Timber and Wildlife Management

Saskatchewan Forest Habitat Project

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A NEW APPROACH TO TIMBER HARVESTING

Saskatchewan Forest Habitat Project partners have endorsed new timber harvesting practices in Weyerhaeuser's Forest Management Licence Agreement (FMLA) area of central Saskatchewan.

Jack Spencer, Chief Forester for Weyerhaeuser's Saskatchewan Division, says harvesting practices that respect the needs of wildlife allow forest companies to operate in a way that maintains a healthy forest.

"The Weyerhaeuser FMLA will soon be zoned into smaller forest management units. Smaller management units, together with the new harvesting practices, will help us to achieve integrated timber and wildlife objectives in each part of the forest," said Spencer.

Six species of wildlife were chosen as indicators of forest ecosystem health. By managing areas for these six species, the habitat requirements of another 250 kinds of forest birds and mammals will be met.

When managing habitat for moose, forest planners will design cutovers that are irregular in shape and no wider than 440 metres. Harvest activity and haul roads will avoid known moose calving areas and mineral licks. In some areas, trees will only be harvested in winter. Before more logging is allowed, nearby cutovers must support new growth that is two to three metres tall.

Rotten logs, high stumps, and clumps of mature trees will be left along the edge of cutovers to conserve habitat for pileated woodpeckers. Within cutovers, some young aspen trees will be left. In 30 to 40 years these trees will be large enough to provide nesting habitat. Until then, nearby stands of mature timber will remain to provide pileated woodpeckers with suitable habitat for nesting, foraging and roosting.

Guidelines in place to conserve beaver habitat will prohibit road building along streams, lakes and rivers. Whenever possible, stream crossings will be located away from hardwood areas where beaver tend to concentrate. This practice should result in fewer blocked culverts and flooded roads.

To manage habitat for ovenbirds, planners will design regular-shaped cutovers in mature aspen stands. This measure will result in the least amount of forest "edge" bordering cutovers, and will improve the nesting success of songbirds that escape predators by nesting in the shaded forest interior.

By stimulating hardwood regrowth beside dense coniferous cover, foresters can produce ideal habitat for snowshoe hares. Because snowshoe hares often destroy planted jackpine seedlings, it may be necessary to protect these plantations by minimizing hare habitat in localized areas.

Another way to control hare populations is to leave large trees in reforested areas. Hawks and owls will use these trees as hunting perches. Predation by hawks and owls reduces the number of snowshoe hares, and will lessen hare damage to planted pine seedlings.

The partners recommend new ways to protect woodland caribou. Large, even-edged cutovers that are tolerated by woodland caribou, are less favoured by white-tailed deer. These deer can spread a parasite that has been found to be fatal to woodland caribou in other parts of North America.

High deer populations in the forest can lead to increased numbers of timber wolves. By discouraging deer from occupying cutovers in caribou areas, wildlife experts predict that fewer caribou will fall prey to wolves.

Another guideline adopted by the Saskatchewan Forest Habitat Project will protect woodland caribou calving areas, travel corridors, and mineral licks. The permanent closure of logging roads will also help to protect this vulnerable animal from hunters.

Narrow clearcuts with irregular shapes create prime habitat for moose and other animals that feed close to the forest's edge.

OLD GROWTH FOREST

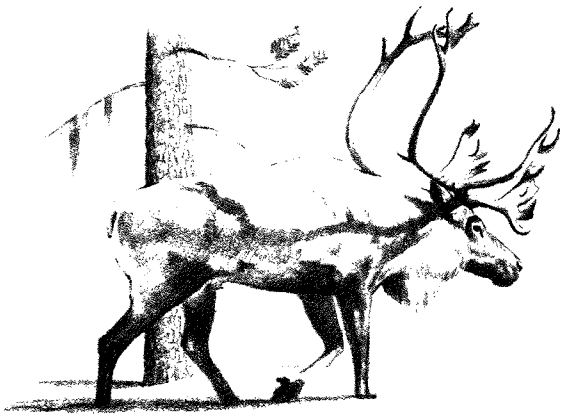
Foresters once thought that leaving trees to age and die was a waste of timber. However, now that the habitat needs of wildlife are better understood, old-growth forest has taken on new importance.

Many species of insect-eating birds seek shelter and food in old-growth forest. In a recent study carried out in Prince Albert National Park, some songbirds were found to nest only in mixedwood stands more than 130 years old.

The pileated woodpecker and the woodland caribou,two Saskatchewan Forest Habitat Project wildlife indicator species, are associated with mature and over-mature forest stands. Old-growth mixedwood stands usually contain a greater diversity and abundance of wildlife than most other forest habitats.

Because of an aggressive fire suppression policy, the amount of older growth forest in some areas of the province has increased over the past few decades. However, in areas that were extensively logged or burned by large wildfires, mature softwood and mixedwood stands are rare.

To protect wildlife species that thrive in old-growth habitat, forest companies will delay, or, in some instances, forego harvesting some mature stands. By so doing, they will maintain a variety of plant and animal life in all areas of Saskatchewan's boreal forest.



Woodland caribou embody wilderness values. They seek food and shelter in old-growth coniferous forests.

TAKING A LARGER VIEW

Connections made between Prince Albert National Park, and bordering wildlife habitats identified by the Saskatchewan Forest Habitat Project, will help to protect a larger forest ecosystem.

Prince Albert National Park is bordered on three sides by Weyerhaeuser Canada's 3.4 million hectare Forest Management Licence Agreement (FMLA) area. Weyerhaeuser harvests trees from about 6,000 hectares of land each year. Logging is not permitted in the park.

Paul Tarleton, a park warden, says that wilderness and wildlife are highly valued in Prince Albert National Park. He also stresses the importance of connections between the park and outlying commercial forest areas.

"Park land that is cut off from surrounding natural areas is like an animal in a zoo. The park should function as the core of a larger regional ecosystem," he said.

Connecting areas, or linkages, include such things as forested stream and river valleys that cross park boundaries. These linkages allow animals to travel safely from one area to another, reproduce and maintain a healthy level of genetic diversity. Linkages also allow natural processes, like predator-prey relationships, to continue uninterrupted.

FUNDING PARTNERS

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Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation

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