



Flawed Forest Carbon Accounting with Nature Canada and the NRDC

Janet Sumner

Welcome to the ClearCut

[Music]

Janet Sumner

Hi, I'm Janet Sumner, Executive Director at Wildlands League

Kaya Adleman

And I'm Kaya Adleman, Carbon Manager at Wildlands League

Janet Sumner

Wildlands League is a Canadian conservation organization, working on protecting the natural world

[Intro]

Janet Sumner

Welcome back to the ClearCut, this week we have a very interesting episode, where had the pleasure of discussing Forest Carbon Accounting with the team at the Natural Resources Defence Council and Nature Canada, who over the past two year published a series of reports about the problems with how Canada counts the carbon stored in its forests, and what the carbon emissions from the logging industry really are.



Kaya Adleman

Nature Canada is a national nature conservation organization that's been operating in Canada over the past 80 years. And the Natural Resources Defence Council (or NRDC) is a U.S. based environment organization that operates internationally, and has been around for about 50 years. The first joint report, [Missing the Forest](#), was released in 2021 and the second, [Lost in the Woods](#) came out in 2022.

Janet Sumner

In a general sense, when we think of climate change, we think of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels. We think of the classic smokestacks of a coal fired powerplant, the gas engines of cars. But what does forestry, and more specifically, logging have to do with climate change? It's not really a mainstream discussion point in the wider climate discussion.

Kaya Adleman

In this episode, you'll hear from the team behind these reports: Former Executive Director of Nature Canada, Graham Saul; Michael Polanyi, Policy and Campaign Manager for Climate Based Solutions at Nature Canada; Anthony Swift, director of the NRDC's Canada Program; and Jennifer Skene, Natural Climate Solutions Policy Manager with NRDC's Canada Program. To provide a little more context about the joint reports and why forestry is an important piece of the climate puzzle, here's former Nature Canada Executive Director, Graham Saul:

Graham Saul

I've been going to United Nations Climate Change Conferences since, I guess 2005 in Montreal. And it's always been sort of two areas of focus at those conferences in the broadest sense. One is the efforts needed to transition away from our dependence on oil, coal and gas, even though they don't really focus on using the terms oil, coal and gas, but it's the clean energy transition. And the other one is what's often called land use change and forestry, which is kind of a UN speak for the greenhouse gas emissions that are associated with the sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere by forests and other natural landscapes, and the release of greenhouse gas emissions when you cut down forests and otherwise undermine different natural



landscapes. So to what degree is life itself contributing to or taking away from efforts to fight climate change as we either restore it or undermine it? And that side of things has always gotten the short end of the straw when it comes to the amount of attention that decision makers are paid. It's sort of the piece of the UN climate negotiations that very few people take a close look at, but in recent years there's been a bit of a revolution going on in terms of what is increasingly being called nature-based climate solutions, where governments around the world are realizing that nature plays a critical role in regulating greenhouse gas emissions. And that nature based climate solutions are an opportunity to both contribute to the fight against climate change while also addressing the biodiversity crisis. And the federal government in Canada a few years ago really, for the first time ever made nature-based climate Solutions a core pillar of their climate change related work. And so it's in that context, I think that a lot of organizations, some of which like NRDC, have been working for a very long time on the health of our forests. And have been looking at the boreal forest as a critical part of the fight against climate change from a Canadian perspective. So I'll leave it to Anthony to tell us a little bit about how the boreal feeds into the broader question of nature based climate solutions.

Kaya Adleman

Interesting. So in the realm of UN climate negotiations, when governments from around the world come together to negotiate agreements on how to tackle climate change, one piece that's getting more and more attention is, as Graham says, this "Land-Use Change and Forestry" piece.

Janet Sumner

That's right. And what I think is important for our listeners to understand is that "Land-Use Change and Forestry" by definition refers to greenhouse gas emissions created when a piece of land *changes* into something else. For example this might include emissions from building new roads and condominiums on a previously undisturbed wetland. Or what often happens in Brazil, cutting down forests for agricultural use, like livestock production. The key here is that the state of the land has to permanently change. Logging activities wouldn't be considered a "land-use change" because there is the underlying assumption that the forest that was cut down will at some point, grow back.



Kaya Adleman

Okay so the greenhouse gas emissions from cutting down a forest to grow crops counts by UN definitions as a land-use change emission, but cutting down a forest for timber and then theoretically cutting it down again when it grows back at some point in the future does not. But where does the Canadian Boreal fit into this picture? Here's Anthony Swift, NRDC's Canada Program director.

