

Astronauts can see logging

Guest Column

by Father Charles Brandt

The 'Forests Forever' campaign sponsored by B.C. forest companies has ended, not with a bang but with a whimper. So too have the full page ads, sponsored by McMillan Bloedel, which appeared in the local papers. This advertising program ended just as suddenly as it began. The ads extolled the virtues of B.C.'s forest industry, their concern and care, and their treatment of forestry as a growth industry.

On November 1, CBC chopped the 'Forests Forever' ad campaign, but the forest industry continued their propaganda on other channels and through the newspaper media right up to December 5 when the newspapers announced 'Logging Firms Fined \$1.6 Million For Waste.' These penalties, imposed by the B.C. Forestry's Minister were for wasting too much coastal timber in 1987.

Ken Ingram estimated that \$800,000 of this waste assessment was levied against McMillan Bloedel after a government-commissioned investigation found the company had left 'Excessive Volumes' of usable wood on the ground in the Queen Charlottes. With the announcement of these penalties, both the TV and newspaper ads came to an abrupt halt. The forest industry could hardly continue saying they cared while at the same time being accused of wasting excessive volumes of timber on our fragile planet.

And 1987 was the very year that 14 million children died of malnutrition and starvation in the Third World, primarily due to the lack of social programs in these countries to alleviate their poverty. The social programs could not be afforded so strapped were these countries by merely making interest payments on their debt to the countries of the north; countries so into profit that they could afford to waste a few million dollars worth of timber.

And though the TV ads spoke of Forests Forever, they did not speak of Rivers Forever, nor mention Salmonids Forever. The TV ads were of clear running streams with timber hugging their banks and someone in a hardhat standing alongside. It was explained that clearcut logging may appear ugly in the beginning but that it healed quickly. It did not show the reality of the situation: clearcut logging over vast areas on steep mountain slopes descending directly to the river with the consequent silting of streams, scouring of the salmonid gravel, flooding in the lower regions and the loss and destruction of property. There was no mention of Rivers Forever, nor of Salmonids Forever.

Those of us who live along the Oyster River know that clear running streams with timber hugging the banks just ain't so. And we know that the healing does not take place quickly, and that no matter how hard we work to enhance this stream, 'there has passed away a glory from this earth.' And this is merely in-



Save our streams says Father Brandt

dicative of what is happening throughout the planet earth.

In the full page newspaper ads placed by McMillan Bloedel, various forestry personnel speak out on protecting the forest, on forest management, on accountability and on sharing the forest. Their photographs appear and it's also possible to meet them. Bob Hopeton, McMillan Bloedel loader operator, speaks out on accountability: "the best thing that's ever happened to logging in the years I've been involved with it was the '73 moratorium on logging in the Tsitika Valley - until Tsitika, I don't know of any place where we actually sat down and drew up a comprehensive, long-range plan for a whole valley. The fish, what's going to happen to the soil, that kind of thing." Certainly there was never such an apparent plan on the whole valley of the Oyster River.

This problem is addressed in a final report of the Oyster River watershed, done for the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona by Chatwin Engineering in July, 1988.

"Eighty per cent of the watershed (Oyster River) is owned by forest companies," it said. "Logging of second growth timber will probably begin in the 1990's. Logging in a watershed can have significant effects on water quality and quantity in the rivers and streams. As a hillside is logged, water runs off more quickly and causes more extreme river levels. The faster runoff can also pick up more silt and cause the streams to have a higher suspended sediment load."

These effects can be reduced by careful planning of a logging program. The tenure held by the

forest companies in the Oyster River Watershed do not require provincial government approvals of the cutting program. It is, therefore, only by voluntary procedures by the forest companies that adverse effects on the stream can be minimized."

And in the ads, retired MB Chief Forester Grant Ainscough speaks out on forest management. "I don't want everybody to love us, but I want them to criticize us for the right reasons," he says.

