

# Science and innovation critical in shaping British Columbia's future forest legacy

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I am feeling somewhat reflective. Just over a week ago, I announced that I am moving on in my career after 10 years as British Columbia's Chief Forester. A new set of challenges awaits me, but I appreciate this opportunity to share my perspective on provincial priorities before I take off my Chief Forester's hat for the last time.

This special edition of *JEM* raises thoughtful issues about critically important and topical subjects. One article explores the influence of climate change on resource management and another delves into the challenges that surround incorporating the range of natural variability into management practices. Yet another article examines a knowledge exchange system to improve the development and application of innovative approaches in Canada's forest sector. Three articles address the human dimension of natural resource management, drawing on social science to discuss processes whereby people's needs and values can be reflected. These are all timely and valuable contributions.

As we advance the science and innovation agenda for the province, what challenges do I want to highlight? I would like to share a few thoughts about a challenge that I believe will be shouldered by both the science and professional communities for decades to come. You know what I'm going to say. I don't want to sound like a broken record, but here it is, one more time . . .

British Columbia is no longer facing one of the biggest crises in the history of resource management—it is now full on into it. I am, of course, referring to the raging and catastrophic mountain pine beetle epidemic that is causing unprecedented levels of mortality in our Interior forests. Harvest levels have been increased to recover as much economic value as is reasonable and possible in the coming years.

The recent increase in harvest levels emphasizes the need to develop new forest management strategies that meet important stewardship goals on the land base. What criteria should guide the deployment of harvesting? What kinds of rehabilitation programs are required to maintain forest productivity and support the habitat needs of many species? What else can be done to minimize the negative environmental impacts of this situation? How will issues raised in *JEM* be directed towards determining the correct responses as the province continues to deal with this natural disaster?

The challenges arising from the mountain pine beetle epidemic are immense, but we must continue to respond on the basis of state-of-the-art science and knowledge. I have said in the past that I believe we are duty bound to continue with the development of a "natural forest management model" in British Columbia—and all that it implies. I believe we must remain mindful of this as we determine regeneration strategies, set or modify landscape goals, define the stewardship implications of the ongoing epidemic, and contemplate our future forest legacy.

We are involved in an event that has reached historic proportions. How we respond will truly define and brand us as a professional community and as a jurisdiction. Let's meet the challenge head on with science and innovation.