



**Forest  
Practices  
Board**

## **Forest Practices near Wilson Creek on the Sunshine Coast**

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*Complaint Investigation #18032*

**FPB/IRC/218**

January 2019

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# Introduction

## The Complaint

On July 11, 2018, the Forest Practices Board received a complaint from a member of Elphinstone Logging Focus, a local environmental group.

The complainant asserts that Sunshine Coast Community Forest (SCCF) did not adequately consider the impacts of forestry activities on an existing landslide<sup>1</sup> into Wilson Creek. The cutblock in question, EW002, is adjacent to the landslide. The complainant believes that harvesting the block caused fine sediment from the landslide to continue to be transported into the fish-bearing creek, and that it will continue to do so until the slope eventually stabilizes. The complainant also asserted that SCCF did not conduct a geotechnical assessment of the landslide.

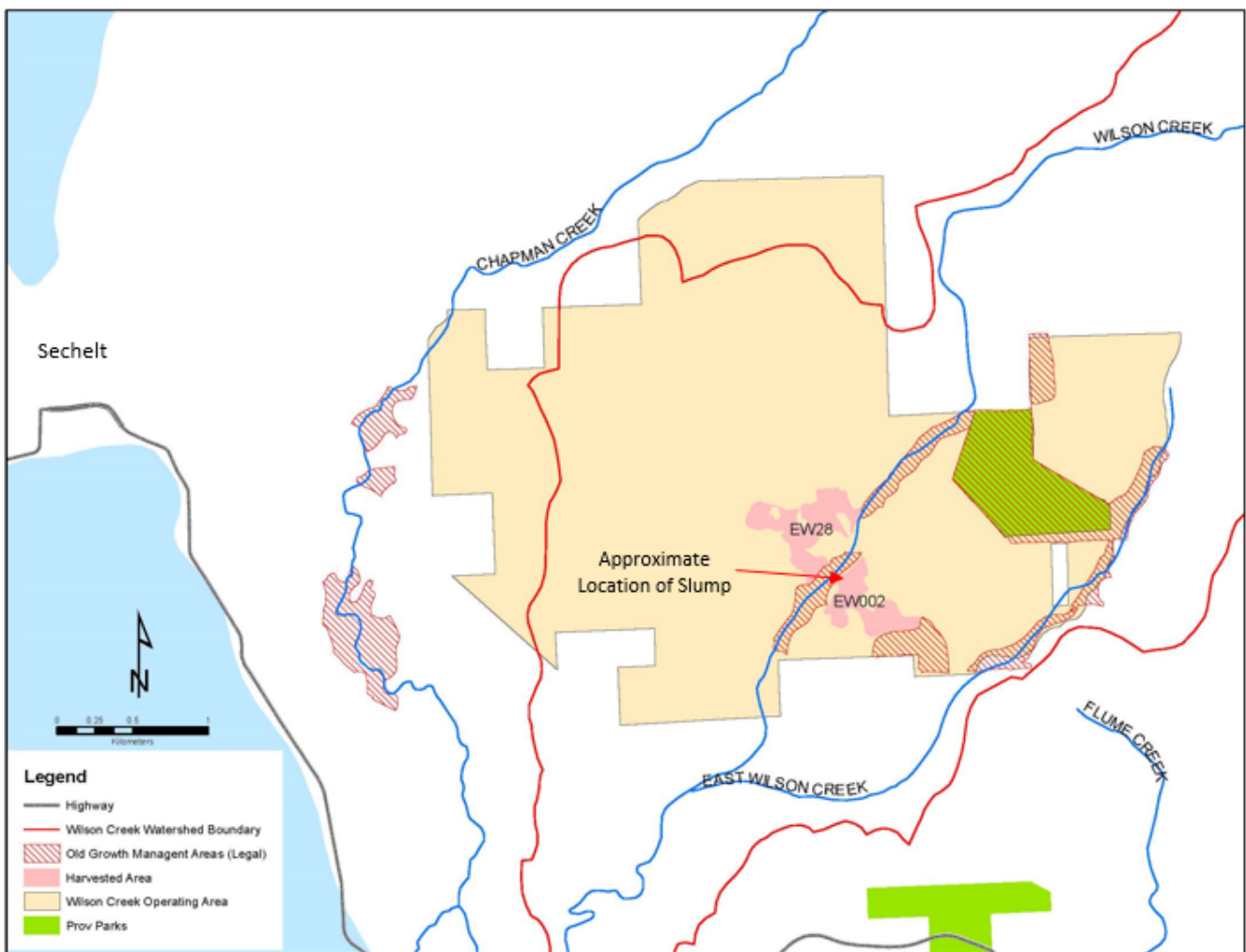


Figure 1. Wilson Creek operating area.

<sup>1</sup> A terrain hazard assessment for block EW002, completed in 2011, identified the feature as a retrogressive slump. The feature is called a slump in the rest of the report.

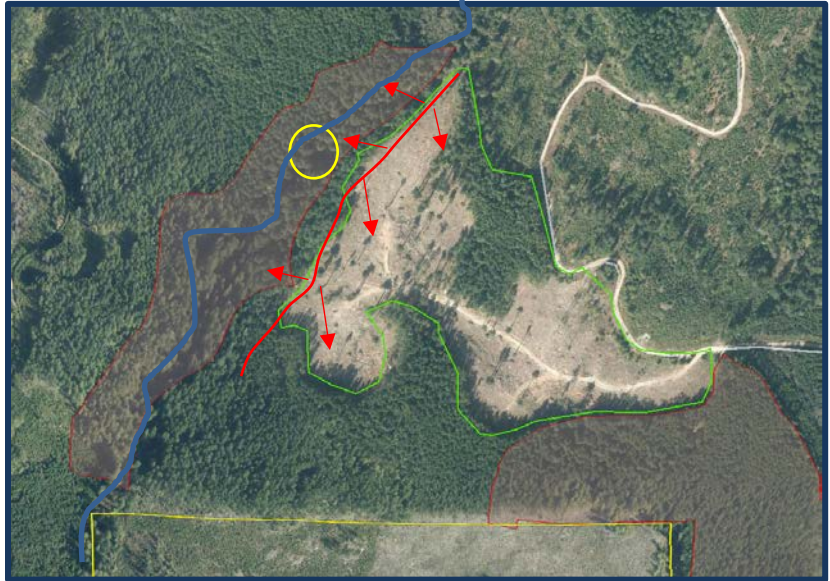
## Background

The SCCF has three geographically distinct operating areas around the community of Sechelt. Wilson Creek is located in the Wilson Creek operating area, about five kilometres southeast of Sechelt (Figure 1). The Wilson Creek watershed encompasses private land in its lower portion, the community forest in its middle portion, and private and Crown land in its upper portion.

Wilson Creek is fish bearing and has domestic water intakes located approximately two kilometres downstream of cutblock EW002. The northwestern-most boundary of the cutblock parallels Wilson Creek for approximately 500 metres. The creek is about 25 to 60 metres downslope from the cutblock and only a small portion of the cutblock drains into it (Figure 2). The stream bank along this section of Wilson Creek is very steep, ranging from 45 percent to over 100 percent gradient (refer to Photos 1 and 2).

Cutblock EW002 was planned and flagged on the ground in 2008 and a terrain hazard

assessment was completed in 2011. The SCCF hired the current forestry manager in 2011. He decided to defer harvesting EW002 until he field reviewed the cutblock. Following the field review, the SCCF modified EW002 by moving the cutblock boundary further away from the edge of the slope break above Wilson Creek. SCCF harvested EW002 in 2014.



**Figure 2.** Cutblock EW002. The blue line is the approximate location of the creek, the red line shows the approximate drainage split and the red arrows indicate the drainage pattern on the cutblock. The yellow circle is the approximate location of the slump, the yellow line is the SCCF boundary and the shaded areas are old growth management areas. Most of the water coming off EW002 does not reach the slump.



