



Satellite Imagery Reveals New Picture of Canada's Remaining Wild Forests

EDMONTON, March 22, 2006 – Results of the most comprehensive survey to date of Canada's remaining wild forest fragments were released today in Edmonton by Global Forest Watch Canada. *Canada's Forest Landscape Fragments: A First Approximation* reveals that Canada's southern biodiversity-rich boreal and temperate forests – those forest areas primarily under concessions to forest and oil and gas companies – have been largely fragmented by industrial development.

“Although many previous studies have shown the enormous extent of Canada's existing forests, few have identified those that are fragmented and those that remain mostly un-fragmented by development activities such as logging, road-building, reservoir construction, agricultural clearing and mining. We've been able to conduct the most thorough assessment to date of how much of our country's enormous area of forest are left, and which forest areas are heavily fragmented,” said Peter Lee, ecologist and executive director of Global Forest Watch Canada.

Large areas of forest landscape fragments - areas relatively untouched by industrial activity - remain in only a limited number of regions on earth – including the boreal forests of North America and Russia, and the rainforests of the Amazon, Central Africa and South East Asia.

The Global Forest Watch Canada forest landscape fragments study, which combined existing digital datasets with the visual interpretation of over one thousand satellite images to map Canada's remaining forest landscape fragments (larger than 10,000 ha for the boreal and taiga forest regions and larger than 5,000 ha for the temperate forest regions), found that overall, 30 percent of Canada's forest ecozones have been fragmented by industrial activity, while 70 percent - almost entirely in the northern boreal and taiga regions – remain almost untouched by industrial activity. The vast majority of Canada's remaining forest landscape fragments can be found in a broad belt of mostly non-commercial forests stretching across Canada's northern boreal and taiga regions. These boreal and taiga forest landscapes are a rich mosaic of forestlands, rivers, lakes, and wetlands.

Other significant examples of findings of the GFWC study include:

- The majority (60%) of Canada's remaining forest landscape fragments are located in the boreal and taiga forests – in the northern portions of the large provinces and in the territories.
- The 4 provinces/territories that contain most of the remaining forest landscape fragments are Québec (19% of the total area of all identified fragments), Northwest Territories (17%), Ontario (14%), and British Columbia (12%).
- Alberta (4% of the total area of all identified fragments), Nova Scotia (0%), New Brunswick (0%), and Prince Edward Island (0%) contain the least amount of remaining forest landscape fragments.

“The findings released today show us a ‘before and after’ scenario – from intactness to fragmentation as a result of significant human and industrial footprints,” said Cathy Wilkinson, Director of the Canadian Boreal Initiative. “Our challenge now is to shape the future of the region, to determine how to balance protection and sustainable economic development across the landscape – while we still can,” added Wilkinson. “Canada's Boreal region represents a unique global opportunity to plan for conservation of the region's extraordinary ecological, cultural and economic values in advance of further development decisions, but, in the face of rapidly-expanding development interest, it is increasingly urgent that we act on this opportunity.”

“Many of the smaller remaining forest fragments occur in the “cottage country” of southern Ontario and Québec and in Canadians’ other recreational playgrounds in both eastern and western Canada. These findings underscore the need for Canada to manage our remaining wild forest landscape fragments in a precautionary manner,” says Peter Lee.

The report, maps, photographs and the forest landscape fragments GIS data layer are widely and freely accessible in electronic format on the Global Forest Watch Canada website (www.globalforestwatch.ca) in order to provide a baseline for practical planning and decision-making in Canada’s forests.

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The Global Forest Watch Canada report, *Canada’s Forest Landscape Fragments: A First Approximation*, and associated spatial datasets, photos and maps are available for download on the GFWC website: www.globalforestwatch.ca

Global Forest Watch Canada was formed to provide access to more complete information about development activities in Canada’s forests and their environmental impacts. We are convinced that providing greater information about Canada’s forests will lead to better decision-making on forest management and use, which ultimately will result in forest management regimes that provide a full range of benefits for both present and future generations.