



The Issue With Resource Inventories

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Abstract

The role of the inventory is growing, from supporting strategic level decision making to one of monitoring change, and supporting the management of large spatial scale land use requirements for many and varied values. The current inventory process began with the need to support timber supply analysis and may not be readily or cost effectively transformable to this new role. A new inventory plan is needed; one that has stable and adequate funding and is purpose-built in support of the increasing role of and need for inventory information. The plan for a new inventory must seek to measure all values that are of concern to British Columbians while recognizing that the inventory process must be cost efficient and may only achieve adequacy in meeting this new role. A new inventory plan will help maintain British Columbian's support for forest management.

An inventory is a measure of current condition. To most foresters the term inventory would bring to mind the Forest Cover Inventory, or more recently, the Vegetation Resource Inventory (VRI). The VRI is the basic forest management inventory however there are many more inventories in forest management use such as scenic inventories, water inventories, and wildlife inventories, to name a few. These separate inventories are combined to create the landbase inventory. It is this combined suite of inventories, not just the vegetation inventory that must adapt to the new forest management circumstances we now face.

Inventories serve many levels of forest management and have traditionally been a planning tool. At a strategic level VRI provides the forest cover status information necessary to support Allowable Annual Cut decisions and develop land use plans. At the tactical and operational level the inventory provides direction as to where the resources being sought, primarily timber or fibre, may be found.

As more and more of the landbase becomes actively managed, and the remaining available landbase decreases, the role of the inventory must adapt. With increased use of a finite landbase resource, the requirement to more precisely and better plan the remainder of the landbase resource increases. This requirement becomes more pronounced when potentially non-compatible landbase uses overlap. To keep up, the inventory must move from a strategic land use planning tool to an operational level land use planning tool; a tool upon which small spatial scale decisions of where landuses will occur or be protected from other uses can be made. This degree of management requires more precise and accurate data than needed for strategic planning.

The next evolution of the inventory will be its use as a monitoring and enforcement tool. With increased use of the landbase, and the need to ensure all values important to users are

maintained, regulations establishing landbase level measures of desired or acceptable conditions will become a norm. Measurement and management of cumulative effects will be required. Without a measurement tool that works well at multiple scales, from a few hectares to tens of thousands of hectares, and for multiple values, we will not be able to obtain public confidence that the various landbase values are being well managed in a coordinated fashion. The tool is the combined suite of inventories. If the inventory is inadequate for this purpose, British Columbia's faith in forest management will be eroded.

British Columbia's current inventory processes are likely inadequate for this new role. Current inventory schedules are generally too infrequent to capture the rate of change currently occurring on the landbase. Furthermore, current inventories likely do not capture the full suite of values important to British Columbians, and current inventories may not be precise or accurate enough to support the level of monitoring and enforcement that will be necessary to maintain British Columbia's faith in forest management.

A new plan for inventory investment is required. Simply spending more on the current inventory process is probably not the answer.

Today's inventory process began with a need to support Allowable Annual Cut decisions. This role is still important. However, it is decreasing in importance, relative to the importance of monitoring landbase change, and developing and enforcing large and small spatial scale land use regulations and policies.

Accepting this new role as the starting point, it is time for a new inventory process to be developed. It is time for the inventory process to acknowledge all the values present on the landbase and time for the inventory process to develop cost efficient procedures to monitor each value or its indicator to a practicable extent. The new role of the inventory in monitoring change, and managing and enforcing land use at both large and small spatial scales may then be achieved.

This new inventory process will still support Allowable Annual Cut decisions and perhaps increase the transparency of the decisions being made.

There will be many inventory options to be considered. Each inventory option will have differing levels of precision and accuracy, each will be more accurate or more precise at measuring some values and weaker at measuring others, each option will have a different cost. No option will likely be best in all aspects; compromises will have to be made.

The challenge for the Province of British Columbia, the land owner and land manager, is to develop and flesh out the various inventory alternatives by seeking out, accepting, and using the input of experts and end users. The end goal must be to select, implement and provide stable funding to an inventory process most cost effective at meeting current and future needs.

By undertaking such an initiative BC can ensure a cost effective landbase inventory process is available to adequately maintain public faith in the management of our forests and lands.