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Ontario's northern forests ailing due to logging practices

New study documents harm caused by over-logging

Toronto – A new report released today by CPAWS Wildlands League, an Ontario chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, documents the harm being caused by unsustainable logging in a huge northwestern Ontario forest under license to Abitibi Consolidated.

Marking the first such forestry assessment by a non-government organization using government data and analysis methods, CPAWS Wildlands League investigated the results of the company's government-approved logging practices in the Whiskey Jack Forest near Kenora and the Manitoba border.

The study authors found that the amount of wood that Abitibi is cutting is causing extensive damage to the forest ecosystem. It will also result in a shortfall within the next 20 years of trees to harvest for local mills. "We've found evidence that these logging levels are too high and we know they cannot be sustained," said Chris Henschel, Manager of Forest Certification for the group and lead author of the report.

The study documents that:

- The current harvesting level cannot be sustained for even 20 years.
- The company's estimate of available wood is based on unrealistic assumptions about how much the forest can produce each year.
- Harvest levels are too high to protect existing wildlife habitat, or to allow the restoration of degraded habitat conditions in the forest.

Much of the Whiskey Jack Forest is in a young, fragmented state, having been recently disturbed by large amounts of fire, wind damage and logging. "The forest is in rough shape," continued Henschel, Manager of Forest Certification at CPAWS Wildlands League. "Abitibi cut almost all of the woodland caribou habitat in the forest between 1999-2004 that was still there after earlier logging periods. I don't know if the caribou – which is a threatened species -- will survive here. The Ontario government and Abitibi should be focusing on restoring the forest, rather than trying to sustain the cut," says Henschel. The company recently received approval earlier this year for a new 5-year forest management plan.

The report also highlights the long-standing concerns of the Grassy Narrows First Nation, which asserts that industrial forest management in their traditional territory is adversely affecting their livelihoods, impinging on their constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights, and affecting the health of fish and wildlife populations on which the community depends.

Based on the report, CPAWS Wildlands League is calling for the following actions:

- The province should reduce the allowable harvest level in the forest to improve the prospects for local wildlife and to provide greater stability in longer-term wood supply.
- The province should also ensure that its plan for sustaining woodland caribou focuses on protection of habitat currently being used by the threatened species.
- Abitibi should commit to certification from the Forest Stewardship Council, which sets sustainable operating standards, to address many of the problems in the Whiskey Jack Forest. The Forest



Stewardship Council sets out the requirements for good forestry that balances Aboriginal, economic, environmental, and social priorities.

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Visit www.wildlandsleague.org for more information and to download an electronic copy of the report.

CPAWS Wildlands League is a charitable non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the land of Ontario through the establishment of protected areas and the promotion of natural resource use that is sustainable for nature, communities, and the economy.