



## The Future of BC Forests

**FUTURE COMMUNITY AND FAMILY HEALTH, AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT revenue, are dependent upon a new focus on forest management.**

The 1990s saw government and industry become global leaders in forest management by focusing on: land-use planning, public involvement in forest decisions, vibrant forest research and inventory programs, initial actions to integrate First Nations into the forest sector economy, third-party sustainable forest management (SFM) certification, and collaboration among industry and major environmental groups following the 'war in the woods'. All contributed to long-term forest stewardship.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought a government change in focus from stewardship to short-term economics. Industry will always focus on the short-term, unless a company has a clear philosophy that balances the two approaches. Therefore, it is incumbent upon government, as the public's agent, to ensure maintenance of long-term stewardship through regulation and policy.

Examples of actions taken over the last decade that caused decline in SFM and loss of global leadership recognition are as follows:

- Government directive to staff to help in implementing policies to increase industry competitiveness, implying this was a priority over long-term stewardship
- Allowing timber harvesting practices to take preference over previously identified values such as tourism, recreation, water, benchmark forests, vulnerable species, habitat and ecosystems)
- Decline in forest inventory staffing and funding
- Decline in forest research funding
- Decline in staffing and funding for monitoring and assessment of forest practices on all identified forest values (e.g., water, soil, wildlife)
- Corporate lawyers advising companies to commit only to the minimum requirements in their forest stewardship plans to avoid potential legal action if commitments are not acted upon, even if justified
- Relaxation of industry and government commitments

The relaxation of industry and government commitments are many and varied. Here is a summary:

- Deferral of the requirement to update tree farm license management plans for up to 10 years beyond contractual commitments
- Reduction in the reforestation of wildfire areas, BC Timber Sales mountain pine beetle (MPB) harvested areas and small MPB salvage-logged areas
- Off-loading the cost of implementing wildfire interface management plans onto communities without sufficient funding
- No response to curb the decline in vulnerable species and ecosystems and in the restoration of habitats and ecosystems
- No concerted effort to address cumulative impact management (i.e., integration management of all resource extraction activities), especially in the northeast
- Removal of funding for land use implementation committees thereby limiting or removing public involvement in monitoring implementation of land-use plans

The focus on short-term economics and the reversal of these negative actions and other deficiencies (including no vision for public forests to guide decision-making and a lack of demonstration of the future forest conditions) have to be corrected to achieve a desired future forest for healthy communities and families.

Government and industry have used voluntary third-party forest certification as the indicator of practicing SFM. However, certification is relying on the good forest management activities of the past such as up-to-date land-use plans and government programs in forest research and inventory to meet requirements and standards. The substantial decline in resourcing of these activities by government could put company certifications in jeopardy and, at the least, induce customers to raise questions.

We can have forests that achieve community and family health and increased provincial revenue but action is needed now. This requires a 10-year investment strategy. Recognizing the current provincial economic conditions, it is recommended government direct adequate investments and human resources toward maintenance and enhancement of the public's forest asset over the next five years by:

- 1) Creating a BC forest vision to guide development and review of legislation, regulation, policies and forest practices;
- 2) Enabling and requiring community involvement in strategic decisions about local forest lands;
- 3) Establishing adequate endowments as stable funding for forest resource inventories, for forest research and for forest practices monitoring and assessment programs;
- 4) Investigating, jointly with industry, opportunities that will encourage investment in forest management other than by government, without privatizing BC forests;
- 5) Aggressively providing forest management mechanisms, in partnership with industry, that promote and support economic diversification within communities;
- 6) Developing and begin implementation of a 10 year strategy to convert economically justified wildfire and MPB generated NSR lands to fully functional forests;
- 7) Taking action to prevent decline of non-timber values and vulnerable species and ecosystems
- 8) Funding forest treatments and habitat-ecosystems restoration to create healthy forests in areas where the forest industry does not have contractual commitments; and,
- 9) Ensuring industrial contractual commitments are fulfilled.

Political parties will begin formally developing their election platforms this month. I would encourage all forest professionals and interested parties to ask their MLAs and candidates how they would respond to these recommendations. There is no risk to you in asking and a significant risk to the forest for not.

Politicians have advised that specific recommended actions are required for each of the 2011 key issues identified. These are being

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this issue. A major part of this evolution is clarifying our forest management goals and making sure we achieve them. An important element of this stewardship responsibility is understanding and working with the dynamic development of forest stands over the entire rotation.

We clearly need to shift the focus of stand establishment away from free growing to one in which each stand is evaluated against its contribution to a desired future forest condition. This in turn is defined based on the landscape or management unit objectives, which should include overall species composition, seral stage composition, desired grade mix and a range of other targets. Such a management system needs to be firmly embedded in the principles of stewardship, whereby forest professionals are responsible and accountable for their decisions and actions toward achieving objectives as opposed to the current minimal achievement of contractual and statutory obligations.

Barring such a paradigm shift, the most likely short-term band-aid is a redefinition of our free growing goals. They need to explicitly recognize that there is much more to designing a future crop than targeting B-level stocking using one or more ecologically suited species. At the very least, they need to include concepts of density management to help produce desirable end products, and risk management to protect against and account for the effects of stochastic disruptions. Most of all, they need to help us expose ourselves to the secret life of BC's forests. 🌲

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developed for each of the recommendations and will be distributed to the four main political parties and posted on the Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities website in September. They will be in draft form as more information will be acquired as output from the expert and community workshops being held during September-November. I would suggest readers check the website in September. 🌲

*Bill Bourgeois PhD, RPF, has 38 years of experience in promoting advancement of BC forest management and is the coordinator of the Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities: A conversation on BC forests initiative providing community dialogue and the views of experts (<http://bcforest-conversation.com>).*



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of production functions for species-site combinations and incorporate estimates of risk especially from forest health impacts. Given the sophistication of these decision-support tools, BC is in an excellent position to make better science-informed intensive silvicultural decisions. 🌲

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