



ROBIN SHACKLETON LOOKS out from a stump at the site on an Englishman River island where Island Timberlands has recently been engaged in selective helicopter logging. Photo by Fred Davis.

Old growth logging raises anger

Petition calls for end to old growth logging

16 February 2009

Whatever else can be said about helicopter logging, the result seen up close on a small island forest of towering old growth in the midst of the Englishman River, are incongruous to say the least.

It could be because everything else about an Island Timberlands logging site is so pristine.

The area is located a kilometer or two outside provincial park boundaries above the upper Englishman River Falls.

That logging is occurring at all on an island in a provincially designated sensitive stream so close to the protected park that bears its name — a river that's been the focus of habitat restoration projects for years due to declining salmon stocks — is something that has renewed anger among environmentalists about logging practices on private land.

“Anyone cutting these trees has to be feeling like they're doing something kind of wrong,” said Robin Shackleton, my guide on Friday to the spot where Island Timberlands was, until recently, engaged in single stem heli-logging operations, taking out a couple dozen or so of the larger trees deemed suitable for harvest.

Shackleton for 12 years worked in B.C.'s silviculture industry and first stumbled upon evidence of logging occurring on the small island.

“This is symptomatic of a problem in the forest industry. There’s the whole old growth issue, there’s watershed issues. It’s a big huge cluster of issues all on this little island here,” he said.

“The big thing is this sets a precedent. There needs to be something enacted in legislation, an old growth act. There’s so little of it left it has to be called a service and treated like other services. That way it becomes indispensable.

“Logging like this is just something you shouldn’t do. It’s in an alluvial plain. I guarantee you there’s water at times over that island or least a big part of it.”

The work has certainly attracted attention.

A facility operator engaged in brief conversation at the Englishman River Falls Provincial Park trail head that leads, after a scramble through knee deep snow and ‘round slippery banks to the logging site, said a parks foreman and Island Timberlands executives had visited the day before.

“We had a lot of bigwigs up. I was told to deeply discourage anyone from heading to that area,” he said.

Bill Waugh, general manager of planning and forestry for Island Timberlands said staff visits from regulatory agencies including the Private Managed Forest Land Council were anticipated early in the week.

“In this case I suspect it’s riparian matters that they’ll be interested in,” he said.

Waugh said the work that has created the controversy is a continuation of methods used right across the company’s natural resource areas, methods that have met government approval and are subject to the Private Managed Forest Land Act and fisheries regulation.

“We started the selection process on the Englishman back in 2003,” he said “The governments of the day gave a very favourable response on how it looked. We understand there’s other values that’s why we’re using the single stem style to harvest.

“I don’t think this will have any detrimental impact to either water users or downstream properties.”

He said trees present on the forest floor were likely felled and bucked for safety reasons adding “we’re taking out single stems of some of the larger but not the largest trees, about 20 to 25 trees in that area ... short of staying completely away we try to do the best we can.”

The Private Managed Forest Land Act and associated regulations contain language that pertains to broad objectives around maintenance of water quality and fish habitat. There is allowance for the wildlife minister to establish water quality objectives upstream of a licensed waterworks intake, with 14 days notice, in writing, required before the minister can enter onto privately held lands to access a stream for monitoring. There is no language in the act that specifically mentions riparian setback distances and soil conservation measures refer only to “minimizing the amount of area occupied by permanent roads, landings and excavated or bladed trails.

The council’s stated object is to encourage forest management practice that takes into account the “social, environmental and economic benefits of those practices.”

Department of Fisheries and Oceans guidelines suggest undisturbed vegetation should extend a minimum of 15 metres from high water marks or the top bank of any watercourse.

Dave Clough, a biologist and educator involved for many years in habitat restoration along the Englishman referred to the recent tree removals on the island as infringement on “the last of the best habitat in a river system literally disassembled by private land logging.”

It’s a chorus of condemnation that seemingly growing in volume as eco-tourism outfitters, select politicians and others interested in maintaining key habitat and watershed values call for an end to old growth logging altogether.

On the hike back from the logging site, that was devoid of workers late Friday afternoon, a man of about 60 was encountered along the riverbank seeking directions to the island that’s caused such a stir.

“I have sent letters to the government expressing my concern,” said Cec Williams, a member of the Arrowsmith Naturalists group. “One came back talking about how we must seek a balance. I think we’ve far exceeded any balance when 90 per cent of the old growth is already gone.

“What are we doing?” Williams wondered aloud. “It’s crazy, it’s so close to the park.”

Comment:

Island logging called despicable

19 February 2009

How desperate is Island Timberlands that they invaded a tiny river island, adjacent to a provincial park, in the heart of the Englishman River watershed to extract some 20 veteran old growth trees?

Until now, these 300 to 400 year-old trees growing in this complex and fragile island ecosystem, were respected and bypassed by generations of previous logging operations.

In addition to the old growth trees cut for export, Island Timberlands also destroyed a number of healthy old growth habitat trees to make way for the extraction of the money trees.

These habitat trees were more than 500 years old, supplying the much needed nesting sites, food and nutrients to ensure this unique and rare ecosystem survived, flourished and remained healthy and in balance.

Where will Island Timberlands log next to satisfy this greedy, despicable addiction for old growth timber?

Why are our local and provincial governments ambivalent regarding logging old growth, especially in the riparian zones of our community drinking watersheds. Are we and our governments nothing more than serfs living in a foreign- owned kingdom?

Former Qualicum Beach Councillor Scott Tanner