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**FROM: Katie Krelove ([katie@wildernesscommittee.org](mailto:katie@wildernesscommittee.org))**  
**on behalf of Wilderness Committee, Catchacoma Forest Stewardship Committee (CFSC)**  
**and Ancient Forest Exploration & Research (AFER)**

**Re: FSC audit SHC 003810 Bancroft Minden Forest Company 2021 S4**

Please accept this submission on behalf of the Wilderness Committee (WC), a charitable national conservation organization, Ancient Forest Exploration & Research (AFER) a non-profit old growth forest research group, and the Catchacoma Forest Stewardship Committee (CFSC), a local group of citizens advocating for protection status for a 660 hectare crown (public) forest located within the management unit of the Bancroft Minden Forest Company (BMFC), known as Catchacoma Forest.

**Background:**

WC, AFER and CFSC have been communicating with the SFL holder (BMFC) and provincial Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) staff since 2019, when field surveys conducted by AFER identified Catchacoma Forest as a nationally significant mature and old growth eastern hemlock forest. AFER researchers also discovered the survey area was scheduled for selection logging in the fall/winter of 2019/2020.

In an attempt to secure a moratorium on logging in Catchacoma Forest until the full extent of its old-growth conservation values could be assessed, WC and AFER researchers met with the SFL and MNRF representatives to present the preliminary old-growth surveys in February 2020. We also presented research of documentation of species-at-risk sightings indicating the presence of at least 10 species-at-risk in the area. Despite these efforts, the AFER information was ignored by both the SFL or MNRF, and logging took place in the winters of 2019/2020 and 2020/2021.

WC and CFSC have continued to advocate throughout the public consultation process in the development of the 2021-2031 Forest Management Plan for conservation status for the Catchacoma Forest. We submitted detailed appeals to protect the non-timber rare old-growth features and dependent species, as well as the carbon storage and recreational values. While a “moratorium” on logging was deemed “out of scope” of the FMP Planning process, a recent “Issues Resolution” decision by the regional director for MNRF did find that information on the age of the Catchacoma Forest as well as silviculture practices for old growth were lacking in the FMP. That decision also required a block in Catchacoma Forest proposed for “regular harvest”

in the 2021-31 FMP be put into “conditional harvest” pending several criteria (full decision is included).

While we are somewhat satisfied with this result insofar as it may provide more time to work towards permanent conservation status for Catchacoma Forest, there are still outstanding issues with the FMP planning process and 2019-2021 logging practices that we would like to draw to the attention for the 2021 FSC audit. It should also be noted that WC and the CFSC submitted as stakeholders to the September 2020 FSC audit of BMFC, which was conducted remotely by Larry Nall. We met with Mr. Nall at that time.

Please see below for descriptions of the FSC standard-related issues of concern for the September 2021 FSC audit of BMFC.

## **1. FSC standard 6.0: Environmental Values and Impact**

### **Issue 1: SFL use of Best Available Information**

Several indicators in FSC standard 6.0 require that “best available information” be used by the SFL to provide a baseline for management activities or as a basis for analyses in subsequent indicators. The definition of this includes results of field surveys, expert opinions and consultations with stakeholders.

WC and CFSC assert that AFER and its founder and lead ecologist, Dr. Peter Quinby (also a member of CFSC) is a recognized and qualified authority on the topic of old-growth forest identification and conservation. We assert that the AFER surveys of old growth in Catchacoma Forest were made readily available to the SFL but were not adequately considered as best available information in the 2019-20 logging operations, nor in the development of the draft 2021-31 FMP. In support of the assertion of AFER and Dr. Quinby a qualified authority, we submit the following description of their background and accomplishments.

[AFER](#) is a non-profit charitable organization formed in 1992, dedicated to research and education focused on ancient and old-growth forests in Ontario. AFER’s research has identified and described old-growth forests throughout Ontario including the Temagami region, Algonquin Park, the Lower Spanish Forest, the GTA Greenbelt area, and Peterborough County. AFER has also mapped and described three wildlife corridors in Ontario including the Algonquin to Adirondacks Wildlife Corridor, the Temagami to Algonquin Wildlife Corridor, and the Superior-Temagami Wildlife Corridor. In 2010 AFER published [Ontario’s Old Growth Forests: A Guidebook](#). The second edition of this book is expected in bookstores any day now. A list of AFER’s publications is available [here](#). AFER’s research work on old growth in the Catchacoma Forest was funded by a provincial government Trillium Grant, issued to survey old growth in Peterborough County. The reports on Catchacoma Forest are available [here](#).

Dr. Peter Quinby is AFER’s founder and has been Chair of the Board of Directors and Chief Scientist since 2004. He has studied landscape ecology and conservation for the past four

decades. He received his masters degree from Yale University, his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, and he was formerly a Certified Senior Ecologist through the Ecological Society of America. Dr. Quinby has published many scientific articles and technical reports addressing the topics of old-growth forest and landscape ecology, natural areas management, wildlife habitat assessment, wildlife corridor design, and species-at-risk. Dr. Quinby's bio is available [here](#).