Anthony Swift

I myself began work on forest issues in Canada after having worked on climate issues in the oil and gas space in North America. And I have to say, you know, while much of the work has reasonably been, you know, focused on issues of biodiversity and supporting indigenous sovereignty. I think we were shocked to see exactly how critical the boreal forest is from a carbon perspective. I think that, you know, when we began to see the numbers of how much carbon is actually locked in the boreal forest, it's in some ways amazing that it's not better known for its role as a globally critical carbon sink. The fact that an acre of boreal forest [stores twice as much carbon](#) as an acre of tropical rainforest. And the fact that Canada's boreal forest [has more carbon](#) than all oil, gas and coal reserves that are currently under production [globally](#). I mean it really is a ecosystem of global significance, both for its biodiversity value but particularly for its climate value. And the reality is when we began working on the question of forest and climate several years ago, it was shocking how, absent Canada's boreal forest and northern forest in general were from the global conversation around nature and climate change. And the fact that Canada's boreal forest also, in addition to being a forest of global significance from climate was also seeing some of the most significant impacts from industrial activities and some of the most carbon rich parts of it in in the primary forest. The fact that Canada's boreal forest is seeing [rates of intact forest loss that are just behind Brazil](#) were shocking to us. And it was clear that something wasn't adding up in terms of both international scrutiny and of course how Canada was treating its forest as a climate issue.

[Musical Break]

Janet Sumner



So not only are Canada's millions of hectares of boreal forest an awesome cornerstone ecosystem this country prides itself on, but it also stores a whole lot of carbon. I mean as Anthony says, an acre of boreal forest stores as much carbon as tropical rainforest? That's crazy! Why isn't this talked about more? You'd think that knowing the amazing carbon storing abilities of the Canadian boreal and this increase in focus on nature-based solutions, the government would be shouting from the rooftops about how much progress we can make on our climate commitments by protecting the boreal.

Kaya Adleman

But that doesn't seem to be the case, right? I mean even though the Boreal forest stores and sequesters a lot of carbon, we're also seeing, as Anthony mentioned, significant impacts from industrialization. Anthropogenic or human activities like mining, forest management, and other development projects.

Janet Sumner

And this industrialization is happening in primary or intact forests, Logging here compromises the intact forest ecosystems which are inherently more resilient. More resilient to mega fires and more inaccessible humans reducing the risk of anthropogenic ignition. We are now expanding forestry into parts of the Boreal forest that have not been previously disturbed by human activity, releasing carbon that won't be regrown by 2050. This is really valuable forest from the climate perspective since these forests store more carbon than younger forests that have been touched by human activity. So how do we reconcile these two things: that the Canadian Boreal stores so much Carbon and yet we're seeing it being industrialised at concerning rates? A good place to start would be finding out how much is lost, in terms of emissions, from the industrial impacts on the forest. Graham again.

Graham Saul

I mean, the government has a process for calculating how much emissions are being released by different industries, and logging is obviously an industry that has a huge impact on the boreal forest and other forests. And something in the neighborhood of [80 to 90%](#) of the logging



that occurs, occurs in old growth forests in Canada.¹ So we wanted to better understand how does this all break down in terms of how much greenhouse gas emissions are associated with the logging industry. And what we found was it was actually very hard to get that answer. Because in fact the complicated process that the federal government goes through in order to convey information about greenhouse gas emissions associated with logging activities and logging is essentially hidden in there. And very few organizations had ever really taken the time to disentangle the various different questions associated with it, and quite frankly, in many ways it's sort of a fiefdom of a small group of people and analysts in Natural Resources Canada that have been building this model for greenhouse gas emissions. And for a lot of activists, it's quite an impenetrable set of a set of questions about how to disentangle the various different emissions associated with our forests. So NRDC, I think in many ways led by the work that Jennifer Skene and Anthony were doing around beginning to disentangle this started a conversation with us.

So that led to a variety of reports that we put out over the past couple of years Logging Loophole Report, Missing the Forest report and most recently Lost in the Woods and each one of these reports went into more and more detail about how the system for accounting for greenhouse gas emissions associated with logging and forestry activities, is done and some of the problems associated with it. And we were very blessed to have a gentleman by the name of Matthew Bramley who is a guy who has his PhD in chemical engineering or theoretical chemistry. He was the policy director for many years for the Pembina Institute in terms of their climate change related work and is just a mathematical genius who joined us and began to actually apply his mathematical understanding to these very complex questions, and I think in many ways, for the first time ever, even though a lot of the policy work that had already been done was sort of creating the conditions for us to better understand what was going on, Matthew's mathematical genius allowed us to, really open up the issues in new ways and begin to break down what was happening. Tragically, Matthew, when he started with us was already in in a battle against cancer and tragically Matthew passed away just a couple of weeks before

¹ "Government figures indicate 90 percent of logging occurs within primary and old-growth forest— forests of high biodiversity and wilderness value. Each year Canada has a shrinking supply of "old-growth" or primary forests" (citing Ted Mosquin, P. Whiting and D. McAllister, Canada's Biodiversity: The Variety of Life, Its Status, Economic Benefits, Conservation Costs and Unmet Needs (Ottawa: The Canadian Centre for Biodiversity, 1995), p. 71.) (Smith et al 2001).



the most recent report was released. And so the report and this work that we're doing is in many ways dedicated to his memory.

