

The Honourable Philippe Couillard
M.L.A., Premier of the Province of Quebec
Édifice Honoré-Mercier, 3^e étage
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Québec (Québec) G1A 1B4

January 11, 2016

Dear Premier Couillard,

We are very concerned by the actions of a group of companies, operating in the Boreal Forest in Canada, that have threatened to withdraw from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The companies are demanding that provincial governments and the FSC halt further progress on needed conservation measures, including better protecting large intact landscapes, caribou recovery planning, and agreements with First Nations. This comes at the very time that many are looking to Canadian provinces to strengthen forest conservation.

Over the last two decades the FSC has proven to be the only credible forest management certification program worldwide. It has given companies with billions of dollars in buying power the confidence they need to reassure customers that their products are sourced responsibly, with the consent of local Indigenous communities and without driving the decline of endangered species. Company threats – that either FSC halts efforts to strengthen conservation standards or they will abandon the certification program – undercut the compact between forest products companies, environmental groups and the social sector that has made the FSC the remarkable success it has been to date. And they put at risk the business certainty the forest products industry and their buyers have enjoyed because of the FSC. We reject this counter-productive and aggressive approach and call on this group of logging companies and their industry associations to work with, not against, the very system that has given them social license in the marketplace.

We believe that a healthy environment and a strong economy go hand in hand.

Today, fifty million hectares of Canadian forest is FSC certified, more than any other country in the world. While this provides Canada with a competitive advantage as a major supplier of the world's FSC product, it requires FSC suppliers and governments that manage forests to be leaders and collaborators to ensure a credible certification system that supports healthy forests. The interest in FSC products has only grown since FSC was launched in 1993 and many of the world's largest companies require FSC certified forest products. The United States is a major consumer of FSC-certified products, particularly from Canada. Increasingly, customers around the world are making social and environmental values a priority in their purchasing decisions.

There is no other third-party forest certification system with a strong system of environmental protection, community engagement and conflict resolution. FSC also provides a forum in which difficult issues of management and conservation can be worked out in a collaborative

manner. This collaboration, as well as progress on conservation partnerships, allows for long term solutions and reduces conflict between various interests in regards to management of Canada's forests. Threats to undermine the FSC will exacerbate conflicts and distract stakeholders from finding real solutions.

Amid growing calls to strengthen forest protection around the world, a viable and world-class forest products industry in Canada will depend, in part, on a greater commitment to the FSC.

Article 5 of the recent Paris climate Agreement calls on parties to “conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases, including forests.” This is critically important for Canada’s Boreal Forest, which is one of the largest terrestrial reservoirs of carbon on the planet as well as one of the largest sources of freshwater and a critical haven for migratory birds. A significant majority of this landscape must be conserved, especially areas that have never been cut. In addition, any future development must fully respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples as decision-makers in their traditional territories, as required under the FSC system and also affirmed in the Paris Agreement

We stand ready to work with Canada’s forest products industry to better meet our mutual goals, but we also stand ready to challenge companies that are fragmenting the last intact forest areas in the Boreal Forest, that do not adhere to best practices and, most importantly, that fail to respect the free, prior and informed consent of affected First Nations in their traditional territories. This is no time to pull back from the only viable system for conserving and responsibly managing Quebec’s forests and risking access to critical markets.

Sincerely,

Better Paper Project
Dogwood Alliance
Catalog Choice
Chlorine Free Products Association
ForestEthics
Friends of the Earth, US
Green Press Initiative
Greenpeace USA
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Rainforest Action Network
Rainforest Relief
Re-nourish

Cc:

Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Government of Canada

James Gordon Carr, Minister of Natural Resources, Government of Canada

Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Government of Canada

Laurent Lessard, Minister of Forests, Wildlife and Parks, Government of Quebec

Geoffrey Kelley, Minister responsible for Native Affairs, Government of Quebec

David Heurtel, Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and the Fight against Climate Change, Government of Quebec

Andrew Tremblay, Quebec Forest Industry Association

Francois Dufresne, President, FSC Canada

Kim Carstensen, Director General, FSC International