

Forestry giant puts waterfront land up for sale

Environmentalists decry Western Forest Products' 1,800-hectare offering; land had recently been taken from tree farm licence

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At the waterfront campground in Jordan River, provided by Western Forest Products, tourists lazed in the sun Tuesday, taking in the spectacular ocean views and watching a passing whale.

But campers and surfers, who prize the waves that roll onto the pebbled beaches, are looking at the end of an era.

The area containing the campground, the West Coast Surfing Associates huts, beaches, headlands and surrounding hills are up for sale.

Western Forest Products was given government approval this year to remove more than 28,000 hectares of private land from tree farm licences on Vancouver Island, including about 12,000 hectares from Licence 25 near the tiny community of Jordan River.

More than 1,800 hectares of that property, including waterfront parcels stretching from Shirley to Jordan River, are now being sold by the forestry company.

When B.C. Forests Minister Rich Coleman announced the deal "to bring stability to the company," he was accused of bailing out the firm without getting fair value for taxpayers.

Environmentalists, such as Ken Wu of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, are aghast that one of the few unspoiled areas within reach of Greater Victoria is threatened with "urban sprawl." NDP forests critic



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Western Forest Products is selling a parcel of land in Jordan River containing a waterfront campground at one of the Island's surf beaches.

Bob Simpson said the decision means communities have lost control over some of the most sensitive sites on southern Vancouver Island.

As property values soar, companies such as Western Forest Products are turning into real estate companies rather than forest companies, Simpson said.

"When the minister decided to release these lands from the tree farm licence, he lost all control, and we knew we would start seeing the sale of these lands in one form or another," said Simpson, who wants tougher regulations for privately managed forest land and a special investigation by the Forest Practices Board.

The land is being sold with about 734,000 cubic metres of standing timber, and that means the local community will have no say over logging practices in the converted areas, Simpson said.

"Now, it's just a private land transaction. There's no environmental review process that has to take place, there's no economic impact analysis, there's no worker adjustment strategy," he said.

"You're going to have potential watershed impacts and viewscape impacts."

Duncan Kerr, WFP chief operating officer, said the land is being sold with the timber standing so it does not limit options for buyers.

It has not been decided whether the proceeds will be invested in the company or go to pay down its debt - believed to be about \$200 million.

The company will not be looking for further exemptions from tree farm licenses, Kerr said.

"This sale is a relatively small fraction of our private lands and a very small fraction of our total operations," he said.

For Jack Burns, in charge of maintenance at the WFP yard in Jordan River when he is not on strike, the major concern is reduction of the timber quota.

"That will be a big part of our cut and it will affect our crew as far as the logging season goes," he said.

For Burns, who is looking at retirement, that is not big deal, but he worries about his younger colleagues.

Erik Lund, Juan de Fuca electoral area director, said the changes may not be as great as anticipated.

"All resource lands are covered by the resource-zoning bylaw, with a 300-acre minimum," he said.

Other areas can be subdivided into 10- acre parcels, he said. "So the whole thing doesn't scare me so much."

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