

Stumpage and tenure issues affecting wildland urban interface fuel treatments in British Columbia

Tom Hobby

Rural British Columbia communities are increasingly threatened by catastrophic wildfires and annual fire suppression costs within British Columbia have been above average when compared against previous decades. To reduce these threats, many local and regional governments have developed community wildfire protection plans (CWPPs) and operational fuel treatments. CWPPs and fuel treatment are critical steps for effectively reducing hazardous fuel and once implemented can reduce fire suppression and other market and non-market costs. Within British Columbia, there are approximately 1.65 million hectares of high and moderate fuel hazards within the wildland urban interface (WUI) that need fuel treatments, and over the 2004-2011 period, 43,000 hectares of land had been treated (approx. 2.5% of total WUI). WUI is defined as an area where human development meets or is intermingled with forest and grassland fuel types (Forest Practices Board 2010). Fuel hazard reduction projects have been implemented by community groups via logging for saw-logs, pulp, and more recently, pellet and bioenergy production, in an attempt to meet fuel treatment objectives. Other fuel treatment methods have also been used such as mastication, hand slashing, piling, and burning. Treatment costs across British Columbia vary widely and depend upon factors such as the quality of the fibre, stems per hectare, mean diameters, and other factors. Regardless of cost, most fuel treatment work to date has required subsidies to reach the intended objectives.

One reason WUI fuel treatments have been limited to 43,000 hectares out of the 1.65 million that need treatment has been the British Columbia stumpage and tenures systems, which has challenged fuel treatment operations. Over the years, there have been recommen-

dations made by the Filmon Report (Filmon et al. 2004) and others (Forest Practices Board 2006; 2010) that have pointed to the fact that these policies and regulations need revisions.

This article provides a brief review of two Forest Science Program reports that are available from the Centre for Livelihoods and Ecology, which covers WUI fuel treatment stumpage and tenures issues and aims to provide forestry professionals with a deeper understanding of WUI fuel treatment challenges. These reports provide support for policy and procedural changes that would benefit proponents of community WUI fuel treatment projects and were developed from the proceedings of a regional Fuel Management Stumpage and Tenures Forum, held during July, 2008 (see Royal Roads University 2009a) with support of the British Columbia Forest Science Program. The Forum was attended by policy makers, forest managers, First Nations, and fuel management practitioners. These two reports make recommendations for changes that could improve the flexibility needed by fuel treatment project proponents in their efforts to implement WUI fuel treatments within British Columbia.

The first report, "Stumpage Issues Affecting Wildland Urban Interface Fuel Treatments in British Columbia" (Royal Roads University 2009b), addresses the costs of getting the work done. Stumpage affects WUI fuel treatment operations from an economic perspective and the stumpage regulatory framework poses challenges for WUI fuel treatment operations. Stumpage barriers limit WUI fuel treatment operations and therefore put communities at risk of catastrophic wildfires. One take-home lesson learned from the Forum included the recognition that proper timber pricing is

essential for implementing fuel treatment projects and other Forum recommendations included many ideas for suggested changes to the Interior Appraisal Manual (IAM). These suggested changes included

- 1) An amendment of the IAM to remove silvicultural levies and obligations within the WUI;
- 2) An amendment to provide an administrative additive cost within the appraisal system to recognize the complexity of planning WUI harvesting, which would reduce stumpage;
- 3) A creative suggestion for setting up a WUI stumpage account (for specific communities) similar to that which has been done by BC Parks, which would allow for stumpage to be retained by communities for supporting WUI fuel treatments; and
- 4) An amendment that would allow a “no-bid” provision for timber sales and would procedurally enable many tenures to be re-offered at the marginal cost of administering a sale. Under this suggested amendment, it was recommended that the silvicultural obligations be reduced to a monitoring cost of \$.25/m³.

The second report entitled: “Tenure Issues Affecting Wildland Urban Interface Fuel Treatments in British Columbia” (Royal Roads University 2009c) focuses on the issue of tenures and their impacts upon WUI fuel treatment operations and reviews the current tenure options available within the current policy framework. Some key findings from the report included a discussion about the 2008 enactment of the WUI Forest Licence to Cut (FLtC), which allows for additional WUI fuel treatment opportunities that would otherwise be difficult to promote under other tenures. The FLtC tenure allows smaller WUI projects to move forward by local fuel management proponents that large forest licensees would probably not be interested in harvesting in order to meet community WUI objectives. Another key finding was that the Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) for a Timber Supply Area (TSA)¹ may be limited in offering new WUI FLtC tenures; however, there is no legal obstacle for exceeding the AAC within a specific TSA if the tenure promotes good land management objectives. One challenge with promoting the WUI FLtC was the fact that the District Managers would inherit the silvicultural obligations under this licence, which could be challeng-

ing for Districts to handle with limited staff support. The report also noted that including silvicultural exemptions within a WUI FLtC harvesting plan may be done with appropriate supporting documentation for reduced stocking standards and could be approved by a District Manager. This would make sense within the WUI where reduced stocking would reduce fuel hazards and meet CWPP objectives. One other key lesson for supporting WUI fuel treatments included the impression that major forest licensees would not treat WUI fuel hazards without appropriate incentives because the economics need to work for forest companies to support fuel treatment activities.

The report summary concluded that WUI fuel treatments are mostly dependent upon market factors and are affected by business cycles, which create problems for implementing fuel treatment projects and operations. The potential for biomass utilization as a co-product from logging and pulp operations may make WUI fuel treatments more attractive for harvesting with the support of the bioenergy industry. Lastly, local WUI fuel treatment project proponents should consider the United States Forest Service stewardship contracting model for implementing fuel treatment projects.

References

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1 (TSA) is an administrative area designated under section 7 of the Forest Act. TSAs have an allowable annual cut intended to provide a sustainable flow of timber to timber harvesting tenures (Valley Vision 2009).

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Contact information

Tom Hobby is a Professional Agrologist and Economist who serves as CEO at SCR Management Inc., 1207 Douglas Street – Suite 321, Victoria, BC, Canada V8W 2E6. Email: tomhobby@sustainingcreation.com

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