

Deathly Hallows called 'greenest book' in history

JAMES ADAMS

From Tuesday's Globe and Mail
July 17, 2007 at 3:44 AM EDT

When Scholastic Inc., the U.S. publisher of the Harry Potter books, announced in the spring of 2003 that it expected to print 8.5 million copies of the then-latest instalment, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, it prompted a collective shudder among environmentalists -- and a black joke on the Weekend Update segment of TV's Saturday Night Live.

The shudder came because, at almost 800 pages, the fifth Potter was (and, in fact, remains) the biggest book in the J.K. Rowling oeuvre.

Therefore, more than 252,000 trees would have to be harvested, mostly from the boreal forests of the United States and Canada, to make that 8.5-million-copy print run a reality.

Well, the end is nigh, at least for the Potter series, as its final instalment, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, is published this coming weekend. But luckily the much-anticipated conclusion is not being accompanied by a corresponding pulp-and-paper apocalypse.

In fact, thanks to the pioneering actions of a non-profit Vancouver-based, Greenpeace-associated firm, Markets Initiative, and Rowling's long-time Canadian publisher, Raincoast Books, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows is being described as "the greenest book in publishing history."

At least that's the view of Nicole Rycroft, executive director of Markets Initiative, which since 2001 has been pressing publishers to use materials not sourced from endangered or ancient forests. The reason for the superlative? Potter publishers in 16 countries have printed or are going to print their editions of Harry's swan

song on eco-friendly paper, including, for the first time, Scholastic Inc. According to Rycroft, 65 per cent of Scholastic's 12 million copies -- more than nine million kilograms of paper stock for a book that is going to run to more than 750 pages -- have been printed on ancient-forest-friendly papers. This includes some that are 100-per-cent post-consumer recycled, processed chlorine-free, and others that are a mix of recycled stock and wood fibre certified by the Forest Stewardship Council as having come from forests that are "environmentally and socially responsible."

The result? A saving of almost 130,000 trees, courtesy of the biggest Potter market of them all, with ancillary benefits in water conservation, reduced production of landfill waste and greenhouse gases -- the last the equivalent, according to Markets Initiative, of removing 1,232 cars from American freeways for a year.

While impressive, Scholastic's effort pales in comparison with what Vancouver-based Raincoast has been doing for more than four years.

In June, 2003, with the release of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, Raincoast became the first (and at that time only) Potter publisher among the 55 worldwide to issue that title on 100-per-cent post-consumer recycled/ancient-forest-friendly paper. In other words, no new trees had been chopped down in Canada or the U.S. when it came time for Potter printers in Quebec and Manitoba to run Raincoast's order of 935,000 copies through their presses.

Almost as impressive was the fact that the frontispiece of the Raincoast's Phoenix carried an endorsement from none other than Rowling.

"Because the Canadian editions are printed on ancient-forest-friendly paper, the Harry Potter books are helping to save magnificent forests in the muggle world," she wrote.

"It's a good idea to respect ancient trees, especially if they have a temper like the Whomping Willow."

Raincoast has since carried over its ancient-forest-friendly practices to its entire domestic publishing program.

In the meantime, other Canadian publishers, including Ontario-based Random House and McClelland & Stewart, have made commitments to eliminate their use of paper from ancient forests.

Similarly, printers both here and in the U.S. have developed several kinds of eco-friendly papers, spurred by their desire to curry favour with Rowling and to capture at least some of the lucrative contracts associated with printing or reprinting the Potter series.

To date, more than 325 million Potter books have been sold worldwide. And it's expected the new book will sell at least 55 million more, once its translations into French, German, Hebrew, Dutch, Spanish and other languages are completed later this year or in early 2008.

Thanks to the efforts of Raincoast and Scholastic, among others, the overall environmental impact in producing the new text will be less, well, deadly than it might have been.

According to the "ecological savings chart" that is to be released by Markets Initiative today, a total of close to 200,000 trees worldwide will have been spared from destruction by the Potter industry – "that's an area 2.5 times New York's Central Park" – while almost 330 million litres of water will have been conserved – "enough water to fill 218 Olympic-sized swimming pools."