



New study shows that Aboriginal people are not economically benefiting from living in Canada's commercial forests

EDMONTON, November 10, 2003 – Despite living at the center of one of the country's largest economic engines—our forests—Aboriginal communities in Canada's commercial forest region significantly lag behind the rest of the country and other Aboriginal communities in income. That's the surprising conclusion of a new report from Global Forest Watch Canada assessing the socio-economic status of Aboriginal communities in Canada's forest regions.

“Our results show that Aboriginal communities within areas used by the forest industry have significantly lower average incomes than Aboriginal communities outside of this commercial zone. It raises questions about the distribution of benefits from logging and other developments in these forests,” says Peter Lee, ecologist and national coordinator of Global Forest Watch Canada (GFWC).

The study, *Aboriginal Communities in Forest Regions in Canada: Disparities in Socio-Economic Conditions*, investigated how location affected the values of five key socio-economic indicators (income, education, age, employment and number of people per room) for Aboriginal communities throughout Canada's forested regions. Some of the other key findings are:

- Aboriginal communities within forest regions were shown to have significantly lower average incomes and employment rates than Aboriginal communities outside the forest regions;
- For Aboriginal communities within forest regions, those communities within historical treaties showed higher disparity than those outside historical treaties for all of the socio-economic indicators that were investigated. The communities within signed Modern Land Claim areas showed higher employment rates and average incomes than those located outside these areas.
- There are significant differences between Aboriginal communities within forest regions based on the provinces in which they are located, with the Prairie and Atlantic Maritime Provinces showing the poorest averages over all.

“Like many Indigenous Peoples around the world, the majority of Aboriginal people in Canada live in forested regions. 80% of Aboriginal communities are located within the nation's boreal or temperate forests. With 10 percent of the world's forest, Canada is one of the largest forest-producing nations in the world, but it has failed to set an example in dealing with Aboriginal communities. The system in Canada of allocating large tracts of land for harvesting wood fails to address the needs of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.”

said Harry M. Bombay, Executive Director of the National Aboriginal Forestry Association.

“For Aboriginal people, the issues go beyond just the apparent lack of economic and social benefit from large-scale industrial development of forests,” notes Romeo Saganash, Director of Québec Relations for the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee). “The system of allocating forests to large forest companies is one of many pressures on the forest that affect Aboriginal people’s ability to continue traditional land use practices and to maintain traditional values,” he points out.

“Canadian society and forest policy makers need to undertake debate about the disparities outlined in this report,” says Lee. “At a time when both the courts and Aboriginal groups are calling on governments to make more genuine efforts to consult with Aboriginal Peoples, this report helps to identify what is at stake. Solutions need to accommodate their rights and interests before major resource decisions are made,” Lee concludes.

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Global Forest Watch Canada is the independent national affiliate of the Global Forest Watch network, a project of the World Resources Institute. The Global Forest Watch network was formed to provide access to better information about the world’s forests and the environmental impact of their development.

Aboriginal Communities in Forest Regions in Canada: Disparities in Socio-Economic Conditions, including maps and data, as well as media briefing materials is available for download in English and French at www.globalforestwatch.ca

For more information contact:

Peter Lee
(780) 914 6241 OR (780) 451 9260

Romeo Saganash (418) 564 1598