



CLOSING LETTER

FPB/IRC/77

File: 97250-20\010357

July 15, 2002

Dear Participants:

Re: Decision to stop further investigation of Complaint 010357 – Bonaparte Lake

This letter is to advise you that the Forest Practices Board has decided to stop further investigation of Complaint 010357, submitted on December 27, 2001.

The Complaint

The complaint is about forest development near the south end of Bonaparte Lake, 65 kilometres northwest of Kamloops. An individual complained to the Board that logging and road building is contaminating drinking water, harming fish habitat and reducing water availability during drought periods. The complainant is also concerned that logging is harming biodiversity and damaging moose habitat.

The complaint issues are broad and potentially involve two forest districts and four forest companies. The Board therefore focused the investigation on what the complainant said was the most important issue – the management of water resources at the southwest end of Bonaparte Lake. The complainant believes there has been too much logging in the area, and would like future harvesting withheld until the effect of past logging on water resources is studied. The Board considered these questions:

1. Is the amount of logging consistent with land use plan objectives for watershed integrity?
2. Is logging affecting the lake's water levels?
3. Has logging damaged fish habitat?
4. Is logging contributing to the contamination of the lake and nearby streams?

No harvesting near the southwest end of Bonaparte Lake has been approved in forest development plans since 1998. Some of the previously approved cutblocks are now being logged.

1. Is the amount of logging consistent with land use plan objectives for watershed integrity?

Cabinet, through its endorsement of the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan (CCLUP), has designated the area around the southwest end of Bonaparte Lake as available for timber harvesting. The Board does not have authority to review government's land use decisions, but can examine whether timber harvesting is consistent with those decisions.

The CCLUP states that when disturbance levels in a watershed exceed 25 percent, a watershed assessment should be done. Watershed assessments can result in recommendations that restrict the rate of harvest and type of forest practice. The CCLUP states that the Bonaparte River watershed is a high priority for a watershed assessment.

In 1997, the licensee completed a preliminary watershed assessment for the entire Bonaparte River watershed. The assessment showed that the Bonaparte Lake sub-basin had a disturbance level of about 10 percent. The assessment did not suggest that harvesting around Bonaparte Lake had reached thresholds where the integrity of the watershed might be compromised. The Board considered the harvesting approved around the southwest end of Bonaparte Lake in 1998 and earlier to be consistent with the CCLUP's objectives for watershed integrity.

An update to the watershed assessment by MOF in 2000 recommended deferring the approval of further proposed blocks in the south Bonaparte Lake area until more detailed study was completed. The Board expect that the district manager will consider that recommendation when reviewing future proposals for forest development.

2. Is logging affecting the water levels of Bonaparte Lake?

The complainant is concerned that logging is affecting the timing of water flow and availability of water during drought periods. In particular, the complainant stated that the lake water level is sometimes too low for a lodge operator at the western end of the lake to draw water.

It is generally accepted that forest harvesting can change hydrologic patterns by affecting snow accumulations and the rate of snowmelt in a cutblock. Harvesting can therefore affect the amount and timing of water flowing into the lake. However, the water level in Bonaparte Lake is regulated by a dam operated by Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Operation of the dam, rather than timber harvesting, would largely determine the water level in the lake and the flow of water out of the lake.

3. Has logging damaged fish habitat?

The complainant believes that logging is damaging fish habitat. The complainant believes that the effect of harvesting in the watershed on fish and aquatic ecosystems is not fully understood, and that further study is needed before more harvesting is approved.

During a field review with participants in May 2002, no specific areas were identified where harvesting practices had potentially damaged fish habitat. However, the investigation found one incident where fish habitat might have been damaged. In 1998, culverts had failed along a spur road resulting in siltation of a stream thought to contain fish. The licensee corrected the drainage issue. The Ministry of Forests (MOF) determined that no Code contravention had occurred. The Board is satisfied that the licensee and MOF have satisfactorily addressed the drainage matter. However, we

would expect in future that the licensee, MOF or Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection would refer any matters involving possible damage to fish habitat to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for their review under the Fisheries Act.

With regard to future harvesting, there are no provisions within the CCLUP or the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* (the Act) that specifically require study of the effect of harvesting on fish resources. However, a district manager must be satisfied that harvesting proposals will adequately manage and conserve forest resources, which includes fish resources. When assessing future harvesting proposals, the district manager can ask a licensee to provide further information or undertake further study.

4. Is logging contributing to contamination of the lake and nearby streams?

The complainant is concerned that runoff from the cutblocks, where he expects cattle will congregate and defecate, will contaminate the lake. The complainant took a water sample from a creek in the area, which analysis showed had fecal and background coliform levels unsuitable for drinking. There are no domestic water intakes on that creek.

The Ministry of Health advised Board staff that high background coliform levels can result from decaying vegetation, even in undisturbed watersheds. The ministry also advised that fecal coliforms can result from cattle or other animals, such as deer and bear. The ministry therefore recommends, as a minimum precaution, disinfecting and filtering surface water prior to drinking.

The test results do not indicate whether the coliform levels are due to cattle or other sources. Further study would be required to determine the source. The Board notes that, during the complaint investigation, the district manager committed to work with the complainant and licensee to develop a study to assess water quality in the area. The Board encourages the local resolution of issues through initiatives such as this.

Having regard to all the circumstances, I find that further investigation is not necessary to consider the complaint. The Board has decided, under section 177(2)(d) of the Act, to stop investigating Complaint 020357.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Peter Nagati, Senior Complaint Analyst, at (250) 356-1657, or toll-free at 1-800-994-5899.

Yours sincerely,

W.N. (Bill) Cafferata, R.P.F.
Chair, Forest Practices Board