

PROFESSIONAL RELIANCE REVIEW

Government Oversight of Professional Associations

Bill Bourgeois, PhD, RPF (Ret) Opinion

The recent *Professional Reliance Review (Review)* included a recommendation to establish an “*Office of Professional Regulation and Oversight*.” There are many valuable recommendations in the *Review*. However, the oversight model is not one of them. As can be expected, the various professional associations who are currently responsible for Professional Reliance (PR) oversight in their sector have voiced major concerns over this additional group. From a forestry perspective, I believe an additional level of bureaucracy is unnecessary and will result in negative overall responses rather than improving the situation. Government may choose to establish the oversight group as a politically expedient response to the recommendations. This would be unfortunate, as addressing the issue is not short-term but one that is very important to the management of BC forests and should not be treated as a “quick fix.” I recognize some forest management activists would prefer a stand-alone agency to create more legislative regulations. However, such an instrument does not guarantee it will achieve the desired objectives of increased accountability, increased transparency and improved forest management.

We do not need more bureaucracy! This is not good policy. At the same time, there are serious issues regarding the implementation of PR that need attention. Most, if not all, of the *Review* oversight group mandate recommendations can be addressed through existing instruments. These be handled through the well-respected offices of the Attorney General (e.g., establishing standards of performance, conducting Association audits, etc.) and the Forest Practices Board (e.g., conducting forest operations audits). Assistance in developing the oversight guidance or regulatory documents could be developed by the Auditor General’s office with assistance from an advisory body consisting of the Association of BC Forest Professionals (ABCFP), the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MFLNRORD), the Forest Practices Board, an environmental forest management advocate NGO and two forest-dependent community representatives. It would be easy to establish a requirement that these documents be based on independently recognized standards many of which are referred to in the *Review*. This model would require modifications to the mandates of existing legislative bodies, including the Foresters Act but I doubt it would be more work than establishing the new oversight group. The use of existing instruments would result in less bureaucracy than the *Review* model, increased transparency for the public, increased accountability by the Associations and forest professionals and improved forest management. **We don’t need another legislated group!**

I encourage Government to take the time and think about a less bureaucratic model for addressing the PR issues and not focus on a “quick fix” for politically expedited reasons. The forest-dependent communities and the BC public deserve thoughtful and sustainable decisions. This decision would be part of Premier Horgan’s TLA AGM speech commitment to provide assistance to “reinvigorate social license in BC’s forest industry.” **Being thoughtful in this PR decision is called leadership which we greatly need in BC forestry.** I look forward to Premier Horgan stepping up to the plate on this issue and not bending to activist approaches.