

ABCFP Responds to Globe and Mail Story



On March 22, 2015, the Globe and Mail printed an article by Mark Hume called “Race is on to save Fraser Valley’s bald eagles.” The article can be read on the Globe’s website (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/race-is-on-to-save-fraser-valleys-bald-eagles-echo-lake-old-growth-forest/article23576358/>).

Mr. Hume is both a journalist and a columnist with the Globe and Mail. This article is an opinion piece written as one of Mr. Hume’s columns.

The ABCFP was concerned that forest stewardship allegations made within the Globe and Mail might involve the professional practice of an ABCFP member, so we started to look into the matter. We discovered that Mr. Hume made several assumptions and factual errors including errors of omission. At no point was the ABCFP asked to comment. As we often do, we wrote to Mr. Hume to help educate him about forest practices in BC. Here is our letter:

Mark,

We read with interest your article in the March 22 Globe and Mail (Race is on to save Fraser Valley’s bald eagles, Echo Lake old-growth forest).

As the regulatory body responsible for ensuring BC’s forests are managed properly, we were concerned that our members may be involved in the removal of trees that contain eagle nests so we started investigating the matter. I want to share our findings with you because our investigation shows that there are a significant number of factual errors in your story.

Your story left Globe and Mail readers with a negative impression of forestry in BC. It does not portray the reality of professional forestry in the Echo Lake area or anywhere in BC. We would appreciate it if you would write a corrected version of the article or a new story that shows both sides. To assist you, we have provided a fact sheet.

I look forward to connecting so we can discuss the issue further.

*Amanda Brittain
Director of Communications
Association of BC Forest Professionals
Cell: 778.233.1169*

As mentioned in the letter to Mr. Hume, we included a fact sheet on the area prepared by one of the forest professionals on staff. We received the following letter back from Mr. Hume:

Hi Amanda....the article to which you refer was a column. Columns, unlike news stories, contain comment. The views stated therein were my opinion. The protection of nesting trees was not an issue I raised. The old growth trees around Echo Lake are used seasonally by eagles to roost in overnight when they are drawn to the area by the salmon run in nearby rivers.

I am aware the area slated to be logged is in a woodlot. The woodlot contains trees eagle roost in. If the woodlot owner knows which trees the eagles roost in, and which they don't, that indeed would be news to me and I'd like to see the study.

Apparently you are of the opinion that old growth trees in B.C. are adequately protected and properly managed. As a lifelong B.C. resident, I don't share that view, which was the point of the column.

Thanks for your note.

We were unsatisfied with Mr. Hume's response and his lack of desire to learn more about the topic. As a next step we wrote to Wendy Cox, the editor of the BC Section of the Globe and Mail (the original article appeared in the BC Section of the newspaper). Here is our letter:

Ms. Cox,

I'm writing to you to express concern both with Mark Hume's opinion piece (Race is on to save Fraser Valley's bald eagles, Echo Lake old-growth forest) that appeared in the March 22 BC section as well as his response to my letter to him.

The Association of BC Forest Professionals (ABCFP) is the body responsible for regulating professional forestry in BC. When we initially read Mr. Hume's column, we were concerned that one of our members was not doing his/her job to uphold the public's interests in the forest in question (Echo Lake area). He implied that a "logging company" was going to cut down trees used by eagles as a place to roost. As a result, we started investigating the situation and when we found that Mr. Hume had made a number of significant errors and assumptions in his column, we wrote him a note and included a backgrounder on the Echo Lake area. Here is Mr. Hume's response:

Hi Amanda....the article to which you refer was a column. Columns, unlike news stories, contain comment. The views stated therein were my opinion. The protection of nesting trees was not an

issue I raised. The old growth trees around Echo Lake are used seasonally by eagles to roost in overnight when they are drawn to the area by the salmon run in nearby rivers.

I am aware the area slated to be logged is in a woodlot. The woodlot contains trees eagle roost in. If the woodlot owner knows which trees the eagles roost in, and which they don't, that indeed would be news to me and I'd like to see the study.

Apparently you are of the opinion that old growth trees in B.C. are adequately protected and properly managed. As a lifelong B.C. resident, I don't share that view, which was the point of the column.

