

Will British Columbia's forests deliver on expectations over the long term?

Bill Bourgeois

The *Healthy Forests–Healthy Communities: A Conversation on BC Forests* initiative sprang from a growing concern among some professional foresters, as well as biologists, conservationists, academics, community leaders, forest support companies, and First Nations, that British Columbia's forests are in need of greater attention if they are to meet societal expectations over the long term. The purpose of this non-partisan, volunteer-supported initiative is to catalyze constructive dialogue, to raise the profile of forest management for inclusion in political party platforms leading up to the next provincial election, and to inform decision makers about communities' visions for British Columbia's forest lands.

The conversation so far

The *Healthy Forests–Healthy Communities* plan is to hold approximately 20 community dialogue sessions over two periods. The input to date includes comments from six sessions held in June 2011, background briefs from 37 provincial leaders in various aspects of forest management, and comments from concerned citizens and forest professionals submitted through the initiative's website (<http://bcforestconversation.com>) and social media. The input has been based on the concerns of communities and the following draft vision for British Columbia's forest lands.

British Columbia's forests are managed to:

- ensure the health and protection of all forest values;
- support healthy, diverse and resilient communities; and
- support a sustainable and globally competitive forest products economy.

Based on what communities have provided to date, the following four conclusions have arisen.

1. Communities are concerned about the future of their forests and want more say in the policy- and decision-making process, more information regarding the status of the forest, and for decision makers to take forest management actions that will contribute to a viable and sustainable local forest industry.
2. Decision makers need to evaluate the state of the forest relative to expectations.
3. A number of key issues and concerns suggest that provincial forest management needs improvement to realize communities' long-term expectations for the forest.
4. Decision makers, professionals, communities, and concerned citizens need to find solutions to some major challenges if the province's forests are to deliver on community needs and maintain the forest asset.

In a brief submitted to *Healthy Forests–Healthy Communities*, **Dr. John Innes**, Dean of the Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia, identified 30 expectations that, if met, could demonstrate British Columbia is managing its forests sustainably.¹ The conversation has so far provided valuable insights into how current British Columbia forest management practices measure up to these expectations; there is much to improve on regarding forest management practices in order to increase value from the forest and protection of the forest environment.

Key challenges

A high-level review of the briefs submitted to *Healthy Forests–Healthy Communities* identified 12 important challenges currently facing British Columbia professionals and decision makers. These challenges incorporate the expectations identified by Innes, and try to fill the most pressing

¹ These include expectations around having recovery plans in place for endangered species, having effective public consultation in place for the management of public lands, and holding responsible anyone who deviates from sustainable practices. See the Articles and Resources section at <http://bcforestconversation.com>.

gaps and deficiencies in British Columbia's forest management policy and infrastructure.

1. How do we demonstrate that British Columbia is meeting expectations related to forest management?
2. How do we encourage potentially interested parties (investors, governments, communities, First Nations, professionals) to participate actively in maintaining the province's forest lands asset?
3. How do we encourage the provincial government to enter into a forest vision that will legally guide strategic and operational decisions related to maintaining or enhancing the province's forest lands asset?
4. How do we encourage communities to create a vision for their surrounding forest lands to meet their needs, and to demand that decision makers use it as a guide for management and continue to involve communities in measuring progress to its attainment?
5. How can a collaborative working relationship be created and maintained between local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to deliver an integrated vision for the local forest lands?
6. What mechanisms are needed to enable communities to demand that the provincial government ensures governance instruments are consistent with delivery of the provincial and community visions?
7. What cost-effective mechanisms can be created to ensure community (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) needs are included in updating and implementing strategic land use plans?
8. How can the current mechanisms be modified to ensure community needs are adequately considered in the development and implementation of forest stewardship plans and (or) sustainable forest management plans?
9. How can we encourage forest managers and inventory specialists to work collaboratively in utilizing available funding to deliver on current

demands for resource inventories, and how do we encourage decision makers to provide adequate and stable inventory funding to gather the necessary data and information that forest managers need to meet community needs?

10. How can the provincial government be convinced to prioritize and provide adequate resources for monitoring the conditions of local forest lands?
11. With the expectation that there will be limited funds, how can we create a vibrant research sector capable of generating new ideas and products, enhancing the competitiveness of the sector, and ensuring forest practices are sustainable?
12. How do we establish innovative funding mechanisms for communities to generate revenue from nearby forests to support necessary forest treatments?

Where to from here?

If the decision makers are to achieve the expectations identified by the experts and address the needs of communities in delivering the forest lands vision, solutions to these challenges must be reflected in priority programs, initiatives, and legislative changes. More public dialogue that encourages politicians to place forest management as a priority is needed in British Columbia. Professionals and concerned citizens are encouraged to participate in the community dialogue sessions planned for this fall.

Contact Information

Bill Bourgeois, PhD, RPF is the Co-ordinator for the *Healthy Forests–Healthy Communities: A Conversation on BC Forests* and President of New Direction Resource Management Ltd., based at 835 Strathaven Drive, North Vancouver, BC V7H 2K1.

Email: wwb@telus.net

Citation –

Bourgeois, B. 2011. *LINK News: Will British Columbia forests deliver on expectations over the long term?* *BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management* 12(2):xvi–xvii. <http://jem.forrex.org/index.php/jem/article/view/153/90>