

## Status of LRMP and RLUP Implementation to Meet the Forest Lands Vision

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### Abstract

**British Columbia has been a leader in strategic land-use planning. However, uncertainties in potential planning table outcomes, the changing dynamics of natural resource use and stakeholders, and a desire to retain more control over the planning process, led the Province to abandon the *Land & Resource Management Planning* framework and adopt a more centrally controlled process that formalizes the *New Relationship* with First Nations, and responds to business drivers.**

### Context

The management of publicly-owned forests in British Columbia (BC) has historically focused on timber production and economic outputs, and land-use decisions have arguably been dominated by commercial and political interests. However, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a shift in forest management priorities toward the management of multiple values and recognition of the important role of non-timber values in the sustainable forest management paradigm; and land-use management in BC was becoming more complex. Increased resource demand (*e.g.* independent power producers, oil and gas exploration and development), and recent resource scarcity (as a result of the mountain pine beetle epidemic) have created a situation where meeting all desires has become more difficult. There are now seemingly more interests competing for limited resources than there have been in the past.

BC has been witness to some of the most contentious land-use conflicts in Canada. At their height in the early 1990s, these conflicts were known the “War in the woods”; these conflicts created uncertainty for a variety of forest stakeholders, including forestry and tourism industries, communities, workers, and public outdoor recreation. The Province’s response then to this unrest and uncertainty was the adoption of consensus-based, strategic land-use planning.

The independent Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE) process was created in 1992, following the Dunsmuir multi-stakeholder conferences that recommended that strategic land-use planning would serve to alleviate the tensions and conflicts that existed around many land-use issues. CORE was focused on the four areas of the province that were experiencing the most contentious land-use and resource issues: Vancouver Island, Cariboo-Chilcotin, West

Kootenay-Boundary, and East Kootenay. CORE gave BC citizens their first opportunity to become actively engaged in regional land-use planning processes for Crown land. Although First Nations did not participate meaningfully as a sector (they wanted to negotiate government to government with the province), CORE provided an opportunity for most stakeholders to learn and experience strategic land-use planning.

In a move to take more direct control of land use planning the province initiated Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs) in 1993 to develop strategic land-use plans for those areas of the province that were not covered by CORE. LRMPs were initially managed by the Land Use Coordination Office, and the Ministries of Forests and Environment, Lands and Parks, and shared decision-making continued to be the framework that would be used at the planning tables. Whereas CORE made broad recommendations, LRMPs were to develop more detailed plans. Strategic plan implementation and monitoring committees were established to oversee the achievement of LRMP objectives by government agencies.

The CORE and LRMP processes introduced the concept of planning tables where sectors representing diverse groups of public stakeholders, industry, and government officials were brought together in consensus-building processes to develop regional land-use recommendations in advisory roles; although First Nations were included as stakeholders, their aboriginal title and rights were awaiting treaty negotiations, which prevented some First Nations from becoming engaged in these processes. Government imposed five constraints on land-use planning: (1) a 12% limit on the area that could be designated as protected areas, (2) a 10% limit on the area of the province that could be designated as biodiversity areas, (3) a 6% limit on planning recommendations on impacts to annual allowable cut (AAC), and the removal of (4) forest tenures allocation and (5) AAC calculation from discussion. While some of these percentages were later revised these generally restricted possible planning outcomes and served to limit or delay public participation. Along side the successes of many of the LRMP tables in resolving land-use issues, political and economic considerations were influential in the final plans that were adopted. Thus, a final assessment of public land-use planning processes in BC must address the fact that the provincial cabinet ultimately had the authority to approve proposed plans, and did alter some of the plans that were produced. As a result, the procedural strengths of the LRMP framework were outweighed by the political oversight imposed on the process.

Initiated in 2006, the Province implemented *A New Direction for Land Use Planning in BC* in 2008, which effectively brought an end to comprehensive land-use planning in BC. This New Direction was a response to: (1) the costs of collaborative planning; (2) a desire by the Province to retain more control over land-use planning outcomes; (3) limited staff and government resources to devote to planning initiatives; and (4) emerging business drivers, including the New Relationship with First Nations, the effects of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, and the rise of non-forestry natural resources like oil and gas. Under this New Direction, strategic land-use planning will be led by the Province and will involve First Nations through government-to-government negotiations. These planning initiatives can include consultation with selected stakeholders and interest groups.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

More than 85% of BC's Crown land base is now covered by 26 regional land use plans and LRMPs, including the four requiring final negotiations with First Nations governments. The remaining 15% of the Province is without strategic guidance or direction from regional land-use plans (this includes the Lower Mainland, except for the identification of protected areas). The Canadian Council of Forest Ministers has suggested that land-use planning processes that incorporate, and are responsive to, the full range of social values are vital for the sustainable

management of forested landscapes. Although there have been advances in the roles that public participation have played in natural resource decision-making, there is evidence that some problems remain. Despite the use of a shared decision-making framework, a focus on consensus building, and an increased level of participation from the public, land-use planning outcomes in BC have been influenced (and dominated) by economic and political considerations, and have ultimately been cabinet decisions.

Experience has demonstrated that strategic, consensus-based land-use planning can help to reduce resource conflicts and provide with thoroughness, clarity and certainty the land-use issues that support a sustainable and globally competitive forest products economy, and healthy, diverse and resilient communities. The inclusion of a diverse sectors of relevant public and industry stakeholders and First Nations is essential to ensure that BC forests are managed to ensure protection of critical forest, cultural, tourism and recreation values and conservation of critical environmental values, such as wildlife and fish habitat, clean and abundant water and clean air for a sustainable future for BC society all over the long term.