AFER and Dr. Quinby have been cited in more than 60 refereed journals, 30 books, and by more than 50 institutions including the Canadian Forest Service, Environment Canada, Harvard University, The Nature Conservancy, Ontario Forest Research Institute, and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (see full list: [https://e251c3be-0fe2-490f-98e1-e22cd6d962b8.filesusr.com/ugd/1eacbf\\_3fdf952b66fa4c88ba36457835e6d2ca.pdf?index=true](https://e251c3be-0fe2-490f-98e1-e22cd6d962b8.filesusr.com/ugd/1eacbf_3fdf952b66fa4c88ba36457835e6d2ca.pdf?index=true)).

Despite AFER's and Dr. Quinby's expertise in the field of old-growth forest ecology our experience with submitting AFER's field studies regarding the Catchacoma Forest conservation values was that the SFL and the FMP planning team dismissed the surveys, data, and reports presented. Instead, the SFL continued to state reliance on 2007 Forest Resource Information (FRI) aerial photography data and publicly inaccessible decisions made by contracted tree markers to determine baselines for the age and stand structure of the Catchacoma Forest. This was especially troublesome as additional field survey work in Catchacoma Forest in 2020 undertaken by AFER, determined the age of the oldest trees in plots studied was on average 58 years higher than FRI stand age data.

We assert that the lack of adequate consideration of AFER surveys as part of "best available information" inhibited the SFL's ability to identify and define the state and condition of environmental values of the Catchacoma Forest, as well as to assess the current forest to appropriately determine management activity impacts on stand and site qualities prior to implementation.

In support of this lack of adherence to "best available information" we submit the following:

- a) In our initial meeting with reps from BMFC and MNRF in Feb. 2020 we were told in advance of the meeting by the SFL that FSC standards were "out-of-scope" of the meeting and could not be discussed (documentation available upon request).
- b) In subsequent meetings with the FMP Planning Team (PT) including the SFL, members of the Local Citizens Committee (LCC) and MNRF, it was stated that several PT members had not read the AFER reports submitted. These meetings were recorded by the MNRF.
- c) WC and CFSC requested in multiple submissions that the SFL, Planning Team and MNRF biologists engage in field research to investigate AFERs field survey findings regarding age classification of the Catchacoma Forest. Either these were never done, or no data or reports were made available (documentation can be shared upon request).
- d) WC and CFSC requested a meeting with the Local Citizens Committee (part of the FMP planning team) to present AFERs findings and were turned down (documentation can be shared upon request).

- e) WC and CFSC requested data on prior logging in the Catchacoma Forest (from 1988-89) regarding the amount and species cut, silviculture used, and regeneration monitoring. This was never provided (documentation can be shared upon request).
- f) AFER research of both documented species-at-risk (SARs) and likely SARs habitat in Catchacoma Forest revealed a minimum of 10 species-at-risk that are associated with the Forest. In our initial meeting with the SFL it was stated by the SFL that species-at-risk field surveys had been undertaken by MNRF prior to 2019 logging. However, no documentation for these field surveys was made available.
- g) The CFSC submissions to the Planning Team to request a moratorium on logging were supported by written submissions from the Municipality of Trent Lae, the Catchacoma Cottagers Association, the Cavendish Ratepayers Association and hundreds of local citizens. (Documentation available upon request)

**Recommendation: WC, CFSC and AFER request a corrective action from the SFL to remedy non-compliance with standard 6.0 in regards to acknowledgement and use of “Best Available Information”. We recommend that the SFL undertake field research to verify AFERs data on old growth in the Catchacoma Forest and register AFER as an “expert opinion”.**

**Issue 2: SFL engagement with interested stakeholders in process to identify and protect representative sample areas of native ecosystems (FSC indicator 6.5)**

*FSC indicator 6.5 states that the SFL “shall identify and protect representative sample areas\* of native ecosystems and/or restore them to more natural conditions”. The indicator goes on to state that, “for forests\*managed on public lands, an efficient process is used to engage Indigenous Peoples whose traditional territory overlaps the Management Unit and self-identified interested and affected stakeholders, regarding the identification and management of designated conservation lands. The process includes the development of a mechanism to achieve consensus on the identified designated conservation lands.”*

On June 1, 2020 the CFSC submitted a statement of interest as self-identified stakeholders to the General Manager of the BMFC regarding the achievement of indicator 6.5 (letter attached). The statement identified CFSC and others as stakeholders wishing to be engaged in the process for a gap analysis of the conservation network to identify potential new designated conservation areas. The CFSC received a confirmation email of receipt of this statement from the SFL **but to date has not been informed of any engagement procedures for identification of new conservation areas.**

The 2020 Audit Report of BMFC contains the following statement regarding the SFLs progress towards achievement of indicator 6.5: *“Referring to Interim Indicator 6.5.1i in Annex H of the new standard, the company has engaged with interested stakeholders in an attempt to reach consensus on how an old hemlock stand is administered. The company has developed a mechanism, the BMFC Issue Resolution Process, to seek to achieve that consensus on the*

*selection of designated conservation lands.*" (From 2020 audit report, section NFSS checklist, section 6.5).

