

## **RURAL COMMUNITIES MUST INFLUENCE FOREST MANAGEMENT**

October 2011

### **Rural communities, dependent upon forest resources, need to take a leadership role in designing the future of BC forest lands!**

The British Columbia (BC) forest industry makes up 29% of the provincial GDP and 41% of total export values. Over 70% of the exports come from the resources around rural communities compared to 30% from BC's metropolitan centres. Consequently, rural communities are a major contributor to the provincial economy.

The rural communities dependent upon the forest sector are strongly influenced by the management of local-regional forests which, in turn is critical for the continued support for local families, businesses and communities. Therefore, local government and the communities are entitled to have a say in forest management and be provided with a mechanism to inform decision-makers of their views, concerns and current and future needs.

A wide range of knowledgeable forest leaders have raised the question of whether BC forests are on a course that will significantly impact the future of communities and families. Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) requires management that "maintains biological diversity, [forest] productivity, regeneration capacity, [forest] vitality and the potential of the forest to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national and global levels, and does not cause damage on other ecosystems."<sup>1</sup> There are a number of actions taken since 2000 which challenge whether the future of BC forests will be able to deliver on these requirements (See attachment).

The concerns of the knowledgeable forest leaders generated the *Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities: A conversation on BC forests* (HFHC), an initiative to provide an opportunity for communities to inform decision-makers of their views and concerns. The HFHC is a **non-partisan, volunteer-supported initiative** intended to capture the concerns and recommendations of experts and community members (including practicing forest and biology professionals, Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals) to enable informed decision-making for BC forest lands management. The securing of background information from experts in the field and the creating of opportunities for citizen dialogue both inform decision-makers of a vision for BC's forest lands that can be used by Government, Aboriginals and stakeholders in shaping policies, regulations and legislation for SFM in BC.

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<sup>1</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Canadian Institute of Forestry's The Forestry Chronicle Vol 70 (6): 666-674)

To date, the following common themes have arisen from the Community Dialogue Sessions and the supporting expert analyses and opinions:

- Communities want more influence in forest lands decisions
- Communities need to be more informed of the state of local forest lands
- Communities are concerned regarding the future of local forest lands
- Communities want a viable and sustainable local forest industry that meets their needs

Communities can take a leadership role in the future of BC forests through:

- Making their concerns known through participating in the HFHC initiative
- Establishing a local mechanism (e.g., advisory committee) of local government to identify and focus on local priority forestry related issues
- Insisting on a BC forest lands vision that will guide legislative and operational decisions and actions
- Developing a vision for the local-regional forest based on the BC vision
- Requiring local forest managers to demonstrate how proposed plans and actions will meet community needs
- Participating in third party forest management certification processes that evaluate forest operations of forest companies and BC Timber Sales
- Influencing third party certification by 1) ensuring performance standards meet community needs, 2) community concerns are a priority for certification audits and 3) participating in certification audits

A void exists in BC for a forest management champion. Communities, with assistance from forest professionals, academics and concerned citizens, can become the champion. The challenge resides with local government and the communities. It is critical the local-regional forest lands are managed to deliver the needs of the communities!

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## ATTACHMENT

Examples of recent actions impacting the practice of SFM in BC:

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.