

GREENPEACE Briefing Paper: International Forest Products February 2001



*"Half of the world's temperate rainforests have been destroyed.
One quarter of what remains is in British Columbia."
- World Resources Institute, 1997*

INTERFOR: The world's worst destroyer of temperate rainforest

The west coast of Canada is home to the largest intact area of temperate rainforest left in the world. This majestic forest contains 1000-year-old cedar trees, some of which tower as high as a 30 storey office building. This global treasure is being devastated by clearcut logging.

Despite growing international concern over the fate of the world's remaining ancient forests, some logging companies continue to clearcut these ancient trees. International Forest Products, also known as Interfor, is one of the worst offenders, logging almost four million cubic metres of trees a year - each cubic metre equivalent in size to that of a large telephone pole.

INTERFOR refuses to be part of the solution

Some British Columbia forestry companies are currently working with environmental organizations in B.C. to place a moratorium on logging highly contentious areas in the coastal Great Bear Rainforest. Together they are seeking a long-term solution to historical conflicts. Interfor was part of this process, but the company walked away from these discussions in June 2000. It has resumed logging in a number of critically important rainforest valleys. One large valley, known as Ista, lies within the traditional territories of the Nuxalk First Nation, whose elders and hereditary chief Nuximlayc have gone to jail for peacefully trying to stop the logging of this sacred site. Other valleys being clearcut by Interfor are home to threatened species such as grizzly bears and endangered salmon runs. Interfor also plans to log other areas sacred to First Nations.

In addition, the company recently began blasting logging roads into the habitat of the Kermode or "Spirit" Bear - a rare white bear found nowhere else on earth - and areas densely populated by wolves.

In total, Interfor plans to log 18 pristine valleys and critically important areas of the Great Bear Rainforest in the next five years.

The destruction does not end with the Great Bear Rainforest. Interfor is currently logging the habitat of endangered species on the border of a national park in the world-renowned Clayoquot Sound, immediately adjacent to a United Nations Biosphere Reserve. It is

also blasting roads into and cutting down 1000-year-old cedar trees in the Elaho Wilderness. In one rainforest region, Interfor is logging at a rate 47 percent higher than the B.C. governments own estimates of long-term sustainability.

INTERFOR lacks corporate responsibility

In 1999, almost 100 Interfor workers and friends took the law into their own hands, and confronted local environmentalists in the Elaho Wilderness. They vandalized a camp and assaulted several individuals, three of whom required hospital treatment. Only five Interfor workers were charged for participating in this assault. In January, 2001, the workers pleaded guilty and were given what amounted to a wrist slap sentence. Anger management courses and letters of apology were ordered, compared to the one year jail sentences imposed on two peaceful protesters, one of whom is a 72-year-old great-grandmother.

Even more alarming than the acts of its employees is the role of Interfor itself.

The employees carried out the assault using Interfor logging trucks. A company vice-president and three directors were in the region at the time but did nothing to stop the vigilante attack. Interfor trucks and radios were used to co-ordinate the violence. A senior Interfor official at the attack referred to the incident as "ethnic cleansing". And a supreme court judge has alleged that another company employee subsequently perjured himself while testifying in court after he destroyed videotape evidence of the assault.

The B.C. Supreme Court expressed its shock at the incident and revoked an Interfor injunction preventing environmental protests. The decision was based on the grounds that Interfor did not come before the court with "clean hands". The judge added "The court must denounce vigilante actions, misrepresentations and lies in the strongest possible way in order to preserve the integrity of its own process."

Another example of Interfor's lack of corporate ethics arose in 1998. Hikers in the Elaho Wilderness discovered an ancient cedar tree apparently used as a den by a grizzly bear. They informed Ministry of Forests staff, requesting that a survey be done to ensure that the bear

habitat would not be logged. The very next day, Ministry of Forests staff told Interfor about the tree. The company immediately dispatched a logger, who cut the tree down before any survey could be completed.

INTERFOR creates fewer jobs in B.C.

Despite Interfor's frequent claims that it must continue logging to provide jobs for people in B.C., the company does a poor job of creating employment considering the amount of trees it cuts. It makes no attempt to manufacture finished wood products in B.C., concentrating instead on shipping high volumes of minimally processed wood. In 1999, for example, Interfor applied for permits to export more than 300,000 cubic metres of unprocessed logs directly to Japan. Exporting these logs eliminates jobs in milling and manufacturing. In 1998 the company put dozens of people out of work with the closure of a saw mill.

Will INTERFOR listen to its customers and investors?

According to former MacMillan-Bloedel (now Weyerhaeuser Canada) chief executive officer Tom Stephens: "We are hearing more and more from our customers that they and their customers don't want wood from old growth clear-cuts."

Companies around the world are demanding that forestry companies do not log in the world's endangered forest areas. They also want non-pristine areas to be sustainably logged to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards. While two B.C. logging operations have recently achieved FSC-certification and the endorsement of environmental groups, Interfor shows no signs of reforming its logging practices in order to receive FSC certification.

Areas where Interfor must improve include:

- **obtaining consent from First Nations** before logging their traditional territories;
- **protecting fish habitat** by not logging right up to the banks of fish-bearing streams;
- **protecting more ancient rainforest** valleys needed for species such as the grizzly bear;
- **ending clearcutting**, which Interfor does in more than 95% of its logging operations. The FSC has never certified such logging practices in old growth forests, and Interfor's competitor Weyerhaeuser has committed to phase out this destructive practice.

Home improvement giant Home Depot, furniture giant Ikea, and companies such as Mitsubishi Electric of America and the Body Shop are insisting that the products they sell do not contribute to the destruction of the world's ancient forests and are FSC-certified. Interfor will lose its share of the forest products market by ignoring this demand.

Interfor may also prove to be a bad investment decision. The Royal Bank is one of Canada's largest financial institutions and one of Interfor's major shareholders. In February 2000, senior Royal Bank officials wrote a letter to Interfor expressing concern over "the threat of clearcut logging to the future health of ancient forests such as the Great Bear Rainforest." Investors like the Royal Bank are becoming increasingly concerned over Interfor's plans to log ancient forests and are anxious to find out more.

Repeat Offender: INTERFOR ignores and undermines the law

From June 1995 to June 1997, Interfor and its subsidiaries have been charged and penalized 136 times for violations of B.C. legislation. This includes 57 infractions of the Forest Practices Code and 66 infractions of the Forest Act. Interfor has also failed to comply with the Forest Practices Code on an additional 414 occasions. The company has been responsible for logging inside the boundaries of parks and causing landslides by logging on steep slopes.

In early 1998, after intense lobbying by Interfor and other logging companies, the B.C. government weakened environmental protection by introducing more than 500 changes to existing legislation. Changes include giving logging companies permission to conduct even larger clearcutting and the reduction of the public's opportunities to comment on logging plans.

In May 2000 the labour union representing B.C. Ministries of Forests and Environment staff issued a scathing report about lack of compliance. The report states that, as a result of sweeping government budget and staff cuts, "the largest forest companies operating in the province are not properly inspected or monitored."

A government-appointed independent watchdog in B.C. recently issued a report stating that "basic compliance with Code requirements is not sufficient to protect environmental values."

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