

Government has no regard for environment: Jones

BYCORYHURLEY

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The Opposition Leader is questioning government's rationale and effort in approving projects such as the five-year harvesting plan for Corner Brook Pulp and Paper.

Yvonne Jones told The Western Star the Department of Environment and Conservation has not followed its own criteria, policies and protocols in "rubber stamping" the mill's harvesting operations.

"The only rationale I can see for it is they have no regard for the natural environment," she said, adding there are other examples of this disregard such as proposing a transmission line from the Lower Churchill through Gros Morne National Park. "They are just prepared to sign these things off and let them go. It shows me they are not putting a lot of thought into some of this stuff, they are not putting a lot of effort in."

The Liberal leader believes because public support is high for the government, it feels it can do what it wants.

"I hope people are realizing those sorts of actions on behalf of government leads to some very detrimental consequences sometimes, and we are the people who are going to have to live with it long after they are gone," she said.

The paper company's five-year harvesting plan for Districts 14 and 15, which stretch from Burgeo to Gros Morne National Park, was conditionally released from the environmental process in late January.

The plan was registered with the provincial Department of Environment and Conservation last October and minister Charlene Johnson's decision, which was to be made mid-November, was extended past Nov. 30.

The company, which plans to harvest a total of nearly 1.7 million cubic metres of timber and build 77 kilometres of roads throughout those districts, reported in its registration document there was little interest in public consultations held leading up to the registration of the plan.

The approval was met with criticism by Don Ivany, regional director of the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF), who said the operations will encroach on some of western Newfoundland's sensitive areas in the coming years.

Ivany said he didn't attend the public consultation, but did submit a report outlining the group's concerns. He criticized the consultation process, referring to it as just a formality.

Jones believes Kruger, based on its reputation for environmentally friendly practices, would want all concerns addressed appropriately.

Corner Brook Pulp and Paper has stated it is willing to listen to people's concerns about the plan. Also, the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation has held meetings with various groups since the plan's release.