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Press Releases

Divide Forest Advisory Council Tours Harvest Operations at Four Mile Creek



Turtle Lake, Sask., Feb. 22, 2011-

-Bob Gourlay - Secretary Treasurer, Turtle Lake Watershed Inc.

As a novice to the affairs of the provincial forest, I've often pondered how all the various activities taking place there were orchestrated. How do the hunting outfitters, trappers, cattle producers, nature enthusiast, hikers, ATV'ers, forest harvesting companies, and those exploring for and extracting oil, gas and mineral resources agree on what's allowed and what isn't. And of course, what about the many birds and animals who make the forest their home? How are their interests represented?

In early 2010 I gained some insight into the world of forest management when I attended my first Divide Forest Advisory Council (DFACC) meeting. There I learned that the Provincial Forest reserve is owned by the Province of Saskatchewan and managed through a number of legislative acts and regulators. The Ministry of Environment takes the lead role when it comes to wildlife and forest resources, but other provincial ministries and agencies such as the Ministry of Energy & Resources and Ag & Food also have responsibilities.

DFACC was started in 1995 by local forest users concerned about conflicts among activities in the Provincial forest reserve. They provide public oversight of the many provincial regulators and users within the forest. Their board is comprised of ordinary citizens who utilize the forest for their living and enjoyment. The many provincial regulators and

companies that conduct business within the forest present and discuss their plans, providing an opportunity for public oversight and input in the best interest of all users and the long-term protection of the resource. They hold their meetings on the 4th Tuesday of every month at Dexter Hall, and the meetings are open to the public.

In late February, I jumped at an invitation extended to me by DFACC to take a tour of a forest harvesting operations taking place on the east side of Mikinak Lake, in an area know as Four Mile Creek. I met the group at Dexter Hall and we jumped in 4 vehicles with drivers and guides provided by Mistik Management. Mistik Management is a forest harvesting operator jointly owned by the Meadow Lake Mechanical Pulp and NorSask Forest Products. We drove north east along the Sundance fire guard road until we passed the northern tip of Mikinak Lake. We then turned south on a logging road into the Four Mile Creek area. There we were given a tour of an area where a subcontractor of Mistik Management was harvesting 100,000 m³ of aspen and spruce.

Cliff McLaughlin and Roger Nesdoly from Mistik Management explained the various stages of how the harvest was conducted. We got a first hand view of the operation in full swing and I was quite surprised to see the amount of equipment and numbers people at work. There were logging trucks coming and going, giant loading cranes, skidders hauling the felled trees to the logging trails, and at one location there were six processors busily limbing, cutting and stacking logs, quite an impressive site. There was a campsite where I was

told the workers stay for 1 week shifts, that were running around the clock.

The window to harvest the forest runs from December to the end of March at which time all equipments must be removed prior to spring break up. The harvesting companies, under the direction of the Forest Management Branch, engaged in a number of initiatives to minimize the environmental impact. Ice roads were built across creeks rather than earthen roads. Ice road crossings simply melt in spring and do not require the placement and removal of earth.

This costs less and has far less impact on the fragile creek ecosystem. Bluffs of trees are left along creeks and low spots to protect riparian areas. Stumps and slash is left in place to further reduce erosion. Leaving stands of trees also provided cover for wildlife and reduced line-of-site giving the animals an extra degree of protection from hunters. Limiting harvest operations from Dec - March when the ground is frozen hard, minimizes the damage to the forest floor, reducing silt in runoff, and disruptions to nesting birds, and spawning fish.

It was explained to me that fire is a natural and necessary element in the forest life-cycle. Forests that grow for years without fire grow too thick. This fosters plant diseases and chokes out many of the more typical plants and animals. Over grown forests also become serious threats to human developments. I was told that the average time between forest fires ranges from 55 to 80 years, so the thinking is that rather than enduring the cost, and risk of

fighting forest fires, a better strategy is to harvest the forest resource in a planned and managed fashion. For sure a lot of science is applied to forest management policy.



After the 3 hour tour we returned to Dexter Hall for supper and the regular February meeting of DFACC. Representatives from Forest Management Branch, The Conservation Officers, Ministry of Environment, representatives from Mistik Management and the Executive and membership of DFACC were in attendance. Larry Anderson, President of DFACC chaired the meeting with an agenda comprised primarily of reports from Mystik Management, L&M Wood Products, Meadow Lake OSB and reports from the various Ministries. Everyone had a chance to asked questions and identify concerns.

Having had the experience of meeting the Executive and members of DFACC, along with the many well trained and experienced people from the Ministries and harvesting companies, I for one came away with a greater confidence in how our precious forest resources are being managed.

July 17, 2010 – Turtle Lake, Saskatchewan

Walleye fish population in Turtle Lake healthy & growing



Gord Sedgewick, Biologist for Saskatchewan Environment provided attendees at the Turtle Lake Watershed Inc. Annual General Meeting with an interesting and current presentation about the status of the fishery in Turtle Lake. After setting 11 gillnets and 3 trap nets in the lake in early July, Sedgewick reported that his team had caught 1,473 fish of which 53% were walleye and 9% were Northern Pike. "Turtle Lake can now be called a predominantly walleye fishery and the walleye are of all ages and sizes with many ranging from 5 to 8 pounds", reported Sedgewick. He went on to report that "they are very healthy with lots of fat on them." When asked if he knew if walleye were reproducing naturally in Turtle Lake, Sedgewick said that he had not completed the research to determine that.

Walleye have been stocked annually in Turtle Lake, since the early 90's and it appears those efforts are paying off. Sask Environment places 500,000 walleye fry in Turtle Lake every spring, however none were stocked this year. Going forward, Sask Environment plans on stocking 1 million walleye fry in Turtle Lake every other year.

(Photos: Top Left, Merv Swanson, President of the Turtle Lake Watershed Inc. and Gord Sedgewick, display walleye, Top Right: Gord Sedgewick presenting to attendees.)

For further inquires contact Bob Gourlay, Secretary-Treasurer, TLWI

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PRESS RELEASE

April 26, 2008 – Turtle Lake, Saskatchewan

Turtle Lake Water Quality Scores Excellent in four year study

Merv Swanson, President of Turtle Lake Watershed Inc. (TLWI) reported to Board members that the four year water quality study initiated by TLWI and conducted by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority (SWA) is now complete. Swanson went on to report that the research shows Turtle Lake's water quality index (WQI), ranged from 92 to 100 over the four year study. Scores above 95 are described as "Excellent - water quality is protected with a virtual absence of threat or impairment; conditions very close to natural or pristine levels".

"Apart from the great results, what's exciting about the completion of this study is that we now have a scientific baseline on which to establish policies for future water management decisions and programming. Our challenge will be to maintain and protect this aquatic ecosystem for generations to come and this study will serve as critical tool for our mission." He went on to thank TLWI volunteers, and the Saskatchewan Watershed for their time and efforts.

Swanson said "TLWI has also developed a presentation and printed materials designed to educate property owners and lake users on the status of the lake and how they can assist. Local hamlets, RM's and organizations can contact the [Turtle Lake Watershed Inc.](#) to arrange a presentation.

For a free copy of the [Turtle Lake Water Quality Study](#) click here.

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