Janet Sumner

So I think one other important thing to note here for people listening is that, the process Graham refers to the government having for calculating emissions associated with different industries is called the National Inventory Report. Countries around the world estimate their respective GHG emissions and removals for the previous year and submit them to the UN as a part of their commitment to the Paris Agreement. The UNFCCC provides guidelines and standards for how countries should report these emissions, the purpose is to help provide transparency and thereby empower countries to adhere to their climate targets.

Kaya Adleman

Okay, and so in trying to figure out how much the logging industry contributes to Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, the first place to look would be Canada's National Inventory Report and Emissions Reduction Plan, Canada's plan to meet its climate commitments under the Paris Agreement outlined as a requirement of the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act.

Janet

Exactly, but as Graham said, the numbers for this economic sector were not very clear. To get a better understanding of how Canada does its carbon accounting for logging and forestry, we also spoke with Micheal Polanyi, Policy and Campaign Manager for Nature Based Climate Solutions at Nature Canada:

Michael Polanyi

I think the first thing to just say is that part of the genesis of our Lost in the Woods report, the recent report was we were quite struck when we looked at the emissions reduction plan, Canada's climate plan, which was released in April, and we saw that there were clearly indicated emissions for every sector of the Canadian economy: oil and gas, electricity, transportation, agriculture. But we were looking to see what were the emissions associated



with the logging sector, which we know in Canada is a huge sector. And we know that about [half a million hectares of primary forest are logged each year](#). So it's a significant industry and we were expecting to see something there about the impacts of that industry and it wasn't there. So this gets to the question of, well, what is there? And what we see in the emission reduction report and in the greenhouse gas inventory is a kind of convoluted terminology of land use, land use change and forestry. We see the government talking about combined net flux from forest land. But what we don't see is any attempt to indicate clearly what are the emissions associated with industrial logging in Canada. And that's really what this most recent report is an attempt to do, is to ask the question: what are the emissions greenhouse gas emissions that can be reasonably attributable to the logging industry, and to kind of go beyond the government's really kind of obfuscating and unclear depiction of emissions and removals from forest land. Which really doesn't help the public understand what are the climate impacts of logging and what can be done to reduce those significant impacts.

[Musical Break]

Kaya Adleman

So, when they did, within those government plans, look at how much the logging industry in Canada contributes to climate change through GHG emissions, there wasn't a clear answer like there was for your other industrial sectors like oil and gas.

Janet Sumner

Right, and instead under the Land Use Change and Forestry section was something called a 'combined net flux number.' Jennifer Skene, report co-author and Natural Climate Solutions Policy Manager with NRDC's Canada program elaborates.

Jennifer Skene

It provides a number for forests for more broadly so looking at the carbon fluxes across what it terms its 'managed forest'. And this includes a variety of dynamics that are not reasonably attributable to the logging sector, including accounting for forest removals of carbon from forest areas that have never been previously logged. So essentially what the



inventory is doing is giving the forest sector credit for the forests that have not been logged. And within that broader forest dynamic you can suss out the data that informs what loggings net admissions impact is, which is what the work that Matthew Bramley, did piecing this together across multiple documents across multiple tables. Some of this is information that's only available upon request, but it really requires this extensive process of excavation and reassembly, because the way that Canada is presenting this is not with an eye to looking at industries impacts, but with sort of papering over the total emissions that it seized from its forest.

Kaya Adleman

So if I'm getting this straight, Canada lumps in emissions from the logging sector with GHG emissions from forests more broadly?

Janet Sumner

Yes, and so in Canadian forest policy and management there's what's called (as Jennifer mentions) the 'managed' forest and the 'unmanaged' forest. The managed forest is where logging occurs. As we've discussed in a previous episode, most of Canadian forest falls into the governments jurisdiction or what's called 'crown land', and the government licenses to forestry companies, permitting them to log on particular forest management units (or jurisdictions) within the managed forest.

Kaya Adleman

So what Jennifer is saying, the 'net flux number' that indicates emissions from 'forestry' more broadly recognizes the entire managed forest as a system that loses carbon stored when trees are cut down adds carbon back to the system when trees regrow. Whether or not the logging industry has to do with the regrowth of trees is not considered in the calculation of the net flux number?

Janet Sumner



Exactly. The entire managed forest has not been logged just yet, and the combined net flux number looks at the entire picture of that managed forest. The problem with this however, is that if we aren't able to see specifically how many emissions are contributed by the logging sector, we have no gauge for what the specific climate impacts of logging are and what can be done to help reduce those impacts. And as Jennifer was saying this led their team to look into the data and figure out themselves, what those impacts were exactly.