**Picture 1.** The retrogressive slump adjacent to Wilson Creek. Note the revegetation of the toe of the slump.



**Picture 2.** Wilson Creek, looking upstream from the slump.



## Findings and Discussion

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The *Forest and Range Practices Act* sets objectives for resource values, but allows forest licensees discretion in how to achieve those objectives. Licensees generally meet the objectives by relying on the advice of forest professionals, an approach known as professional reliance. If the licensee's forest professional lacks the skill set to address specific risks associated with proposed development, they are expected to obtain the advice or assistance of a specialist who possesses these skills. Assessing terrain stability and hydrologic impacts of proposed development requires specialized knowledge and experience and it is up to the licensee and their coordinating forest professional to ensure that individuals completing these assessments are competent.

The SCCF completed a terrain hazard assessment for block EW002 in 2011. This assessment identified the slump and said that similar slumps and failures were found in gully sidewalls of Wilson Creek and other nearby streams. The hazard assessment recommended SCCF move the block boundary back from the slope break into Wilson Creek and that the boundary along Wilson Creek be treated for windfirming<sup>2</sup> in order to lower the potential instability and sedimentation that could result from post-harvest blowdown. The SCCF followed both of these recommendations.

In addition to the terrain hazard assessment, the SCCF has been proactive and conducted three watershed level hydrologic-related assessments. Two of these examined the condition of the watershed and potential hydrological impacts of proposed future harvesting, one in 2010 and another in 2012. The latter was updated in 2018 to reflect current conditions. A third assessment was prepared in 2012 to address fish habitat protection in Wilson Creek. The SCCF committed to following the recommendations made in these assessments.



**Figure 5.** Cutblock EW002. Note the gentle terrain and vigorous regeneration and thick shrub component. Wilson Creek is to the left of the cutblock.

The SCCF forest manager exhibited a level of professionalism expected of forest managers under a professional reliance model. Following the recommendations in these assessments will help the SCCF minimize impacts of its activities on adjacent and downstream resources in Wilson Creek. The professionals who completed the assessments were well qualified and included a registered professional biologist with a Ph.D, two professional engineers, a hydrologist with a M.Sc. and several experienced forest professionals.

On October 12, 2018, Board investigators—a terrain specialist and a forest professional—reviewed the slump in the field and walked along Wilson Creek from the slump upstream to another cutblock (EW028). They also reviewed the roads accessing cutblock EW002.

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<sup>2</sup> Windfirming is treating the edge of a harvested area by feathering, topping and top-pruning to reduce the likelihood of edge blowdown.

Board investigators did not observe any sedimentation or slope failures directly attributed to harvesting or road construction and maintenance associated with cutblocks EW002 or EW028. They did observe indicators of past naturally occurring slumps along the side slopes of Wilson Creek.

## **Finding**

There is no evidence that harvesting EW002 has or will contribute to the continual erosion of the slump. The Board found the SCCF complied with all legal requirements with respect to planning, road construction/maintenance and harvesting. It also exercised appropriate caution by obtaining a number of specialist assessments and following the specialists' recommendations prior to carrying out forestry activities.

## **Conclusions**

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The complainant was concerned that harvesting adjacent to an existing landslide would cause sediment to be transported to a fish-bearing creek. They asserted the SCCF had not done a geotechnical assessment of the landslide before forestry activities commenced. The Board found these concerns were not borne out because the licensee had completed a geotechnical assessment, as well as several other hydrologic related assessments, and planned and carried out its activities to avoid causing sediment to enter Wilson Creek.

The forest activities of SCCF did not cause the slump that the complainant identified: the slump was a natural event that occurred before any primary forest activity took place. The design and development of cutblock EW002 did not affect or increase the sedimentation that is naturally occurring from the slump. Further, Board investigators observed that the toe of the slump is beginning to revegetate, which will reduce the amount of sediment from the slump introduced into Wilson Creek in the future.



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