

# ALBERTA'S PULP INDUSTRY HISTORY

WHERE IT STARTED

BY PETER J. MURPHY AND ROBERT E. STEVENSON

Just 40 years ago the first wood pulp produced in Alberta began to roll off the line. This northern bleached Kraft pulpmill was built at Hinton, in west-central Alberta east of Jasper National Park, through a partnership between a local company, North Canadian Oils, and an American corporation, St. Regis Paper—the only one willing to invest in a major forest products venture in the province at that time. The new com-

pany, North Western Pulp and Power Ltd., was a fortuitous partnership with St. Regis supporting a high standard of forest management and innovative approaches to it. The story is of historic interest, showing adaptation to rapid changes—technical, environmental and social—and is a microcosm of meaningful changes underway in modern Canadian forestry practices.

Timber harvesting rights on a defined

lease area were negotiated in 1954 under a unique Forest Management Agreement (FMA) in which a commitment to sustained yield forest management was entrenched as a fundamental condition. The FMA ensured prompt renewal of harvested areas as a part of the company's responsibility for the full scope of forest management planning and harvesting, including inventory, forest renewal and construction of roads and bridges. The Alberta government, in turn, granted the company long term security of tenure, i.e. 20 years renewable, upon which to base investments in manufacturing plants and forest improvement. This model of shared government-industry responsibility and commitment was precedent-setting, and its principles provided an example that was widely emulated.

The two leading foresters involved at the time deserve recognition. Reginald

**Above** Part of the lease area in 1911. The forests in this area are largely of fire origin. Increased forest protection has enable this burn to regenerate and grow to maturity.

**Left** Hand-piled 8-foot wood, patch cutting in the Camp 1 area in the background—laid out to encourage natural regeneration.



NORTH WESTERN PULP AND POWER PHOTO

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D. Loomis was responsible for forest management in the province, and Desmond I. Crossley was the first Chief Forester for the company. Both had extensive experience and were determined that this operation would achieve the highest possible standards of forestry practice. Fortunately, they had the backing of both the government and company in this resolve.

St. Regis later acquired full ownership, and in the 1980's sold to Champion International. The mill is now operated by Weldwood of Canada. All owners have honoured the condition of the FMA and have since gone beyond their initial terms in consideration of forest ecosystem values. The mill has since been modernized and expanded. A stud mill was added, recently replaced with a dimension saw mill with a 220 million fbm (feet board measure) annual capacity.

From a historical perspective, this 40-year period was one of rapid change in both technology and forest management philosophy.

For example, in 1955, before the mill was constructed, forestry crews travelled on foot and snowshoes, living in tent camps to locate and cruise timber that could be accessed for the initial wood supply. Shortly after, St. Regis introduced the concept of Continuous Forest Inventory for determination of volume, growth and yield, a program that is still maintained. Now, inventory includes a broader array of ecosystem values, and is aided by remote sensing, geographic positioning, and computer-based data bases and mapping.

Logging began with a network of camps, housing up to 500 men. Trees were felled by hand with back saws and power saws, bucked into 8-foot lengths, skidded by horse and stacked by hand into 4-foot high piles. Horses were replaced by skidders in 1968, and most felling now is done by mechanical harvesters including an array of systems suitable

for sensitive sites. Woods workers now live in established local communities and commute to work.

Although sustained yield forest management was assured from the start, ecosystem concerns and social values led to the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM) as described in the National Forest Strategy of 1992. This requires management by an ecological approach that aims to maintain forest structures, patterns, diversity and processes within the range of natural varia-

**Above** Original fire-origin stand and two ages of regenerated cuts illustrating sustained yield forestry.

**Left** Sustainable forest management also requires consideration of all ecosystem components, such as this pileated woodpecker.

tion. It also involves public participation in identifying values. The transition to SFM has been addressed and is well underway in the Hinton operation. In recognition of its forward-looking practices the FMA and surrounding areas were selected in a national competition to become the Foothills Model Forest, one of a network of ten of Canadian Model Forests.

This large FMA in Alberta, now operated by Weldwood of Canada, has been sustainably and successfully managed for 40 years. Its success can be traced to the vision and initiative of Alberta Forest Service and company pioneers who developed and implemented the Forest Management Agreement system in Alberta. Also key was the Weldwood's willingness to adapt management practices in response to society's changing needs and expectations. The company has capitalized on opportunities based on improved resource management expertise developed through its experience, applied research, and technology transfer adaptation and development.



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