[Musical Break]

Kaya Adleman

In order to help us better understand how they used the data to figure out what loggings net greenhouse gas emissions are, we figured who better to explain it to us than the math whiz behind the report, Mathew Bramley

Janet Sumner

Yes, we were fortunate enough to be able to use some audio clips from a briefing Mathew did on the report last year for the purposes of this podcast episode. In order to start the work of determining loggings net emissions, the report outlines a definition of what logging emissions should be. Here's Mathew:

Mathew Bramley

We've come up with our definition of what we think net logging emissions are. The first point to make here is that you can only say that emissions are attributable to logging if it's reasonable to consider them, in a reasonably direct way, the responsibility of or attributable to the logging industry. So anything that is sort of really not under the direct control or responsibility of the logging industry cannot be considered to be logging emission, so that's the first point

Kaya Adleman



So any action by the logging industry, which includes cutting down trees to make wood products but also replanting trees should be included in the number calculated for emissions from the logging industry. If a company cuts down some trees, that contributes to their emissions, but if they plant some trees, how much carbon those trees store will lower their emissions. Anything happening in the forest unrelated to logging should not be considered in their logging emissions: things like wildfires, for example.

Mathew Bramley

There are three pieces. One of the pieces is positive, the other two pieces are negative. So the big piece above the line is basically the entire amount of the carbon that is removed from forest land in a year, and this is an average year over 16 years from 2005 to 2019. So we're extracting on average about 160 megatons CO₂ equivalent of carbon from the forest, from logging every year. And then you do have to lower that amount by a couple of pieces that are negative. Some of that carbon actually doesn't go to the atmosphere straight away because it's in longer lived products, particularly construction materials, so you get a bit of a piece to subtract there on the order of maybe 20 megatons per year, and then you get a slightly larger piece that you also need to subtract because the forests are regenerating after logging. So that's basically what we think logging emissions are. We think that's relatively easy to understand and that those are the right pieces to be including.

Janet Sumner

So basically, and we'll include a copy of the diagram Mathew is explaining in our episode notes, the report lines up 3 pieces that fall in line with their definition of what logging emissions are. What Matthew references as the positive piece, is what we count as an emission, or how much carbon is released by logging our forests every year, averaging 160 Mt per year. Then Matthew mentions two other numbers, bringing down that total

The first is how much of carbon stored in longer lived wood products, particularly materials used in construction, like if you build a house the frame stays standing for 80 years storing that carbon. And the second is the estimated carbon over a period of a year that would be stored by a tree or all the trees that forestry companies are required to replant.

Mathew Bramley



So here's our answer to the question using that definition...in 2020 we're looking at 75 megatons of CO2 equivalent. The number has been coming down partly because of reduced harvest areas. And you can obviously compare those net logging emission figures with other key sectors like oil sands or electricity... And what you can see right away is that for most of the past 16 years logging emissions were actually higher than oil sands emissions, just recently fallen a little bit below. And you can see that while electricity emissions have really fallen a lot, more than 50% in the past 16 years. That means that there used to be more than logging emissions, but these days logging emissions are considerably higher than current electricity emissions. So that's our answer to the question we're looking at net emissions attributable to the logging industry that are sort of on a par with comparable with emissions from oil sands operations.

Kaya Adleman

So by gathering up all this information from different government sources, adding carbon lost from the amount logged in a year and subtracting carbon stored in harvested wood products and estimated regrowth, Matthew and the team were able to calculate logging sector emissions that were on par with the oil sands. That's crazy.

Janet Sumner

It really is. That's a staggering number. But when you think about it- it makes sense. You can't cut down a forest that's as carbon rich as the Amazon and not have a big carbon footprint. But they don't stop there. They wanted to understand why there was such a huge discrepancy between the numbers Canada counts and the logging-specific approach they took. They compared the government's 'combined net flux' number, what Canada reports, with the logging-specific numbers they came up with.

Mathew Bramley

And it turns out that the sole difference of the governments A + B, and our net logging emissions... is basically a big sink that the government counts, which we don't think it should be counting. And it's pretty big.... so we're able to reconcile everything and we're able to understand exactly why there's a difference between the number we come up with for net



logging emissions and the government's combined net flux, which is the headline number you'll see in all the government reports.

Kaya Adleman

And what is that big sink that the government should not be counting, according to the NRDC and Nature Canada? The big sink Canada counts is the carbon stored by trees that are regrown after a wildfire. But this regrowth isn't from trees that companies replant, but rather the trees that just naturally grow back after a fire.

Janet Sumner

So in looking at the difference between the two, NRDC-NC only counted the ways that forestry companies change carbon, either plus or minus, whereas Canada included all the carbon that resulted from regrowth everywhere, including after wildfires, even when forestry companies had nothing to do with it. All while not counting the emissions from wildfires. This allowed Canada to claim a near zero emission for forestry.

