

CANADIAN BOREAL FOREST

Dr Gordon Miller, Director General with the Canadian Forest Service, discusses the social, economic and ecological importance of Canada's boreal forest to Canadians and the long history of research in this important region.

1 Watch the VIDEO and comment.

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Audioscript

My name is Gord Miller. I'm a Director General with the Canadian Forest Service. The Canadian Forest Service has existed for over a hundred years. Most of our research efforts – and we have been largely a science-based organization over our history – has resulted in research in the boreal. It's an ecosystem that's been very well studied. And better studied than most of the others on the planet.

The boreal forest came about because of the retreat of the glaciers at the end of the last ice age and trees moving north. The boreal forest is circumpolar. It occurs in Canada, Alaska, Russia, Scandinavia. It gets into Mongolia as well. The boreal forest is the largest forest in Canada. It stretches from Newfoundland right through to Northeastern BC. Canada has about 20-30% of the world's boreal. The reason I give you that range is there's different definitions of what the boreal is. So, the number varies a little bit.



We're actually working internationally to come up with some common definitions, common ways of measuring things. Countries define ecosystems differently, have different ways of measuring things. So, we're working internationally to come up with some standards we hope that all countries can respect.

The boreal forest is one of the largest ecosystems on the planet. It provides us with many environmental services that we actually come to take for granted over the years. It provides

economic opportunities. It provides spiritual values for many peoples. It does provide clean air and clean water to humans, it provides a home to many different forms of wildlife.

Many of the communities in Canada are located in the boreal forest. The citizens in those communities derive their livelihoods, they recreate, there's many uses of the forest. It is also very important to aboriginals in Canada. 80% of the aboriginals in Canada live in the forest generally and most of those are in the boreal. So again, it's a community that's very dependent on deriving its livelihood, their spirituality..., many of the cultural things that both aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities have come to expect and desire from the forest are derived from the boreal.

The boreal forest is the source of a lot of the resources for the industry in Canada. It's the major source of fibre supply to the pulp mills and saw mills in Canada. It's also the backdrop for a lot of the tourism type activities, the hunting and fishing, and hiking that many other people from around the world come to enjoy.

I think it's important to remember that Canada has well over a 400 million hectares of forest. And only less than half of 1% of that forest is harvested annually. Natural disturbances affect about five times as much forest in Canada as does harvesting. The regulatory system with regard to forest management in Canada is one of the strictest in the world. There's actually been studies that look at how policy in Canada compares to other countries. And they find that the regulatory system in Canada is equal to, or better than most other countries.

The Canadian Forest Service has been seen internationally for decades as one of the global leaders in forest research.

And, certainly, we have many people that are world class scientists. I think that Canada has a lot to be proud of, given all the work that has been done. We are seen as a leader in many areas of forest management. And other countries actually do come to us to find out how we practice forestry, and how we manage forest fires and those sorts of considerations.

The science that the Canadian Forest Service conducts has been used over the last few decades by policy makers and by resource managers such that our forestry practices in Canada, our forest management in Canada is very much founded on science.



2 Suggested activity: students may be asked to surf the Net, looking for more information about Scandinavian boreal forest.