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**SCATHING REPORT FINDS DISTRICT MANAGER'S DECISION "CONTRARY TO
SOUND FOREST MANAGEMENT"**

In a strongly worded report released Friday, BC's Forest Practices Board condemns former Robson Valley Forest District Manager Jeff Beale's decision to approve three large clearcuts in the Holmes River watershed, located just east of McBride. The report stems from a complaint submitted by the Fraser Headwaters Alliance (FHA) and the Sierra Legal Defence Fund in July 2000 after the Robson Valley-based conservation group became concerned about the nature of the development.

"What we are seeing are management decisions driven by economics, not ecosystem health," says FHA Executive Director, Roy Howard.

Mountain pine beetle was first identified in the area in 1995. However, for "economic reasons" the licensee (Zeidler Forest Industries Ltd., later McBride Forest Industries Ltd.) did not harvest the trees until 2001, by which time the area approved for harvest had grown from 5 to more than 500 hectares. Moreover, the harvested area consisted of between 64% and 98% spruce, a species not affected by mountain pine beetle. BC's Forest Practices Code sets the maximum clearcut size at 60 hectares.

In addition to at least three infractions of the Forest Practices Code, the Board found that the Ministry of Forests' six-year delay contributed to the spread of the beetle and that the three approved clearcuts were large enough to harm the biodiversity and ecology of the watershed. "The district manager should have taken strong action to ensure that harvesting took place," the Board states.

"We're pleased with the Board's findings, but the damage has already been done," says Howard. "We need stronger legislation and more effective enforcement."

The BC Government is in the process of replacing the Forest Practices Code with a 'results-based code,' which conservationists equate to letting the fox guard the chicken house.

Today's report is the second in as many years to find fault with Robson Valley's former District Manager.

For more information, contact the Fraser Headwaters Alliance at (250) 968-4490, or Devon Page at the Sierra Legal Defence Fund at (604) 685-5618. The Board's investigation report can be downloaded from www.fpb.gov.bc.ca.