[Musical Break]

Kaya Adleman

That doesn't sound like we should be taking any credit for trees we didn't plant or intentionally regrow. Here's Jennifer Skene on that topic.

Jennifer Skene

We don't think there's really any justification for anybody getting credit for those forests regrowing. They are entirely natural. There's been no human caused anthropogenic interference within those forests. Most of them are not formally protected, nor have they been replanted following industrial logging. They're sort of at this policy interstice, where logging could get to them, but just hasn't yet and because of that, Canada has deemed it appropriate to consider those areas anthropogenic, despite the fact that logging is not in any way responsible



for its emissions absorption. And that has really led to this very biased approach that we really focused on even more extensively in our Missing the Forest report last year where Canada, because it is counting all of these removals from these never before logged forest areas, but actually excluding other natural dynamics like major wildfires, it's created this massive artificial carbon sink that it's then putting on top of logging emissions, essentially making the logging sector or the forest sector more generally appear to be roughly carbon neutral and really covering up that massive 75-80 megaton carbon dioxide net greenhouse gas impact.

Janet Sumner

So the justification for using the 'combined net flux' approach is that there is none. Here's Micheal Polanyi following up.

Michael Polanyi

I mean, what's going on really, is that in the managed forest, the, the government is approaching natural emissions or wildfire emissions and removals in a very unbalanced way. And we raised the concern that the UN, which sets guidelines for forest carbon accounting, is clear that if a country is not going to report in its carbon totals, emissions associated with wildfires, [then it must also not take credit for carbon sequestration that takes place after those wildfires](#). So that the country is treating natural emissions in a balanced way, so that a country is not masking emissions that are associated directly with industrial activity behind natural emissions. And that's what we argued in *Missing the Forest* Canada is failing to do is by allowing effectively logging companies to take credit for the regrowth of trees that may be taking place on managed areas that are part of their forest management plans, but that haven't involved any direct intervention by those logging companies, just as the companies should not be held accountable for emissions from fires in forests that are, you know, beyond their direct areas that have been logged. They also shouldn't take credit for carbon that's sequestered in these areas that they haven't yet logged. So that's really what we were trying to do in the recent report is ask, well, what emissions should forest companies be accountable for? And we concluded that they should be accountable for the wood that they take out of the forest, they should be credited for carbon that's sequestered from trees that they replant. That makes sense. And they should also get credit for carbon that goes into long lived wood products and is kept out of the atmosphere. Those seem to us to be the reasonable aspects of emissions that



logging companies should be credited for and accountable for. And that's not how Canada is currently doing it.

Janet Sumner

The UN has guidelines on different approaches countries can use to calculate their greenhouse gas emissions in their reports. In Canada's NIR report, it does not include carbon emissions from wildfires, which we know are becoming increasingly common here, due to climate change. And that's fine if the government doesn't want to include them as per the UN guidelines, I mean it wouldn't be fair to attribute the increased prevalence of forest wildfires to a specific sector. However, what Michael is saying is that even though Canada is not reporting emissions from wildfires, it is taking credit for the regrowth and carbon sequestration occurring after those wildfires. Which actively goes against the UN guidelines for that specific approach to forest carbon accounting.

Kaya Adleman

So in a sense, it's like they're trying to have their cake and eat it too. Removing the emissions from wildfires but giving credit for the carbon sequestration that happens during forest regrowth post-fire. If we're following the logic that we're not going to report wildfire emissions because they are not 'human caused' we can't just start saying that we're storing more carbon due to an event that humans had no involvement in in the first place. That's stealing all of the thunder from mother nature, and that's messed up.

[Musical Break]

Janet Sumner

So what are the consequences of Canada's forest carbon accounting methods and why should we count emissions from the logging sector? Here's Graham Saul again:

Graham Saul

THE CLEAR CUT

If you go to the emissions reduction plan, which is the federal government's strategy that it laid out earlier on this year for how it's going to address climate change and how it's going to meet its goals, what you see is for every high emitting sector of the Canadian economy, there's some kind of clear statement for, you know, how much greenhouse gas emissions are associated with transportation and what's our plan to do something about it? And you can kind of go through chapter by chapter and you can look at the different industries in the different high emitting industries you'll find a clear articulation of what the assumptions are about greenhouse gas emissions associated with that industry, and you will find some sort of articulation about what the goals are in terms of reducing emissions from that industry as well. Which makes complete sense. And then you get to the logging, or the forestry section of the plan and you get something completely different. What you get is basically a jumble of different kinds of forestry related emissions, all packed together in a way that basically makes it sound like the forestry sector is carbon neutral. In fact, one could be excused for reading the governments emissions reduction plan and coming to the conclusion that forestry activities are actually good for climate.

