

FPB/IRC/65

File: 97250-20\010337

March 21, 2002

Dear Participants:

This letter reports on the resolution of a complaint about the impact of harvesting on Boulder Creek and the Pine River, 25 kilometres west of Chetwynd.

Background

A gravel bar formed in the Pine River at the mouth of Boulder Creek after a significant rainstorm in 1987. The complainant, a trapper, became concerned that the gravel and other debris could block the Pine River, causing flash flooding of the community of Hasler Flats.

In 1997, Chetwynd Forest Industries (the licensee) proposed four cutblocks totalling 230 hectares (gross area) in the Boulder Creek watershed. The watershed is approximately 1450 hectares in size. The complainant raised a number of concerns about the cutblocks related to wildlife, the harvest of old growth, and hydrological impacts. In response to the complainant's concerns, a number of meetings and field trips were arranged. The regional forest hydrologist reviewed the licensee's plans and concluded that the cutblocks would cause negligible downstream impacts.

The complainant filed a complaint with the Board in January 1998. The Ministry of Forests agreed to review the cutblocks again, and the complaint was withdrawn. The licensee also changed the shape and size of the cutblocks and added wildlife tree patches to address the complainant's concerns. In the summer of 1998, the regional geotechnical engineer and the regional hydrologist reassessed the impact of the proposed harvesting on the watershed and terrain stability. They did not express any concerns with the proposed blocks.

The complainant wrote to the ministry in February 2001 with concerns about the risk of flash flooding cause by the diversion of the Pine River. He included a picture of the gravel bar in the Pine River taken in 1987. The ministry responded that there was little likelihood of slope instability or abnormal water events in the drainage as a result of the approved harvesting.

The cutblocks were harvested by the spring of 2001. Taking into account wildlife tree patches and the fact that the harvested portion of one cutblock was not within the Boulder Creek watershed, the total harvested area within the watershed was 134 hectares.

In July 2001, a rainstorm described by the district manager as a one-in-75-year event occurred in the northeast part of the province. Highways and forest service roads across the region were washed out. A new gravel bar formed at the confluence of the Pine River and Boulder Creek. After the storm, the complainant filed this complaint with the Board, restating his concern about the potential for flash flooding.

On August 24, 2001, the ministry's regional geotechnical engineer revisited the cutting permit area. He stated that he did not believe the logging contributed much debris to the Pine River. However he recommended that the licensee conduct a survey from the cutblocks to the Pine River to determine the origin of the gravel and debris.

The licensee hired a geotechnical engineer to assess Boulder Creek from the cutblocks to the Pine River to determine the origin of the material in the Pine River. A geotechnical and hydrological assessment was done in late October 2001, and a report was released on February 26, 2002.

Discussion

The geotechnical and hydrological assessment concluded that a debris flow occurred in the Boulder Creek valley in late July 2001. It appeared to be caused by the extreme rain event of July 17-21, 2001. The debris flow deposited coarse material below the apex of the Boulder Creek fan, and gravel and sand in the Pine River. The geotechnical engineer found evidence on the ground and in historical air photos of past debris flows, and he concluded that debris flows were a natural occurrence in the Boulder Creek watershed. The assessment also concluded that harvest of the cutblocks did not appear to be a significant factor in the formation of the gravel bar in the Pine River.

Board staff reviewed the geotechnical and hydrological assessment and agree with its conclusions. There is no evidence that the harvest of the three cutblocks caused the formation of the gravel bar in the Pine River.

Resolution

The complainant reviewed the assessment and accepts its conclusions. Even before the assessment was complete, the complainant acknowledged that the July rainstorm might have caused the formation of the gravel bar in the Pine River. However, he suggests that this provides even more reason to be careful when planning forest development in the area.

As a trapper, the complainant has a detailed and intimate knowledge of the local area, and he felt that government had not listened to his warning about the flood threat. He also observed that his relationship with the ministry and the licensee had been better in the past. The complainant was interested in re-establishing good relations and communications with the licensee and the ministry.

The district manager indicated his willingness to directly inform the complainant of future operations and any opportunities for public input. The licensee also demonstrated a willingness to work with the complainant, and a representative of the licensee has already visited the complainant at his home to discuss the deactivation of the roads in the cutting permit area.

In light of agreement on the cause of the gravel bar formation and renewed commitments to work together to improve communication and relationships, further Board involvement is not required.

The ministry and the licensee have put a lot of effort into addressing the complainant's concerns. The 1998 complaint was withdrawn as a result of their efforts. Additionally, the assessment to determine the source of the material in the Pine River was not a Code requirement and was done at the licensee's expense. Those efforts demonstrate the ministry's and the licensee's interest in a long-term cooperative relationship with those interested in and affected by forest management.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the participants for their cooperation in resolving this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Liz Osborn
Panel Chair
Forest Practices Board