

## The Real Story of Water Protection in BC: Glade Creek

Since the spring of 2015 the Glade Watershed Protection Society (GWPS) has been trying to work within the legal constructs of the BC system to protect the forest that creates our community water. We have tested each part of the system in turn and each has failed. Despite the circumstances of climate disruptions and the support of proven science, nowhere in the BC system is there a deviation from the status quo of corporate timber industry support.

Any measures in place to protect our water sources are smothered under the weight of a forest industry bias: in the MLA's office, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the Forest Practices Board (FPB), the Compliance and Enforcement Office, the Associations of Qualified Professionals, the Interior Health Authority (IHA) the timber companies Kalesnikoff Lumber Company (KLC) and Atco Wood Products (Atco), the Ministry of Forests (MFLNRO), the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and the BC Supreme Court where Judge McEwan opined that the citizens of BC have 'no right to clean water' in April 2019.

The IHA, after declining to investigate a Drinking Water Protection Act complaint stated in March 2017 that "As a matter of jurisdiction, we believe it is not appropriate to apply a(n)...investigation to the legal framework and approvals processes of forestry activities of MFLNRO." When we asked the Selkirk District Manager of Forests (an office that is mandated to work for the *public* good) for help, we were told that "I am a representative of the public service, not a representative for any individual group or opinion" (June 2018).

All have relinquished the responsibility of their office to work for the public good to instead work for the corporate better. The forestry bias that exists throughout our province at every level is clear. And local forest companies continue to strenuously lobby the regional and provincial government for more trees and more ways to cut them down, more money and more compensation. The CEO of the Interior Lumber Manufacturer's Association stated in a September 2017 RDCK meeting that "...there were no watersheds..." that couldn't be logged; there would be a way to "...work around..." a fragile watershed.

GWPS can tell you that communities are left with no say, and no voice at any level of the forest 'development' process. Communities have no control of the forests in their public community watershed. Even a basic request of asking the timber company not to slash burn fails when the company states that slash burning is cheaper than taking the slash to the pulp mill twenty five minutes down the road. The obvious bottom line for timber companies is financial, and the existing government support system makes it easy for them to flourish. It is ironic that water users are legally responsible for the potability of their water – even if cumulative deforestation caused by clear cuts is at fault. This is one point that the IHA continues to remind the community of: that the Glade community is legally responsible for the potability of their water source.

When we asked the IHA to help us protect our water source in 2016, the IHA told us they had no responsibility for what came into our water intake from above it - that was the responsibility of Environment Minister. When we asked the Ministry of Environment to help, they declined because they were not responsible for the water above the intake either, and they sent us on to the Ministry of Forests. Who, of course, declined to help as well. And so it goes: all of them apparently incapable of action for the public good, except when it benefits industrial logging.

Another example of this forestry bias is a complaint we submitted to the FPB (IRC/232 Jul 2020). In 2016 KLC and Atco commissioned a Qualified Registered Professional (QRP) to complete a hydrology assessment of the Glade Creek Watershed. The report is intended to assess the likelihood of adverse cumulative impacts to our water and provide guidance for forest development to limit the risk of such impacts occurring.

In a 2018 revision of this same report, the risk analysis data for our watershed was altered by further decreasing the meagre protection that had been afforded to Glade Creek by the report. Why? The FPB report stated that the licencees amended the watershed assessment because the revision “considered the licencees re-evaluation of the risk analysis based on the updated risk assessment framework associated with the new professional standards” (FPB/IRC/232, p2). In the revision, both the risk of flood to our Glade intake and the risk of landslide to our Glade intake were reduced from *moderate* in the original 2016 report to *low* in the 2018 revision. This is perplexing- how can the data in an August 2018 revision be altered due to ‘new professional standards’ that weren’t released until January 2020?

Sidestepping the obvious question of how in these times of climate disruption these dangers can lead to a *reduction* of the risk analysis, the community of Glade was not informed of these data changes. According to the FPB report, KLC and Atco felt the “...recommendations did not change, and therefore they felt the (data) changes were not significant.” (FPB/IRC/232,p7)

They are correct; the changes are not significant to the lumber companies, because the hydrological report is inconsequential in that there is no legal obligation to commission it, and no legal obligation to follow it. The report and most other reports are part of the public façade that gives the appearance of protecting community water, that gives the appearance of the industry working with the impacted community, while a forestry bias supports anything but that.

Public offices won’t act to the full extent of their office, and responsibility is placed on the shoulders of individual volunteers begging for money and support from a society who only hears the loud voices of those who produce the glossy brochures: the Premier’s office, the Minister of Forests, the Interior Lumber Manufacturer’s Association, the Truck Logger’s Association, the Council of Forest Industry, the professional associations, and many other industry groups.

The system is fed by trees and produces corporate money from public lands. As long as there are still trees to cut, no matter how young and small they are, and despite a mountain of science that proclaims to all that we need to protect and restore forests and watersheds to continue to drink water now in the future; the people who represent the timber extraction system huddle under the bedsheets too afraid to face the morning light of precaution, reality and change.

Vancouver and Victoria’s water is fully protected from logging, but the rural water might be dried up, washed away, and contaminated with turbidity if we wait too long, and that timeline started a few years back! How will the lumber companies keep their wood wet, piled high in their yards and using millions of gallons of water to keep it usable if the water dries up?

The value that the forest adds to the health and welfare of all life is paramount and how we care for the elements of nature that provide us with these benefits should be foremost in our actions.

The province of BC does not need to convene a panel of forty industry experts to figure it out, it is already done: written down in plain language by the scientists and ecologists of today, standing on the shoulders of those who have been practicing for decades. This is the to do list: make plans that incorporate the science of climate change and conservation, treat water as the human right it should be for everyone in the province, not just Vancouver and Victoria. Instead of making clear cut blocks, make up nature based conservation plans where all values are considered, not just the value of resource extraction. Release the public forests and community watersheds from the unsustainable practices of profit making and give them back to the communities. Water is the priority – and the forests that produce that water need to be protected.

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