It doesn't even try to present a clear picture to Canadians about logging emissions activities. And it's really the only high emitting sector of the Canadian economy where that's the case. So once you start kind of scraping away and moving all of the different kinds of emissions that are forestry related but are not related to logging, to the side and you just focus on those emissions that are associated with logging activities, both as sinks in terms of the regrowth of trees after they're logged or harvested, wood products, or as sources in terms of the cutting down of trees and the carbon that's being released from them. What you find is that the government's own numbers say that net greenhouse gas emissions associated from logging are the size of the tar sands, they're the size of the oil sands. That there's actually more greenhouse gas emissions being released in terms of the net emissions from logging than there are those emissions that are being associated with our electricity sector in Canada. Like it's massive. There is this huge blind spot in the government of Canada's approach to industrial emissions that is literally the size of the oil sands production. And yet the government doesn't want to have that conversation. So, on the one hand, we take real issue with the way they're calculating this other bucket of emissions, this other bucket that has to do with emissions that are not logging related, we think they're actually making a lot of mistakes in that. But even if you just forget about those mistakes and you just successfully separate the two kinds of emissions, you still come to the conclusion that logging emissions is basically one of the highest emitting sectors of the Canadian economy, that the federal government does not clearly report that fact to the



Canadian public, that the federal government does not have a plan to do anything about it. And we are trying to figure out how to get the federal government to actually be honest with Canadians and to put forward to do the same thing it does for every other sector of the Canadian economy. Tell us what the emissions are associated with this industry and tell us how we're going to reduce them.

Anthony Swift

By failing to acknowledge those emissions and take action to reduce those emissions, we're foreclosing an opportunity to move forward with the dramatic set of natural climate solutions that could have a much larger impact on climate than the policies the Trudeau government is moving forward with now. And in some ways there are enormous impacts on the ground. There are enormous policy impacts by, you know, presenting one of Canada's largest emitting sectors as a climate solution, which is what essentially the federal government's representations do

Graham Saul

Like the implications of this policy failure, beyond the fact that we're basically systematically misleading Canadians about whether or not the logging industry is a challenge that we have, but the policy implications are enormous because the logging industry has been allowed to basically sit outside of the regulatory process that the federal government has been developing. So we've been developing this entire set of suite of policies that are designed to create the right incentives. For industry, you know, carbon fees that are designed to penalize high emitting activities and promote cleaner activities. Regulatory approaches like clean fuel standards and other things that are designed to encourage cleaner fuels and penalize dirtier, more high emitting fuels. And the logging industry and the impact of the logging industry has basically sat outside that conversation and been given a free pass. So the logging industry is basically a free rider in the climate policy structure of the federal government and the really perverse result of that is that we are actually in many ways encouraging the destruction of our forests with our climate policy. Because if you don't acknowledge the greenhouse gas emissions associated with logging, then you're not discouraging those emissions if there is not a fee associated with them, if they sit outside of a clean fuel standard. If you actually treat logging as though, it's essentially carbon neutral, then you end up coming up with a whole different set of policy prescriptions. And if you were to look at logging as what it is, which is a high emitting sector of the Canadian economy that needs a strategy for reducing emissions. So we are not just like turning a blind



eye to the problem, but the very act of turning a blind eye to the problem, meaning that we are inadvertently actually, in many ways incentivizing the destruction of our forests. And we see that in terms of these false narratives around harvested wood products being some solution to the carbon challenge. We see that in the notion that fuel pellets are being encouraged as a way to produce energy. But fall outside of the regulatory structure, so there's no carbon fee, there's no disincentive at all. We're shipping our forests to Europe to be burned in power plants, and they're sitting outside of the policy framework. So there's all of these variety of ways that we're actually perversely encouraging forest destruction because we refuse to actually acknowledge the implications of logging from a greenhouse gas perspective.

Kaya Adleman

So as Graham and Anthony are saying, by not counting emissions from logging, we are turning a blind eye to its impacts, and therefore not able to take actions to reduce those impacts. It creates a systemic policy failure that does not incentivize good or green behaviors from the logging industry, and as a matter of fact even, encourages business as usual behaviors because the numbers make it seem like it's a 'sustainable' sector.

