

## **BUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN FOREST MANAGEMENT**

### **Compliance and Enforcement**

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British Columbia (BC) has legislative and policy instruments directed to providing the public with information on the management of Crown forests to meet identified objectives. There are three main questions relative to strategic decision-making that contribute to building trust in forest management and awareness by communities and concerned citizens, specifically:

- 1) Is the public aware of proposed plans and activities?
- 2) Are the public expectations being met through implementation of plans and activities?
- 3) Is there adequate compliance and enforcement?

Building community and public confidence in forest manager decision-making would benefit from integrating instruments associated with answering each of these questions. The instruments exist to address these questions but recently, there have been concerns raised by the public and independent bodies regarding their adequacy. This paper addresses the third question.

### **BACKGROUND**

BC forests are very diverse and complex. It is impossible to create legislation and regulations that detail forest management practices for each geographical area and forest type without them being voluminous. However, there needs to be clear, measurable and achievable objectives identified and local mechanisms to audit performance at the operations level.

The Government of the day in 2005 decided to move from the highly prescriptive and costly Forest Practices Code (FPC) to a “results-based Code” (i.e., Forest and Range Practices Act – FRPA). The rationale included a need to reduce costs while maintaining a high standard of forest management. The expectation was that FRPA would identify forest management objectives and rely on the professional decision-making of foresters, biologists, etc. managing the forest to deliver strategies to achieve them. There would be a reduction in emphasis on Government professionals’ involvement but an increase in the number of Compliance and Enforcement officers to ensure the strategies would be delivered. At the same time Government was in the process of implementing another commitment to reduce the size of the civil service. Within the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources (MFLNRO), this came in the form of centralization of operations, reducing the number of Forest Districts and expanding the responsibilities of Compliance and Enforcement staff to cover other resources in the newly labeled Natural Resource

Districts. The BC Government Employees Union (BCGEU) has conducted a comprehensive analysis of the compliance and enforcement staffing from 2007-2017 which is planned for publication in the near future.

There were two key governance tools instituted as part of FRPA intended to assist in meeting the overall improvement in forest management regulation (i.e., Professional Reliance and Forest Stewardship Plans). Unfortunately, these have not achieved the desired outcomes as outlined in a HFHC opinion document<sup>1</sup>.

## **COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT DEVELOPMENTS**

The Compliance and Enforcement staffing and regulatory changes instituted under FRPA resulted in:

- A commitment to increase (300 staff) Compliance and Enforcement officers<sup>2</sup>,
- Actual reduction in staffing levels (18%)<sup>3</sup>
- Expanded operating areas of Compliance and Enforcement officers,
- A reduction in time allocated to auditing forest management practices,
- Questions regarding the implementation of the Professional Reliance model, and
- Questions regarding the effectiveness of Forest Stewardship Plans.

These results have eroded the level of public confidence regarding whether BC forests are managed according to public expectations. The current Government has initiated a review of the Professional Reliance model<sup>4</sup> and the Chief Forester and Natural Resource District Managers have provided guidance documents to those preparing or extending Forest Stewardship Plans. However, nothing appears to be on the horizon regarding addressing the Compliance and Enforcement limitations. Regardless of the assurance provided by the FRPA model and the actions taken/expected regarding Professional Reliance and Forest Stewardship Plans, **a strongly supported Compliance and Enforcement Program is essential to achieve the necessary public trust in BC forest management!**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) Return Compliance and Enforcement staffing to 2005 levels.
- 2) Ensure Compliance and Enforcement staff responsibilities are prioritized to meet the needs of public expectations of forest management oversight.
- 3) Ensure results of Compliance and Enforcement audits are readily available to the public in a form understandable to laypersons.
- 4) Integrate Compliance and Enforcement with Professional Reliance and community engagement as a package to build public trust in BC forest management.

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<sup>1</sup> HFHC, <http://bcforestconversation.com/building-confidence-forest-management-professional-reliance/>

<sup>2</sup> British Columbia Ministry of Forests News Release, *Code Protects Environment, Promotes Economic Growth*, Nov.4, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> BC Government Employees Union (BCGEU) unpublished data

<sup>4</sup> BC Government, *Reviewing BC's Natural Resource Sector Professional Reliance Model-Terms of Reference*, September, 2017 <http://bcforestconversation.com/pofessional-reliance-review-tor-final/>