The mechanism referred to in the passage -- "the BMFC Issue Resolution Process" --has never been brought to the attention of the CFSC, WC or AFER, despite our statement of interest. While we did participate in the MNRF FMP Issues Resolution process, this was initiated by CFSC, not the SFL and is not a mechanism developed by the SFL. Importantly, prior to and **during that process it was explicitly stated that the issue of designating new conservation lands was out-of-scope.** Therefore we do not consider engagement in that process as a potential mechanism to achieve consensus of designated conservation lands, and from our knowledge no such mechanism has been developed or shared with interested stakeholders.

In addition to this apparent mis-information regarding the existence of a mechanism to select designated conservation lands in consensus, the 2020 audit also contains inaccurate information. In the NFSS checklist for 6.5, it states "*Regarding the dispute between the company and several interested stakeholders over selection harvesting in an older hemlock stand in Block 1711, there is already a 1307 ha hemlock reserve, the Clear Lake Conservation Reserve, established in 1997, on the Minden side of the forest.*" While there is a Clear Lake Conservation Reserve that consists of 1307ha, old-growth hemlock accounts for 34.6% according to the [1999 Clear Lake Conservation Area Statement of Conservation Interest](#). This puts the hemlock stand at Clear Lake at approximately 452 ha, which is the size used by AFER in the report produced [comparing documented old-growth hemlock stands across Canada with the Catchacoma Forest](#). This again seems to be an example of AFER's research being overlooked with regards to "best available information."

The 2020 audit also makes several references to gap analysis processes for conservation undertaken by the MNRF in 1999 and by MECP in 2019. The SFL, however, has not engaged with the CFSC, WC or AFER around these analyses. The 2019 gap analysis is not readily available to the public, nor has it been peer reviewed. If the SFL's intention is to rely solely on these analyses to determine the need for designating new conservation areas, at the very least this should be communicated to interested stakeholders.

It is also important to note that the process for Issues Resolution with regards to forestry practices in Ontario has recently legally changed. The Ontario government of the day has [exempted forestry operations in the province from adherence to the provincial Environmental Assessment Act \(EEA\)](#) which substantially has removed the ability for public requests for independent environmental assessments of specific forest management blocks. The provincial government has also recently [permanently exempted forestry from adhering to the provincial Endangered Species Act](#).

#### **Recommendation:**

- a) We recommend that a corrective action be required to clarify and substantiate the SFL process to engage with self-identified interested stakeholders regarding the identification and management of designated conservation lands.**

- b) The SFL undertake an independent peer review of any gap analyses regarding conservation areas, with special emphasis on gaps in mature and old growth ecosystems**
- c) The SFL create a map of old growth ecosystems in the MU, including forest type and quantity**
- d) The SFL work within their sphere of influence to oppose the exemptions of forestry from the provincial Environmental Assessment Act and Endangered Species Act**

### **Issue 3: Harvesting in Block 1711**

From observations made on-site, WC, CFSC and AFER also have concerns with the harvest that occurred in 2019-20 and 2020-21 in Block 1711 of the Catchacoma Forest. These concerns (documentation available upon request) include:

- a) Basal area remaining in some areas resembles shelterwood cutting rather than selection, resulting in large gaps in the canopy that do not support hemlock regeneration
- b) Ineffective or lack of water culverts resulting in stagnant water pooling and iron leaching.
- c) Inadequate field studies to identify SARs prior to logging.
- d) Natural disturbance silviculture emulation based on fire disturbance, rather than wind-throw, which is the primary natural disturbance in this forest. The logging that was done exposes old growth hemlock trees to even more wind throw) due to thinning
- e) Built entry road and landing seems to have no plans for decommissioning. This road encourages high impact use by trucks and cars, and impedes low-impact use such as hiking.

**Recommendation: We recommend that the Catchacoma Forest blocks be designated for an on-site audit in the upcoming process, and that special attention be paid to silviculture maintenance of eastern hemlock old growth features, road and trail building contribution to non-sustainable activities, destruction of hiking trails, water buffers, field identification of species-at-risk habitat and monitoring plans.**

**The CFSC, WC and AFER request a meeting with the FSC auditor, both online and in the blocks comprising the Catchacoma Forest. We are happy to share any and all information required by the auditor.**

Sincerely,



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On behalf of  
Wilderness Committee,  
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