Very well! Sediment in the Oyster River. The Iron River Road, a road constructed by the logging company, runs parallel to the river for about five miles. This mainline has experienced erosive damage, where road and river meet, without the benefit of a leave space. Many culverts failed to accommodate the small streams that fall steeply from the road banks, resulting in cut and gullied roads. I have videos taken in 1971, showing massive land slides directly into the river.

In 1973 Grant Ainscough was quoted as saying the Iron River Road system is a classical example of how not to construct a logging road. The placement of these roads was obviously not ecologically considered nor was the changing course of the river anticipated as the upstream clearcut logging went ahead. This classic road has now been abandoned and new roads have been constructed as the company logs higher up the mountain slopes. The old road remains but the damage has been done.

In December, Auditor General Ken Dye's annual report was released; the forestry industry

was cutting more trees than they were planting it reports; the Canadian Forestry Service doesn't have adequate information to know the true state of Canada's total forest resource. The situation of cutting more trees than are being planted, the report goes on to say, is much worse in B.C. than other provinces.

Apart from the Dye report, in B.C. the sustained yield is considered to be about 54 million cubic meters per year. The latest figures released from the ministry show logging proceeding at nearly twice that rate - more than 91 million cubic meters per year. There are a number of people who are working toward and wanting a long term sustainable economy for ourselves and for our children. This kind of planning and thinking is deemed in some circles as environmental radicalism.

Industry wants to harvest more and more trees; otherwise they tell us there will be a loss of jobs. It's not really a matter of jobs, but of poor management plus the introduction of higher and higher technology which results in job reduction. To prevent this, industry boosts production to the present 91 million cubic meters per year.

Basically, it is a matter of greed and more and more profits for top management and government as well. If we could curb greed we could control the amount of timber cut so that there is truly a sustainable yield, a sustainable lifestyle for the ordinary citizen and more important than all, a sustainable planet.

From outer space some years ago, astronauts could see only one sign of man's activities on earth - the Great Wall Of China.

Three things are now visible: The Great Wall Of China; Burning forests in Brazil and clear-cut logging in B.C.

And so the forest industry has left its mark for the whole universe to see. As well, the Ministry of Forests shares in this logging imprint on the planet.

We do congratulate the present government, however, for disallowing mining and logging in Strathcona Park and other major parks in B.C. This is certainly a great step forward. If only they will do the same for the Stein and Carmanah Valleys so they will not become other Oyster River Valleys.

When there are trees and water, the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere from fossil fuel burning is absorbed. Otherwise it forms a heavy blanket and prevents infra-red energy from escaping into outer space and so creates the greenhouse effect with attendant higher earth temperatures, consequent melting of the polar ice cap, flooding of lower lands and the creation of deserts.

The greenhouse effect, the disappearance of the ozone layer, the dumping of wastes and dioxins from our pulp mills, which enter the oceans and kill off aquatic life, threatens all life on earth. Every day, irreplaceable species of plants and animals are being destroyed by this kind of pollution and destruction. There are some who feel that the bomb has already been dropped.

We stand at a turning point. How can we keep the earth viable? Those of us who live now, and this includes industry and government, will determine the future and the very continuance of the species.

Every person must come to realize the urgency of the destruction that is taking place. The earth is in a highly vulnerable position. Somehow, we must all be willing to adjust our life style and abandon our wasteful and careless practices. There used to be an organization in Campbell River called Save Our Salmon. Now there should be one called Save Our Earth.

In the past we have looked at this tiny planet as a provider of resources, without limit, for man, yielding without end whatever he demanded. Now the end is in sight. It can be turned around, but it will never be the same again. We belong here. The earth is more than just a home, it is a living system and we are part of it. It is GAIA.

We are called upon to create a new type of civilization in the dawning ecological age, an integral civilization with the ever-renewing transformation of the natural world and of every human being, a planet shining with life in all of its plenitude and shot through with the divine presence.