

WILL BC FORESTS DELIVER COMMUNITY NEEDS?

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Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities: A conversation on BC forests

August 22, 2011

A wide range of knowledgeable forest leaders are raising the question of whether British Columbia (BC) forests are on a course that will significantly impact the future of communities and families. As forest professionals, it is critical we individually or collectively bring forward our views to decision-makers, communities and concerned citizens. Traditionally foresters, I being one of them, tend to not speak out for various reasons. However, the time has come to capitalize on the positive reputation of the profession within the public.

There have been a number of newspaper articles and contributions to the “*Healthy Forests- Healthy Communities: A conversation on BC forests*” (<http://bcforestconversation.com>) initiative that have raised questions regarding the current state of the forest and its future. Many of these include references but also opinions. I thought it might be useful to bring some of the issues and concerns together where specific reference materials are available to support the concerns. I would encourage you to review the following and let decision-makers and concerned citizens know your views, supportive or not, of whether the current BC forests trajectory will deliver the expected short and long-term community needs from our forests.

Forest management issues: concerns

- **Leadership:** No long-term forest lands vision exists to guide policy and management decisions in BC; the Government’s “The State of the Forest Report” did not include a vision to evaluate the success of existing forest management.
- **Re-stocking:** Regeneration levels (40-70%) in Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) impacted areas; this level of regeneration is expected to significantly compromise future productivity if not corrected, especially with increasing global external influences.
- **Monitoring:** Staff reductions (25% in 10 years) in BC Forest Service, much in the area of monitoring; current levels of oversight are expected to challenge the ability to both adequately determine the state of BC forests and ensure sustainable management; no evidence exists that other efficiencies or delegation have compensated for the staff reductions.
- **Resource inventories:** Funding levels of resource inventories (45% of the estimated essential staffing levels for inventories maintenance; 75% of the inventories are 25 years old); lack of updated and readily available resource inventories is expected to limit managers’ ability to evaluate and manage forest conditions appropriately.

- **Research:** Unprecedented low funding levels for forest lands research (80% over the last 3 years); reduction of research expenditures is expected to affect the ability of researchers to fill knowledge gaps and respond to impacts of global external influences.
- **Management:** Short-term management policies to assist industry while maintaining forest stewardship (e.g., management plans deferred for up to 10 years beyond earlier agreements; Government operational decisions focused on reducing industry costs; relaxation of small scale regeneration in MPB salvage areas); decisions to focus on short-term competition gains are expected to negatively impact the future forest productivity and the forest asset base.
- **Policies:** Transfer of Community (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) interface hazard reduction planning and implementation responsibility from Government to communities; increased large-scale fire risk exists due to required levels of implementation and funding with all the risk residing with communities and not the Provincial Government.
- **Industry:** Industry focus on marketing at the expense of forest management; failure of the forest industry to request Government assistance with long-term forest management costs, compared with recent requests for product marketing assistance, suggests forest management is not a priority.

Realizing increased value issues: concerns

- **Planning:** Activity level of public involvement in strategic land and resource planning; public involvement limited to providing input into Government plans with limited or no oversight by public advisory committees to harness past world-class land use planning and threaten global land use planning leadership.
- **Forest use:** Coordination and timber impact limits associated with non-traditional forest resources management; reduced lack of policy coordination and the continued legislated limit regarding impacts of recreation, road access, fish and wildlife, parks and reserves, cattle management and non-timber forest products suggest the focus is on timber management at the expense of other resources.
- **Product development:** Marketing of “value-added products” (10-25% of total Government marketing allocation); low levels of market development funding is expected to limit the growth of the secondary manufacturing industry and hence community diversification and full utilization of the fibre resource.
- **Community development:** Funding levels (\$1 M/year for each Beetle Action Coalition for three years) for community diversification in MPB impacted areas; current funding allocations for community diversification in each of the three BC regions is expected to limit diversification and be far short of the projected funding needed to establish viable and sustainable communities.
- **Community diversification:** Policy barriers to the encouragement of wood utilization for bio-energy; existing barriers limit opportunities for broader diversification and full utilization of the forest resource.

Forest environment protection issues; concerns

- **Biodiversity:** Biodiversity protection initiatives; BC biodiversity “...is vulnerable to rapid deterioration, especially in light of climate change,” thereby requiring action to prevent loss of species and ecosystems.
- **Adaptation:** Response to global environmental influences; with a focus primarily on research and not operations adaptation is expected to limit future opportunities.
- **Productivity:** Cumulative impacts; without concerted coordination of broader resource management interests (especially in the Northeast) involving oil and gas exploration, forestry, mining, hydro development and agriculture, resource management and extraction activities are expected to create significant cumulative impacts to ecosystems and forest productivity.
- **Restoration:** Habitat restoration in areas impacted by the MPB epidemic; current level of habitat restoration is expected to significantly reduce ecosystem productivity.
- **Watersheds:** Impacts of MPB harvesting on streamflows; ecosystem and forest productivity is expected to be impacted by rising water tables due to tree harvesting and salvaging in MPB harvested watersheds.
- **Public involvement:** Level of meaningful community participation; local communities and family desires regarding forest lands management influence is expected to be limited unless policies are changed.

I encourage you, as forest professionals, to let your views be known through direct conversations with decision-makers, communities or concerned citizens or through the *Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities* initiative website, facebook or twitter.