Thanks for your note.

We feel that Mr. Hume is dismissing the science of forestry in favour of the emotion involved in seeing the whole area preserved. In stating our opinion, we at the ABCFP support neither logging nor preservation, we do support informed public choice than includes advice from professionals. As you can see, when we brought our concerns to him, he brushed them off as insignificant without considering the facts from all parties involved (forest professionals, woodlot license holder, the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, and other private land owners in the vicinity).

As I'm sure you're aware, forest tenure in BC is very complicated. The majority of the area around Echo Lake is enveloped by an Old Growth Management Area (OGMA), which is used to conserve old-growth trees as well as a wide array of biodiversity. While there is no standard definition of an old-growth tree (it differs depending on where you are in the province), in the Echo Lake area many of the trees in the OGMA's would be in excess of 150 years and may even reach 1,000 years old. Of note, the area of the Chilliwack Forest District is 1.4 million hectares. Of this area, 21% is already protected under different designations (parks, ecological reserves, conservancies, etc.). This area is 9% more than the provincial commitment of 12%.

In addition to some private land around the lake, there is also a 416 ha woodlot. A woodlot is another type of forest tenure that, in this case, required the owner to include his own private land in order to gain the right to manage and harvest Crown timber. Woodlots are good for BC and communities because they provide a diverse type of tenure that takes the community interests into account. Many woodlot owners allow community members to use their land for recreation and may hire local people to work on the land. Woodlot owners, including the owner of the Echo Lake woodlot (Woodlot 0043), have intimate knowledge of their land and they manage it with the desires of the community in mind because they live within the community themselves.

An OGMA cannot be placed over a woodlot as they are both different types of tenures. You can't simply change the boundaries of a woodlot due to legislation and policy reasons and the fact that it often includes privately owned land. As I said, it is complicated.

Of course the eagles and other species in the area do not care about the boundaries between a woodlot and an OGMA. They live in the habitat that most suits them. When the salmon are running, the eagles roost in old-growth trees, as well as younger trees, whether these trees are part of an OGMA or a woodlot. The owner of woodlot 0043 is well-aware of the roosting trees and has asked his forest professional to manage accordingly. He is willing to work with any new scientifically sound data that is presented to him.

As Mr. Hume points out in his response to my note, it is ridiculous to think that either the woodlot owner or Mr. Ben-Oliel could identify individual trees used by the eagles; however, they can identify the area of the OGMA and woodlot that contain the preferred trees. The owner has done so and instructed his Registered Professional Forester to manage the woodlot taking this knowledge into account (for example, place areas such as these in Wildlife Tree Patches. Many of these areas would already be protected as they are located in the OGMA outside the woodlot). The woodlot owner and Professional Forester are acting well above legislative requirements.

We are disturbed that the Globe and Mail would print a prominent column which deliberately misleads the Globe and Mail readers. We believe a new story is necessary -- one which is factually correct and considers all information to make an informed opinion.

Ms. Cox wrote back a couple of days later to indicate that she was supporting Mr. Hume's article. Here is her letter:

Hello Ms. Brittain,

I have carefully read your email below and have consulted with our public editor, Sylvia Stead. I have also re-read the column.

My reading of the column is that it is a general exhortation to protect this area of old-growth. It is a criticism of what Mark regards as the lack of regulatory will to do so. It is not an accusation against a specific woodlot owner, nor is it an exhaustive examination of how forest tenure is divided and I don't think the column pretends to be.

I'm not sure what specific facts you are arguing that Mark got wrong. My understanding is you're concerned at what he left out, namely a canvass of voices defending the current system.

However, Mark is correct in responding that the column is his opinion and it is marked as such. It doesn't purport to be a balanced news story.

I'm happy to correct any fact in the story that he got wrong, but I'm unclear which statements are incorrect based on the email you've sent.

Thanks for taking the time to write.

Upon further discussion amongst the communications and professional staff at the ABCFP, we felt that we simply had to agree to disagree with the Globe and Mail. We believe that everyone is entitled to his/her own opinions; however, we feel that most people – but especially journalists – would choose to learn about a topic from all parties before stating that opinion.