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Government failing loggers, Manitobans with logging license area renewals

Logging licenses set to expire, winter logging work now uncertain, park protection not yet guaranteed

With less than six months until they expire, the government is reporting no progress on renewal of the multiyear logging license awarded to Tembec for their Pine Falls plant and the license to Louisiana-Pacific for their Swan River plant. At this late stage, it is unlikely that Manitoba Conservation will have time to do proper environmental assessments or public consultation by the December 31, 2008 expiration date of these licenses. Without license renewals, many loggers and timber processing plant workers could be left without employment this winter.

The Wilderness Committee has, on several occasions, requested information--including a time line--on logging license renewal procedure from the Environmental Assessment and Licensing Branch, the Conservation Minister's office, and the Premier's office, but no information has been forthcoming.

Tembec's logging license that is expiring includes much of Nopiming Provincial Park, while Louisiana-Pacific's license includes Duck Mountain Provincial Park. Overwhelmingly, Manitobans have asked to have provincial parks removed from logging license areas, but corporate logging interests have resisted this push for more protected public land in Manitoba. The government delay in establishing new license agreements that exclude parks may be putting people's jobs at risk.

"The Manitoba government is doing things wrong--that's as simple as I can state it," said Eric Reder, Campaign Director for the Wilderness Committee. "They are not telling the public what is happening with logging licenses, and they are obviously behind schedule. This means they are failing both Manitoba citizens who want to see our provincial public lands protected, and people who are employed in the logging industry."

Logging in Manitoba can be a sustainable industry, but large areas of the province must be off-limits to industrial activity, so healthy ecosystems and biological diversity can be preserved. An expensive and extensive government report from 16 years ago succinctly recommended logging in provincial parks be phased out. The Wilderness Committee is calling on the Manitoba government to expediently establish logging license areas outside of provincial parks, and ensure all logging licenses include a protocol to establish more protected areas in the future.

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