



MEMO

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To: Council
From: Executive Director
Date: February 28, 2009
Re: **IN-902 Englishman River heli-harvest Island Timberlands**

On February 12, 2009, we received several public complaints that Island Timberlands was logging an island on the Englishman River. These complaints expressed concern for effects on the fish habitat of the Englishman River and drinking water quality as the City of Parksville draws water from the river.

I was aware that the Englishman River is a fish-bearing river and that habitat restoration project work to improve spawning habitat is ongoing. Also there is a lot of community interest in protecting "the health of the Englishman River". The Englishman River Falls Provincial Park is used extensively for recreation by the local public.

Accordingly I took the following steps:

Verified that the City of Parksville has three water licences for the Englishman River and that the City has a water supply intake in the river downstream. Also that the Arrowsmith Water Service has one water licence and operates the Arrowsmith dam and reservoir. Water from the reservoir is released into the Englishman River annually under controlled conditions

Confirmed that the logging referred to was on Island Timberlands private property. I was informed by Island Timberlands that the logging was a heli select operation within a small island of the Englishman River.

Retained Shawn Hamilton RPBio and Associates, consulting fisheries biologist, to undertake an on-site inspection of the harvesting. Mr. Hamilton was requested to collect information concerning pre-planning work by Island Timberlands, and to inspect the logging site. He was tasked to assess the removal of merchantable trees, the retention and protection of non-commercial understorey vegetation, the amount of the disturbance to the site and whether there has been any disturbance to the riverbanks.

I intended to use the information and facts assembled by Mr. Hamilton to help assess whether there had been any potential contravention(s) of the Council Regulation 2007 as a consequence of Island Timberlands' logging.

Mr. Hamilton carried out a joint inspection on February 17, 2009, with Brad Rushton, DFO Habitat Management technologist and Island Timberlands staff. Laura Coward from the Ministry of Agriculture & Lands also attended.

Mr. Hamilton's report is attached. His report should be read in conjunction with this memo for more detail. I have summarized the salient points from Mr. Hamilton's report with my own observations.

The heli logging area is an island of the Englishman River. The main river channel flows along the west channel, the eastern boundary is a side-channel that only flows (with water) during periods of moderate-to-high discharge.

The Englishman River at this point is a Class A fish stream. The harvest site is several kilometers upstream of a licensed water supply intake. This means the harvesting must be carried out in compliance with the Council Regulation 2007 sections 19, 20, 27 and 30.

Prior to any harvesting activity, Island Timberlands had a terrain stability assessment completed by a consulting geoscientist. Landslide hazard and the increased risk of windthrow were rated as low. The report recommended that non-merchantable and immature trees be retained to the fullest extent possible on the island due to a concern for potential long term effects on bank erosion and large woody debris recruitment. Mr. Hamilton's inspection revealed that Island Timberlands followed this recommendation.

The harvesting was executed as per the logging plan. A total of 21 trees were removed by helicopter. A number of non-merchantable danger trees and obstacle trees were felled and left on site (a requirement of the *Occupational Health & Safety Regulation*).

Mr. Hamilton measured the number of trees retained within 10 m of the river bank area along two 100m-long transects and reports that the number exceeds the regulatory minimum requirement (by one and half times). In his view, the falling of non-commercial and understorey trees was kept to a minimum and likely done for safety reasons.

The forest canopy remains substantially intact after the selective harvesting (refer to accompanying post-logging photo). Mr. Hamilton's opinion is that the stream habitat has not been adversely affected. He bases his opinion on his assessment of factors that potentially affect fish productivity, including: channel stability, nutrient food input, shade, large woody debris recruitment, windthrow and sediment delivery. In his view none of these factors have been negatively affected. He attributes this to the small number of trees harvested and lack of disturbance to the ground and riverbank

The DFO Habitat Management technologist, Brad Rushton, assessed the harvesting from the standpoint of fish habitat protection provisions in the *Fisheries Act*. He did not identify any concerns. He considers harvesting to have been light impact. In his opinion the functioning of the riparian zone beside the river has not suffered any adverse impacts to the critical fish habitat factors and remains functional.

I contacted the City of Parksville operations manager, Al Metcalf, to find out if the City had any concern of potential impact on the drinking water quality. I was informed that the City draws water from its intake in the Englishman River only between May and September of each year, when the turbidity is below the threshold level. The water drawn from the Englishman River is treated before distribution. I was told that both the City and VIHA monitor the water quality. No concern was expressed that there would be a detectable negative change to water quality as a result of Island Timberlands recent harvesting upstream of the water intake.

Conclusion:

The heli-logging has been low impact. Activities that are sometimes significant contributors to habitat alteration and disturbance, such as roads and ground-based yarding, are absent. The timbered edge along the riverbank remains intact and the banks themselves remain stable. There has been little disturbance to the forest floor and the understorey vegetation remains substantially intact and functional.

Based on the facts and opinions described above, it is my view that the heli-logging by Island Timberlands has not had a measurable effect on fish habitat or water quality in the Englishman River.

I have concluded that the heli-operation has been completed in compliance with Sections 19, 20, 27 and 30 of the Council Regulation 2007. I have also determined that I do not have grounds to elevate the inspection to an investigation of a potential contravention of the Regulation.

Recommendation:

I recommend the file be closed and Island Timberlands be advised of these findings.

Accordingly I recommend that this report and Mr. Hamilton's report be accepted.
In addition I recommend that Mr. Hamilton's report be released to the public.



Stuart Macpherson



Figure 1: Post logging overview (Island Timberlands photo)