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## Kananaskis hiking trails used for logging

Environmental groups don't buy government, industry explanation  
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Two months after the provincial government spent more than \$1 million to expand the Trans Canada Trail in Alberta, a Cochrane company has turned parts of the trail system in Kananaskis into logging roads for clear cutting — an operation in keeping with a forest management plan approved by the Alberta government.



Jeremy Klaszus

Spray Lakes Sawmills and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) say the cuts could prevent a mountain pine beetle outbreak, but local environmental groups are far from convinced.

Hikers who head down the Lusk Creek Trail quickly encounter small clearcuts. The Alberta government says the cuts could prevent a mountain pine beetle outbreak

"If you accept that logic, then in fact they should be logging Banff and all the protected areas in K-Country — and they're not. It's clearly not required," says Ralph Cartar, a University of Calgary ecologist who's part of the Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition. "SRD has acted with complete indifference to the cultural and recreational values embodied in that Trans Canada Trail. We find that shocking."

Sections of the Lusk Pass and Baldy Pass trail systems — many of which were originally logging roads — are part of the Trans Canada Trail, which will eventually stretch 18,000 kilometres across the country into every province and territory. James Clark, trail director for the Trans Canada Trail, says there's not much his organization can do since it doesn't actually own or operate any of the trails. "It's not something that you like to happen," he says, "but unfortunately, like everything else, it kind of does. We try to work with the agencies that have jurisdiction over that trail as much as we can."

While clearcuts are typically kept well out of public view, the area in question is a quick walk east of Barrier Lake and Highway 40. Hikers and snowshoers heading south on the Lusk Creek Trail are greeted by a yellow caution sign warning that the trails are "affected" by "active logging and road building operations." Trucks laden with trees roar past the sign every few minutes, and other machines can be heard droning to the south. "It's just senseless," says Doug Sephton, a Bragg Creek resident who co-founded Save Kananaskis. "I have no problem with logging. I have no problem even with clear-cut logging. But that's not the issue. The issue is that they shouldn't be doing it in Kananaskis."

Those who walk further down the road will find a pile of long, spindly pine trunks. Behind the pile is a small clearcut, one of many in the area. Gord Lehn, Spray Lakes Sawmills' woodlands manager, says the company planned on cutting these patches of the forest in future years, but SRD asked it to harvest them earlier to prevent the pine beetle's advance from B.C. since the weather hasn't been cold enough to kill the insect. "We feel we can have some success in limiting the spread of the mountain pine beetle by doing this," says Dave Ealey, an SRD spokesperson. Lehn says his company has already found some beetle-infested trees in the area. "[That area] has got pine stands in the age and size class that are very ripe for picking from the beetle's perspective," he says.

Lehn points out many of the recreational trails Spray Lakes Sawmills is now using were created by the forest industry. "We're back on using some of those old trail systems that were for logging in the first place," he says. The company will log in the area for about a month longer and will return again next winter to log further into the bush. "I can't say we'll totally avoid all trails, but certainly the majority of the impact on the trails will be from this

season," says Lehn, adding that reclamation work will begin next summer. "By the time we finish the 2009 season, everything will be reforested and planted and... usable again."

Provincial parks make up roughly 60 per cent of Kananaskis Country. Those areas are protected; companies can't log there. However, the non-park areas are open to industrial activity, including logging and gas-drilling. The Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition and Save Kananaskis group both want Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture (TPRC) to create a park in the area where Spray Lakes Sawmills is logging, and thereby protect it from industrial exploitation. "SRD and TPRC are at odds with each other and don't have a coherent policy," says Sephton. If they did have a coherent policy, he says, "you wouldn't have a logging operation wiping out a Trans Canada Trail."

A 2006 Alberta Forest Products Association survey showed 84 per cent of Albertans believe "use of forests should be based firstly on preserving and protecting the environment and sustaining wildlife habitat," even "at the expense of sustained economic benefits and jobs." That statistic, Sephton says, shows Albertans' deep appreciation for the forest in areas like Kananaskis. "Yet [the government] persists in this policy of destroying it," says Sephton. "They're not good stewards of the land."

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