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# FINANCIAL POST

## Greenpeace admits its attacks on forest products giant were 'non-verifiable statements of subjective opinion'



[PETER KUITENBROUWER](#) | March 2, 2017 | Last Updated: Mar 3 6:18 PM ET



Peter J. Thompson/National Post  
Richard Garneau, chief executive of Resolute Forest Products Inc., shows off his wooden bowtie, made in Quebec's forestry heartland of Lac St. Jean. Garneau says it is funny how Greenpeace is changing its tune now that it must account for statements regarding the forestry company's activities in eastern Canada."

Greenpeace, after repeated attacks against Canada's biggest forest products company for "destroying," Canada's boreal forests, now says that it was merely stating an opinion about the logging activity, not a fact.

After years of weathering attacks on its forestry practices, Montreal-based Resolute Forest Products Inc. last year sued Greenpeace in United States District Court in Georgia under racketeering statutes, alleging that Greenpeace's repeated attacks on Resolute, to raise money for Greenpeace, amount to criminal activity.



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In its claim, Resolute noted that Greenpeace has lobbied big Resolute paper customers, such as the Rite-Aid pharmacy chain (which printed its flyers on Resolute newsprint), encouraging them to switch suppliers, because, said Greenpeace, Resolute is a “forest destroyer.”

But now Greenpeace says it never intended people to take its words about Resolute’s logging practices as literal truth.

“The publications’ use of the word “Forest Destroyer,” for example, is obvious rhetoric,” Greenpeace writes in its motion to dismiss the Resolute lawsuit. “Resolute did not literally destroy an entire forest. It is of course arguable that Resolute destroyed portions of the Canadian Boreal Forest without abiding by policies and practices established by the Canadian government and the Forest Stewardship Council, but that is the point: The “Forest Destroyer” statement cannot be proven true or false, it is merely an opinion.”

Greenpeace adds that its attacks on Resolute “are without question non-verifiable statements of subjective opinion and at most non-actionable rhetorical hyperbole.”

None of the allegations by Resolute or Greenpeace has been tested in this case, which remains before the courts.

Richard Garneau, the chief executive of Resolute, who himself hails from the company’s centre of logging operations in the Saguenay region north of Quebec City, seized on Greenpeace’s admissions in an op-ed published Thursday in the conservative U.S. magazine National Review.

“A funny thing happened when Greenpeace and allies were forced to account for their claims in court,” Garneau wrote. “They started changing their tune. Their condemnations of our forestry practices ‘do not hew to strict literalism or scientific precision,’ as they concede in their latest legal filings. These are sober admissions after years of irresponsible attacks.”

Garneau, in Toronto Thursday, said Greenpeace’s attacks have hurt many across northern Quebec and Ontario.

“It is sad that we have to do all this to straighten out the record on misinformation,” he said. “It is sad that all Greenpeace’s allegations are against people who cannot defend themselves against organizations who blackmail customers to raise money.”

Resolute has faced criticism over its logging practices in the boreal forests of Ontario and Quebec from people other than Greenpeace. Forest product companies pay the German-based Forest Stewardship Council to review their logging operations and ensure they are sustainable. The FSC logo emblazons products across Canada as responsibly sourced — such as the envelopes used by Canada’s five biggest banks to send out customers’ account statements. FSC in 2014 revoked its seal of approval for logging operations that comprise about half of the forests where Resolute operates in Canada.

FSC said that Resolute wasn’t doing enough to protect caribou habitat, and failed to get permission from First Nations to log certain forests.



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But Resolute has trained its legal firepower squarely on Greenpeace. In 2013 Resolute extracted an apology from Greenpeace for falsely alleging that Resolute had cut trees in an area it promised to spare. That same year, Resolute sued Greenpeace for libel in Thunder Bay, Ont., alleging that the global environmental group was spreading lies about the forest harvesting operations.

In a statement released to the Financial Post late Friday, Shane Moffat, head of forest campaigns at Greenpeace Canada, wrote that, "Greenpeace Canada stands by our criticism of Resolute Forest Products' practices that have been undermining the ecological integrity of the boreal forest in key regions where Resolute operates. Richard Garneau has taken legal arguments out of context to imply that Greenpeace is backing down on these claims. Greenpeace Canada is not involved in this lawsuit, but is being sued by Resolute in Ontario."

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