

Alternative Futures

**Alberta's Boreal Forest
at the Crossroads**

Richard R. Schneider

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data

Schneider, Richard R. (Richard Roland), 1959-
Alternative futures : Alberta's boreal forest at the crossroads /
Richard R. Schneider.

Copublished by: Alberta Centre for Boreal Research
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-9696134-4-X

1. Forest policy—Alberta. 2. Forests and forestry—Alberta,
Northern. 3. Taiga ecology—Alberta, Northern. 4. Forest
management—Alberta. I. Federation of Alberta Naturalists. II. Alberta
Centre for Boreal Research. III. Title.
SD568.A5S36 2002 333.75'097123 C2002-911134-X

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Published by:

The Federation of Alberta Naturalists
11759 - Groat Road
Edmonton, Alberta, T5M 3K6
www.fanweb.ca
and
The Alberta Centre for Boreal Research
P.O. Box 52031
8210 - 109 St.
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2T5
www.borealcentre.ca

Financial assistance for development and printing provided by:

Alberta EcoTrust Foundation (www.albertaecotrusted.com)
Canadian Boreal Trust
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Edmonton Chapter (www.cpaws-edmonton.org)
Federation of Alberta Naturalists (www.fanweb.ca)
TD Friends of the Environment Foundation (www.td.com/fef)

Cover photo: Cleve Wershler

Printed in Canada by Friesens

Printed on Reincarnation Matte paper (100% recycled, 50% post-consumer waste, processed
chlorine-free)

To Hilde and Fred, for starting me on this path,
To my dearest Alina, for all her love and encouragement, and
To Anika and Sasha, whose generation deserves to inherit a healthy forest.

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Acknowledgements

The origin of this book can be traced to the Ecosystem Management Working Group of the Alberta Forest Conservation Strategy. I thank the members of this group, Ron Anderson, Cheryl Bradley, Keith Branter, Diana Brierly, Sheri Dalton, Brian Harris, Darryl Hebert, Cam McGregor, Frank Oberle, and Brad Stelfox, for the insightful discussions we had on the application of Ecosystem Management to Alberta.

For the last two years I have been part of a research group called the Adaptive Management Experiment Team. The efforts of this group to devise practical scientifically-based management solutions to forest land-use issues in Alberta provided much of the intellectual foundation of this book. I thank Stan Boutin, Mark Boyce, Matt Carlson, Roger Creasey, Steve Cumming, Elston Dzus, Dan Farr, Lee Foote, Werner Kurz, Fiona Schmiegelow, Brad Stelfox, Mike Sullivan, and Shawn Wasel for their invaluable insights.

The support of the board of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society in Edmonton, and the broader conservation community in Alberta, has been vital to the success of this project. In particular, I thank Connie Boyce, Kim Dacyk, Dave Dodge, Judy Evans, Brett Purdy, Sam Gunsch, Peter Lee, George Newton, Irma Rowlands, Glen Semenchuk, Jill Sturdy, Richard Thomas, Cliff Wallis, Helene Walsh, and a long list of CPAWS volunteers for their many and varied contributions.

This book has benefited greatly from the feedback I have received from reviewers. I thank Cindy Chaisson, Steve Cumming, Susan Hannon, Steven Kennett, Marty Luckert, Ellen MacDonald, Monique Ross, Dave Schindler, Fiona Schmiegelow, Samantha Song, Brad Stelfox, Kevin Timoney, Marian Weber, and Bob Wynes for taking time out of their busy schedules to provide their comments and to assist the project in other ways.

Shawn Wasel and other members of the Al-Pac Environmental Services Team have greatly facilitated the project by providing data and photographs. I also thank the many other individuals that contributed data or photographs for the book; Dr. James Burns at the Provincial Museum of Alberta and Alina Schneider for copy-editing the manuscript; Carol Dragich for assisting with the cover design; and Mona Southron at Alberta Ecological Information Services for providing reprints. Financial assistance for the development and printing of the book was provided by Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, Canadian Boreal Trust, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Edmonton, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation.

Last, but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to Larissa and Vladimir Lurye, Hilde and Fred Schneider, and Alina Schneider for their support on the "home front" during the writing of this book.

Preface

Although the forests of Alberta are, for the most part, publicly owned, the public has had remarkably little access to information about these forests. Moreover, the information that does get widely disseminated comes from government and industry sources that generally convey the message that "all is well". In reality, the current system of forest management in Alberta is a relic of the 1950s, and is in serious need of repair.

To address the need for a reliable independent source of information on the boreal forest, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Edmonton Chapter initiated the Alberta Centre for Boreal Research in 1999, and I became its Executive Director. The Centre is a non-profit Society, registered in Alberta, and maintains a web site at: www.borealcentre.ca. This book represents the culmination of the Centre's first three years of work.

The book describes two alternative futures for Alberta's boreal forest. The first is the future forest under the existing system of management. My aim here is to provide readers with a clear understanding of what is happening in the forests of northern Alberta today, and what this will mean to the forests of tomorrow if no changes are made. The second half of the book describes an alternative future based on the implementation of ecological forest management. Here I provide a synthesis of the relevant scientific literature and describe how this new approach could be applied in Alberta.

From the outset, this book was designed to be accessible to a broad public audience, even though it draws heavily from the scientific and management literature. My job, as I have taken it, has been to pull all the pieces together and present the whole in a manner that is understandable to all. The dozen or so technical terms that I could not avoid using are defined in the glossary.

In addition to providing an overview of boreal issues, the book is also intended to serve as a gateway to further study. Factual information is thoroughly referenced, using material that is, for the most part, available through the Alberta library system or on the Internet. Most of the graphs and tables can be downloaded in Excel format from the Forest Watch Alberta web site (www.forestwatchalberta.ca).

To assure readers that the information being presented is accurate and reliable, references are supplied to the original sources of data. Most chapters of the book were also reviewed by one or two members of the Centre's scientific review board, comprised of academics with relevant experience (See the Centre's web site for more details). The reviewers were asked to identify errors of fact and omission.

Although the book is intended to provide a comprehensive guide to the boreal forest, some narrowing of the scope was required to keep the project manageable. For ex-

ample, the spatial scope was limited to forests above 55 degrees latitude, even though some boreal forest extends south of this. To simplify the discussion of management options I excluded forests that are not on Crown lands. The whole issue of native rights and land claims, although integral to land-use planning in the North, was not addressed, mainly because I lack the expertise to do so. Finally, some specific issues, such as open pit oil sands mining, agricultural expansion, and global warming could not be given the attention they deserve within the time and resources available to this project.

I believe that an informed and motivated public is vital for the conservation of Alberta's northern forest. My hope is that by raising awareness of problems, and providing viable alternative approaches to management, this book will help swell the ranks of informed and motivated individuals and support their efforts to advance conservation in Alberta.