Janet Sumner

As I always say, "what you can't count, you can't change". Here's Jennifer again:

Jennifer Skene

And one of the more insidious manifestations of that is just this idea that emissions from logging or loggings relationship to the climate is somehow different than emissions from oil and gas and the fossil fuel sector. And that's really resulted in a number of policy approaches that have failed to adequately regulate and capture the impact of this high emission sector, most notably in Canada, approach in enshrinement of an offsets policy that essentially allows certain, you know, replanting activities or forest protection activities to offset emissions from the oil and gas sector. And what our report really shows is that these can't be treated as mutually exclusive or one as a substitute for the other. They are solutions that have to be pursued in tandem, and there's really no justifiable reason why logging emissions should be regulated any differently than emissions from the fossil fuel sector. They're having, you know, equivalent net emissions impacts, the atmosphere does not distinguish between emissions from smokestacks



and tail pipes and emissions from forests. And what our report really calls for as a result is this movement away from a false justification for an offsets regime and movement toward direct regulation of logging emissions, just like other sectors

But there is one very fundamental difference between the fossil fuel sector and the logging sector, and that's that the logging sector is not inherently incompatible with the climate safe future. These are not products that we are going to cease depending upon. Products like, you know, long lived wood products, lumber, furniture, etcetera. But we cannot continue operating under the fiction that current practices are somehow climate safe or, even worse, climate friendly. And to get there, we have to actually recognize the emissions that are happening on the ground. And as Anthony and Graham already mentioned, acknowledging these emissions then opens up a whole suite of opportunities for driving more sustainable economies, including more sustainable practices in the logging industry that are going to be really essential as the marketplace increasingly looks for our products that are in alignment with a climate safe future. So in the logging sector, this means ending logging in really climate critical primary forests that have irreplaceable value for the global climate, avoiding the kind of infrastructure impacts we're seeing with logging scars, so avoiding full tree logging practices and ensuring that areas are actually regrowing after they've been planted, transitioning away from really harmful clear cutting practices and also transitioning away from products that don't need to be made from industrial logging products like toilet paper or energy (biomass). And really focusing on those products, like long lived wood products that are, you know, do have more of a value for the climate than those short lived products which emit their carbon almost instantly. But that are also the products that truly do depend on a wood based industry not that are driving the loss of climate critical. For us to be, you know, flushed down the toilet or burned.

[Musical Break]

Janet Sumner

So as Jennifer is saying, in order to move towards a more climate safe future, we need to start including the logging industry in a real way in the regulatory process, because the climate is going to keep warming regardless of whether carbon being released into the atmosphere comes from a tailpipe or a tree that's cut down. But if we don't actually include it in our accounting system, and we're not counting it, that's going to be a bad thing. Bringing the



logging sector online with more truthful accounting to the governments nature based climate solution policies will help keep Canadian wood products relevant in a marketplace that is going to increasingly value and demand products that are truly sustainable.

Kaya Adleman

And bringing the logging sector into the fold is something that Canadian are actively looking for from their government.

Anthony Swift

You know, these sorts of policies are policies that, you know, the Canadian people are behind. In polling earlier this year, nearly [3/4 of Canadians](#) wanted the federal government to take strong action to reduce logging emissions. So this is something that is very in line with public values and would position Canada to be a global leader in a natural climate solutions. The reality is that kind of action would put Canada in a position to be able to really lead by example with other nations that have forests of great climate and the ecological benefit.

[Musical Break]

Kaya Adleman

And what has the response generally been to these reports after you've published them?

Michael Polanyi

In terms of the response, first of all, the media has provided a lot of attention to these reports, I think because the media has appreciated that we've taken an in-depth look at an issue that hasn't been examined. So both *Missing the Forest* and *Lost in the Woods* had widespread media coverage. But the other thing I want to say is that a range of different stakeholders have really kind of weighed in on the issue and echoed our concern about the lack of transparency and accuracy of measurement of the carbon impacts climate impacts of logging. 75 health and environment groups sent a letter to ministers Guilbeau and Minister Wilkinson calling for more



transparent reporting and action to reduce logging emissions. And nearly 100 scientists echoed concerns that we had raised in our *Missing the Forest* report about the biases and omissions in the way that Canada is approaching its measurement and accounting for forest carbon in its inventory. So I think the message is that there is widespread concern. Anthony mentioned public concern earlier. [We did an opinion poll](#) or ECOS, did an opinion poll and it found that over 80% of Canadians want stronger protection of forests and over 70% want to see the government doing a better job to reduce the climate impacts of logging. So there's widespread public support, widespread support from scientists and health and environment groups for the government to do better. And it has an opportunity to do so in in coming months.

Kaya Adleman

Does the government want to do better?

