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# Hard data: looking deep into Indigenous forests

**Louis De Grandpré studies the traditional lands of Canada's Pessamit people in the face of widespread logging.**

By [Nicola Jones](#)



Louis De Grandpré is a forest ecologist with the Canadian Forest Service, currently on an exchange programme with the Pessamit people. Credit: Ed Jones/AFP via Getty

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some 100,000 square kilometres northeast of Quebec City. It's a fairly open landscape dominated by black spruce (*Picea mariana*), with some balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*). It's not uncommon to find forests that are 300 years old here.

I study the southern portion of these forests, an area of roughly 30,000 square kilometres, to see how their structure and diversity change over time and respond to disturbance. I did this first as a graduate student, and then as a forest ecologist for the federal government. Now, I'm employed by the Pessamit community.

Logging started here in the 1920s and shot up in the 1970s; now, about one million cubic metres of logs, such as those pictured here, are cut each year. Logging has completely changed the age structure of the forest. Large tracts of old growth have declined from about 40% of the landscape 30 years ago, to less than 20% today.

Moose enter the logged areas, where they feed on new deciduous growth. Wolves follow the moose, travelling along logging roads, and prey on caribou.

I'm not against logging, but I'm against the speed with which it's done here. Loggers have been moving from south to north, and in five to ten years they'll reach the commercial-logging boundary. Then they'll go back south and start again. Sustainable forest management means maintaining the species that are associated with these forests. And that's not what is happening.

Many groups are pushing for an Indigenous-led conservation area. The Innu are also interested in the possibility of carbon credits. They want to find ways to manage the forest, while continuing their cultural practices. I'm keen to contribute to something that I believe in. I feel that the Innu and I share the same ecological values.