the forest and that minimize the need for roads, ground damage and habitat loss should be employed.

5. **Habitat**

GOAL: Maintain or restore viable populations of wildlife, by maintaining or restoring the varied characteristics of a natural forest at the broad landscape level

Eighty percent of the species considered at risk in Canada are threatened because of habitat loss. We need to ensure that populations of boreal-dwelling species do not decline as a result of forest-management activities. The boreal forest is home to numerous species that rely on old, intact, interior forests for their habitat. Leaving a significant amount of each forest management unit in large intact core areas of old forest can help ensure the maintenance of such critical habitat. Further, forest management plans should ensure that the full range of habitats of species already assessed as "at risk" are protected or restored to levels that are sufficient to mitigate past and current harmful logging practices.

6. Roads and Fragmentation

GOAL: Maintain remote forest areas within the managed forest

On a grand scale, intact wilderness in the boreal forest has immense worth to Canadians: it is part of our Canadian heritage; it supports a unique system of biodiversity; and it is irreplaceable. Intact forests also provide environmental services and preferred habitat for many forest-dwelling species (such as the boreal-dwelling marten and woodland caribou). Roads are detrimental to habitat not only because they open up the forest to logging -- they also increase the ease of access for predators, invasive species and hunters and increase wildlife deaths due to vehicle collisions and interfere with breeding by isolating wildlife populations. Logging road networks are expanding across the boreal forest with little consideration of the cumulative impacts on ecosystem function. Forests that are no longer being logged are often still easily reached by hunters and other recreational vehicle users via old logging roads to the detriment of wildlife. It is essential that forest managers create and implement access-management plans that include strategies for retaining significant sections of their management area in a remote condition. Such strategies should emphasize maintaining remoteness, minimizing forest access, preventing road-building in candidate protected areas, avoiding ecological impacts on protected areas and candidates from road adjacency and effectively abandoning and decommissioning roads, bridges and water crossings. In particular, where currently remote areas are of regional, national or global significance, they should be managed to maintain their remote character. Road planning is an important and required component of ecosystem-based land use planning.

7. Intensive forest management (IFM)

GOAL: The extent and intensity of IFM does not compromise the ecological integrity of the forest.

Intensive Forest Management (IFM) is defined as forest management that surpasses current levels of practice and integrates the use of advanced planning, intensive silviculture, enhanced protection, and monitoring of management effects and effectiveness to increase the quantity, quality and/or diversity of forest products. Within the conservation movement, there is a cautious recognition that IFM can be valuable if it helps to take the pressure off of intact forests. However, IFM is not an acceptable option if it converts native forests to plantations, uses genetically modified tree species or if it employs damaging practices like drainage, fertilization or increased use of biocides. The use of IFM must be limited to those cases where it is proven necessary to maintain important economic and social objectives and where it yields meaningful conservation benefit.

8. Biocides

GOAL: The use of biocides is phased-out.

There is increasing concern over the use of biocides in forest management, due to both the environmental impacts of the chemicals used and the danger their use poses to forest workers and other people using the forest. For example forest herbicides have been banned in Quebec since 1998. A phase-out of biocides is therefore advocated for the entire boreal forest. During the phase-out process, biocides should not be used near waterways and should not interfere with the collection of non-timber forest products such as berries, medicinal plants or mushrooms. Alternative harvesting methods should be adopted to reduce the need for tending of regenerating forest areas and biocide use.

9. Forestry and Aboriginal Peoples

GOAL: *Aboriginal Peoples shall control or co-manage forest management on their lands and territories unless they delegate control with free and informed consent.*

Aboriginal Peoples represent the majority of people living in boreal forest regions. Yet they generally have little control over management decisions, see few of the benefits of boreal logging and have to live with consequences, such as environmental degradation and loss of cultural values. If forest management is to be socially responsible, it is essential that forest managers (e.g. license holders) fully recognize and respect existing Aboriginal Peoples' rights and title on the land for which certification is sought. Aboriginal cultural values must be identified, protected and monitored and opportunities for joint forest-management agreements and Aboriginal participation in forest management must be created. Forest managers must have consent from local Aboriginal Peoples for their management activities and they must ensure that management plans are consistent with Aboriginal objectives for forest-lands and waters.

10. Public Involvement in forest management

GOAL: Local communities and the broader public are meaningfully involved in forest management.

The boreal forest belongs to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Although forestry companies usually have some protocols for involving the public in the planning process, from having local citizens committees (often dominated by industry employees or their families) to having open houses to display maps of planned harvest areas, this is not enough. Full consultation should be implemented with Aboriginal and local communities in all forest resource management decisions and relevant and accessible information should be provided to ensure that public involvement is meaningful and informed and that public views are incorporated into decisions. Full consultation with the public, Aboriginal and local communities should encompass every stage of the forest planning, management and monitoring process.

11. Equitable sharing of forest resources

GOAL: The benefits from forests are equitably shared with local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Although over 90 percent of Canada's forests are publicly owned, the benefits derived from harvesting forest resources are often distributed inequitably. As timber is exported from forests adjacent to local communities, so are the majority of the profits derived from the timber. At the same time, there has been a long-term trend toward a reduction in local employment as industry increases its level of mechanization. Emphasis needs to be placed on community forest initiatives, value-added production, non-timber forest products and meaningful long-term employment commitments to ensure the equitable distribution of forest benefits with communities in the boreal forest.

12. Monitoring and disclosure

GOAL: The results of comprehensive forest monitoring that credibly assesses the effects and effectiveness of all forestry operations are made available to the public.

As we strive to develop forestry practices that maintain the natural structure, composition and ecosystem functions of the boreal forest, there is an urgent need for comprehensive forest monitoring that credibly assesses the impacts of current and past forestry operations. Effective monitoring requires the use of benchmarks, including protected areas and permanent sample plots and should include a commitment to measure changes in wildlife habitat use, soil moisture and fertility over time. The collection of accurate growth and wood yield data for the forest is also a priority. This information should be accessible to Aboriginal Peoples and the general public without expense.

13. Sensitive Areas

GOAL: All sensitive sites, including fragile sites, sites of low productivity, riparian/shoreline areas and sites of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural importance, are protected from the impacts of forest harvesting.

The boreal forest contains numerous ecologically sensitive areas such as streams, lakes, wetlands, shorelines, dunes, shallow soils, peatlands and permafrost areas. Logging, piling of felled trees, post-harvest operations and road building in or adjacent to sensitive areas can severely degrade these sensitive areas. Comprehensive identification and mapping of sensitive areas should be undertaken, and appropriate protection, including no-harvest reserves around such features should occur.

14. High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs)

GOAL: To maintain or enhance the ecological and social values associated with High Conservation Value Forests.

Some eighty percent of the world's original or ancient forests have already been degraded or destroyed by development. Canada's boreal forest represents a significant proportion of the small percentage of intact and undisturbed forest that remains. High Conservation Value Forests are forests that are globally, regionally or nationally significant, contain rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems, provide basic services of nature in critical situations or are fundamental to meeting the needs of local communities. They include "frontier" forests within the boreal, as well as large areas of primary old forest habitat and other remote, threatened and sensitive sites. Given the global rarity of such forests and their continued decline, special preference should be given to managing HCVFs within the boreal to protect and maintain the values for which they were identified.