

Glade residents anxious, feel ‘under the gun’ as logging plans loom

by John Boivin on 04 Jun 2017



An aerial view of the watershed above Glade Kalesnikoff Lumber would like to log. — Submitted photo

Residents of Glade say they can often hear the Kalesnikoff lumber mill, on the opposite bank from their Kootenay River community, as it processes hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of lumber every year.

Soon those operations will be a lot closer to them.

“The [Kalesnikoff] woodland manager said there would be 350 logging truck loads, 700 trips going thru our community,” says Heather McSwan of the Glade Watershed Protection Society (GWPS).

“We only have small ferry, and logging trucks will be going down our streets, which are very small and have no sidewalks.”

But it’s not just the trucks that concern the Glade water protectors. It’s where the logs that will be filling those trucks are coming from- the watershed that supplies drinking water to the community.

This fall, Kalesnikoff plans to begin road-building to access three cutblocks on the slopes above the Glade community. One of the blocks is completely within the watershed, two others partially within it. (A second logging company, ATCO, also has a licence to cut in the watershed area.)

When the plan was announced two years ago, the community began to worry. Logging itself wasn’t the only problem, it was the road-building that goes with it was also a concern.

The 300 residents of Glade, an idyllic century-old settlement of organic farms and homesteads, fear their water quality could be deeply disturbed by creating new access routes through the watershed.

“We had landslide on our old waterline road about a month ago. This waterslide was caused by heavy rain,” says McSwan. “We’re getting huge precipitation events that have cause the land to move. Soil goes down to the creeks, affecting the turbidity of the water.

“If these cuts go the way the logging companies are proposing this would exacerbate the situation greatly- there’d be a lot more water coming down the mountain.”

So for the last two years the Protection Society has researched, lobbied and made applications to stop Kalesnikoff’s plans. Earlier this year, Interior Health declined to act on a community application to stop the logging on the basis of regulations protecting a community’s water supply. The group is now considering a judicial review of that decision. It’s been a frustrating process, says McSwan, because so much is at stake.

“If our water quality is damaged, and it has to be treated, then that water is no good. And if our treatment system fails we’re left with nothing,” she says. “The reasons we have for protecting our water and not logging I think supersedes their reason for resource extraction.”

But if anything, the frustration exists on both sides. Tyler Hodgkinson has been shepherding the Glade project as Woodlands Manager for Kalesnikoff. He says the community isn't listening either.

"They just don't want logging, period," he says. "It's more of an anti-logging agenda, than working with us and trying to flesh out what the concerns are and how we can alleviate those."

Logging is very different from decades ago, Hodgkinson says. What his company does is not resource extraction, but farming "on a grand time scale and grand spatial scale". He says forestry experts, geologists and hydrologists work with the forestry companies to ensure road building and logging don't impact a community's water supply.

"There's not going to be a detriment to their water. There's not going to be a detriment to their quality or quantity of water whatsoever," he insists.

Hodgkinson says nearly 90 per cent of Kalesnikoff and the other half-dozen large forestry companies' operating areas are community or domestic watersheds. Bringing hundreds of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars to the region, he says forestry is and will remain an important activity that has to be accommodated by the people living in the area.

"They're losing sight of the fact they don't own the watershed," he says. "They get their water from the watershed but the Crown owns it. The public of BC owns the watershed. The Canadian people own the watershed, and there are multiple uses out there."

But that is the very problem, says McSwan.

"At one point watersheds used to be protected," she says. "Prior to the 1950s watersheds were protected, against all industrial activities and even trespass."

That changed with industry lobbying back in the 1950s and 60s, says McSwan. But there's no reason it can't change back.

"When people like myself say why watersheds shouldn't be protected, it's not like we're talking about flying to the moon," she says.

The larger issues won't be resolved anytime soon, and residents of Glade have one month left to respond to Kalesnikoff's stated plans for the watershed. Hodgkinson says rather than being swamped with objections, they've received exactly one feedback letter- from the local Irrigation District.

"They have had two years to do this. They've taken the anti-logging stance, which is the wrong approach," he says, noting that the development is going to happen this fall. "You're much better to sit down at the table and come to a compromise. We live in a democracy, it is not one size fits all."

McSwan says more letters of protest will be coming to the company soon. Legislation and bureaucracy may be against them, and residents are anxious and feeling under the gun, but she says they are not giving up.

"I guess one of the levers we have is we are passionate, we are stubborn and I think as well we have science on our side," she says. "They have the legal stuff on their side. But 80 per cent of BC residents get their water from surface sources.

"If that's not as important as resource extraction I don't know what is." <http://thenelsondaily.com/news/glade-residents-anxious-feel-%E2%80%99under-gun%E2%80%99-logging-plans-loom-44677#.WTiPwsaltPb>