

Forest stewardship and allowable annual cuts in British Columbia today

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As the person privileged to follow Larry Pedersen's exemplary 10-year tenure as British Columbia's Chief Forester, it's also my privilege to follow up on his guest editorial in *JEM*, Volume 4, No. 1. In his editorial, speaking in the context of recent increases in harvest levels to recover "whatever economic value is reasonable and possible" from the catastrophic mountain pine beetle epidemic, Larry identified the need to develop new forest management strategies that meet important stewardship goals. He noted the need for these strategies to be based on state-of-the-art science and knowledge, and the associated decades-long challenges for scientific and professional communities.

Important foundations for meeting those challenges are already in place and being built upon. The solid principle of "reliance on science" underlies our whole approach to responsible stewardship of the forest and range resources in British Columbia. Founded on this principle, our stewardship will enable us to use and conserve resources in ways that take a full and balanced account of the interests of society, which to me implies multiple generations. In practice, stewardship is complex, requiring the setting of goals and the making of decisions addressing land use, tenure, forest, and range practices, and the conservation of resource values, as well as managing our revenues and marketing our products. These decisions must be consistent both with science and with the government's direction, which also needs to be well informed by science.

In the Ministry of Forests' organizational structure, the Chief Forester is also responsible for the leadership of Forest Stewardship Division. This requires me to respond—with others—to the Ministry's need to develop, implement, maintain, and continuously improve a stewardship policy framework that is transparent, effective, and efficient, in partnership with other government agencies, tenure holders, non-government organizations, First Nations, and the public.

Such a framework has to be based on the newest science, as informed by continuing research, learning, and evaluation. At the same time, this framework has to be understandable by, and acceptable to, the public; it has to be consistent with international environmental standards; it has to set out clear roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities; it has to be within the resource capacity of government to implement; and it has to provide legislated and non-legislated tools for resource professionals to plan and carry out practices consistent with sustainable resource use.

Recognizing that good stewardship is only as durable as the skills and knowledge of the people who practise it, the Forest Stewardship Division, following significant work force adjustments and reorganization, has established priorities that include, first and foremost, valuing people for their diversity and talent, as well as ensuring forward-looking succession planning that will maintain the availability of requisite, continually informed skills, over time.

Our next priority is responsible management in the wake of the mountain pine beetle. A provincial Action Plan has been prepared, with my office being responsible for specific components, including:

reviewing timber supply; providing stewardship guidance for salvage activities; identifying and acting on research requirements (with federal and institutional partners); creating a strategic forest inventory business plan; examining opportunities to mitigate mid-term timber supply implications; projecting the future spread of the beetles; and communicating critical information to interested parties.

Implementing the *Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA)* is the next priority for which we need to continue developing and piloting our evaluation framework for forest resources effectiveness. We also need to ensure ongoing improvement through adaptive management, continue working on non-legislative components of *FRPA*, and review our processes for developing major policies.

We also need to address government's commitment to reforesting large areas burned by wildfires or devastated by beetles. We will continue working with federal and provincial partners on carbon management and strategic forest policy issues related to the Kyoto Accord. We need to assess whether we have enough information to begin responding to indications of climate change, by modifying seed transfer guidelines, species selection, stocking standards, and related policies, and we will collaborate with stakeholders to examine trends and determine whether refinements to practices are required.

It is important to recognize that the Forest Stewardship Division's leadership role in stewarding forest and range resources can only be achieved through effective partnerships; we will therefore use all opportunities for two-way communication and collaboration with colleagues in the many agencies and disciplines that contribute to effective forest management in British Columbia.

One valuable such organization is FORREX, publisher of *JEM* with its definitive, peer-reviewed articles. This current issue includes important information on: bald eagle nest sites and nest tree characteristics; the relationships between forest overstorey and understorey characteristics; the use of site series sampling to link ecologically based site productivity information with timber supply analysis; post-harvest treatments on high-elevation forests; a habitat decision aid for Roosevelt elk; decision aids for establishing healthy stands in the Southern Interior Forest Region; and a personal interview with wood specialist Les Josza.

Articles like these keep all of us abreast of the latest insights and developments in forest management in the province. Sooner or later they will influence the contents of the huge stack of information I'm presented with when it's time to determine an allowable annual cut (AAC).

Ah, the AAC. Some people believe AACs constrain our stewardship by determining how quickly we transform portions of the landscape, and so define the adequacy of the provisions we can make for other values. In fact, it's exactly the other way round. The nature and quality of our stewardship first define the provisions we make for each of a range of forest values in a given area. On that basis, we assess how much timber may be harvested each year in that area. If an AAC is criticized for being too high to permit good stewardship, we need first to examine the underlying stewardship objectives before we can reassess the timber supply and determine a new AAC. This is where *FRPA* effectiveness evaluation can play a key role. If the objectives are being met, no problem. If they are not, we may need a change to an order, a regulation, or a higher-level plan. When that's done, the implications for timber supply can be considered in a new AAC determination. The beetle, of course, looms large in both stewardship and AAC these days; all related, peer-reviewed articles will be welcomed!

I thank the editors of *JEM* for helping to keep resource professionals up to date with reliable information; this helps all of us contribute to world-class forest stewardship in British Columbia.