

November 4, 2019

Youth Leadership in Sustainability
c/o The School of Education
Trent University
1600 W Bank Dr, Peterborough, ON K9L 0G2

Svetlana Zeran
Bancroft Minden Forest Company
27578 ON-62, Bancroft, ON

Dear Ms Zeran,

We are members of a senior high school program in Peterborough known as Youth Leadership in Sustainability. We are contacting you to urge you to put a hold on plans to cut the old-growth eastern hemlock forest at the north end of Catchacoma Lake in northern Peterborough County. We are hopeful that we can find a time to speak with you about this forest before the end of next week.

Youth Leadership in Sustainability (YLS) is a one-semester experiential learning-based 4-course educational program that prepares grade 11 and 12 students for leadership roles in pursuing sustainability at the local and global levels.

As part of our learning within the grade 12 Environment and Resource Management course, we have been working with Ancient Forest Exploration & Research (AFER), under the guidance of Chair and Chief Scientist Dr. Peter Quinby and local field staff Carling Dewar and Laura Collings on their citizen science-based Peterborough County Old-Growth Forest Project. Part of our learning included two days of forest survey work in the eastern hemlock-dominated forest at the north end of Catchacoma Lake.

During the survey work, we saw yellow and blue markings on trees, and came to learn that contractors working for the Bancroft Minden Forest Company have plans to do a selection harvest in this area in the near future.

We have identified many trees over 140 years old (using 40 cm DBH as a minimum) and estimated the age of several trees using an increment borer. Within the area scheduled to be harvested, we found a 73 cm DBH eastern hemlock tree that we estimate to be 349 years old that is marked to be cut.

We also were in awe of the aesthetics of this old-growth forest and noted the many trails that link to the forest that indicate the popularity of this area for recreation.

After we shared our survey data with AFER, they confirmed that indeed it is an old-growth forest, and after more research on their part, learned that this stand is, at 550 hectares in size, in fact the largest *known* old-growth eastern hemlock stand in Canada. In addition, natural eastern hemlock forests of all ages are endangered forest types in Ontario, and are likely endangered throughout the rest of Canada as well.

Forests smaller than this (for example the Clear Lake Conservation Reserve (453 hectares) and Raganooter Lake Conservation Reserve (311 hectares)) are officially designated as provincially significant. It stands to reason therefore, that relative to these two old-growth eastern hemlock forests, the larger Catchacoma Old-growth Forest is also provincially significant.

The Catchacoma Old-growth Forest has a basal area and average tree size that are comparable to other nearby old-growth forests. For example, the average DBH and basal area for trees in our Catchacoma plots is 31 cm and 48.4 m²/ha, respectively, while the average DBH and basal area for trees in Mark S. Burnham Provincial Park (40 hectares of old-growth forest) were lower at 26 cm and 35.9 m²/ha, respectively.

Through the iNaturalist app, we noted that five Five-Lined Skinks have been identified within two kilometers of the proposed cut area. This species is identified as “special concern” under Ontario’s Endangered Species Act. Skinks in hibernation cannot evade logging equipment that is operating during the winter months.

All of this suggests that there is much at stake. Given the significance of this forest at many levels, we are respectfully asking for a one-year moratorium on cutting in this block until further environmental and economic studies are done. Using the results of these studies, logging of this endangered ecosystem could then be re-evaluated. We think these studies should include:

- an assessment of the significance of this forest at the regional, provincial and national levels.
- a comparison of the economic value of logging to the non-resource values (recreational, aesthetic and carbon capture) This sequestration and storage of carbon is critical for solving our climate crisis.
- an assessment of how important this old-growth forest might be for the five-lined skink, as well as potentially many other species at risk that may use this forest (e.g., eastern whip-poor-will, Blanding’s turtle, and others). Field survey work to assess for these species-at-risk would likely have to wait until the summer months.

We have also come to learn that many recreational users of this endangered old-growth forest and surrounding cottage owners are not well informed about logging operations in this area. We believe their input is important to consider before logging operations are given final approval.

We would very much like to speak with you at your earliest convenience about the Catchacoma Old-growth Forest and your cutting plans. We would like to invite some of the staff at AFER to participate in that conversation as well. Perhaps a video conference call (google hangout, or “zoom”) would work best, so all of our students and AFER could take part. Times that work for us include Nov 11 12:30-2:30, Nov 13 10-2:30, and Nov 14 1:30 - 2:30

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Best regards,

Signed, Kyle Nilsen, on behalf of the 2019 YLS class