Graham Saul

I would say it depends on that portion of the government. I think there is a high level of awareness within certain political quarters in the current government that the system for accounting for logging related emissions is kind of been a problem for a very long time. I think there are people like Minister Gilbeau who have spent as much time at UN climate negotiations as anyone and knows that it's actually a very political process, and not quite as scientific situation as many people like to point it out or suggest it is. And so there's a kind of an awareness that there's a problem here that needs to be unpacked and needs to be dealt with. I think there's a huge amount of resistance. Coming from certain technical quarters within Natural Resources Canada, people that have basically staked their life on a given approach to this problem and resent the notion that people like us are asking for more clarity and a clear strategy to address the emissions. And then on the part of senior management within government, it's been a bit of a mixed bag. But on the whole, our sense is that this is a big problem that. very few people want to deal with. Because it is yet another major industry in Canada that needs to be held accountable for its greenhouse gas emissions. And the federal government would rather not have to have difficult conversations with another major industry in Canada about its greenhouse gas emissions. And so while it's not hard to win certain dimensions of the intellectual conversation when you're involved in it, like, hey, here's a crazy idea, you should tell us what emissions from logging are, and you should tell us what your plan is to reduce them, that's an easy argument to win. But then when you start getting beyond



that, what you find is a lot of foot dragging, a lot of resistance, and in some ways we often feel that despite the positive demeanor and the good intentions of many of the people we talked to in government, it's hard not to conclude sometimes that you're really getting stonewalled and ignored by the government on this.

[Musical Break]

Kaya Adleman

Is there anything that listeners of this podcast of this episode can perhaps do to maybe incentivize some of those changes to happen? How can they get involved with the work that you guys do?

Graham Saul

Well, first and foremost, we need people demanding clarity from the federal government. You know, it's the notion of we need a clear sense of what the net greenhouse gas emissions are associated with the logging industry. And we need a clear plan to reduce those emissions and it's unacceptable that that we don't have that is the message that decision makers need to be hearing. And they can sign an online action, they can sign up for our newsletter, they can make a donation to this work to advance it themselves, or to or to help show leadership in advance. I think that's the critical question. We need to get beyond the current obfuscation and the myths that that the logging industry has been allowed to promote for so long. And we need to have a serious conversation as though we're serious about dealing with climate change that holds the logging industry to account. And individuals can be part of that conversation in the same way they're part of any important federal policy conversation and it's also important to realize that this is manifesting in many ways at the grassroots level, right, like the logging is occurring in communities and it's occurring and often it's being determined by provincial governments. And so people can also get involved in how the logging industry and the regulatory approaches to logging or dealt with at their regional level. We've got a problem with essentially policy capture right across the country where in many ways the logging industry has been treated more as a client than an industry requiring regulation. And that has meant that we have a wide variety of distortions in terms of the degree to which we're actually regulating logging with a view to



maximizing not only sustainable communities and economies, but also our ability to fight climate change and address the biodiversity crisis.

[Music]

Janet Sumner

Well this was an incredible conversation we had Kaya. What are your thoughts?

Kaya Adleman

Yeah, I think I really learned a lot. I think one of my main takeaways is that there are a lot of logical inconsistencies in the approach to forest carbon accounting. For instance, just on a macro-level, what Graham was saying about National Inventory Reporting guidelines being politically motivated as opposed to backed by science really resonated with me. And I think that also in a way applies to the Canadian federal government's approach, first of all, not treating all the industrial sectors the same by giving forestry a hall pass on its GHG emissions and then crediting a large, naturally occurring carbon sink to forestry that has little relation to industrial activities all seem like decisions that are motivated by politics and bureaucracy as opposed to science. At the very least, the government should be much more transparent about the way that they are getting their numbers which would allow the public to be better informed about our work towards meeting its climate commitments. I feel that the process is not as difficult to understand as its made out to be.

Janet Sumner

Right, and what I like about this, or what I take away from this is this need to create something that is more transparent and accessible. And that's why I like the logging-specific approach. Taking the whole forest and entire managed area and managing it as one big carbon area seem, well it seems inefficient. It doesn't allow us to say "Ok. You have this forest management unit, you're responsible for this amount of carbon, there's this amount of carbon on the landscape today and after your forestry operations there's this much, you've been able to regrow this much." And you can do a calculation that then any company can take responsibility for. Can be motivated to do things in a better way, it can create change that will actually garner real



emissions reductions and climate-positive actions. Whereas now, we're kind of shielding everybody by doing this mega-approach right across the country, not seeing any of this as a land-use change, all the trees cut today will not be regrown, why aren't we discounting those right away. I just think there's a better way to do carbon accounting that will ensure better transparency, motivate companies to do different things and reward them for doing those things. And right now seeing it as almost carbon neutral, I think prevents that

Kaya Adleman

I like that. Transparency fosters accountability, which creates change. That's nice.

If you want to read the *Missing the Forest* and *Lost in the Woods* Reports for yourself, you can find them online at the NRDC's or Nature Canada's websites, and we'll also be linking them in our podcast description.

Janet Sumner

The podcast description will also include citations, a transcript, and other helpful resources related to this episode.

[Music]

Janet Sumner

If you liked this episode of 'The Clear Cut: Conversations on Forestry,' stay tuned for new episodes.

Kaya Adleman

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Janet Sumner



That's @Wildlandsleague on Instagram, Twitter, and, Facebook

Kaya Adleman

See you next time!