

BC FORESTS CENTENNIAL PLAN

'IN SEARCH OF A BETTER WAY'



British Columbia Forests Society

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BACKGROUND

Looking back 100 years, to the earlier days of forestry in British Columbia, important steps were being taken to formalize management of our vast forest resources. The year was 1909 and the Fulton Report (“Royal Commission of Inquiry on Timber and Forestry”) was undertaken, leading to the first Forest Act for the province in 1912. So what has happened since that time and what is the answer to our key question “Is everything all right out there”?

The British Columbia Forests Society believes that it’s time for change. The traditional arrangements for BC forests, within an Industry/Government private/public partnership, are not working very well. The systems we have in place may have seemed appropriate in the past, but they have for some time been propped up by low oil prices, a weak Canadian dollar, and high quality/low cost wood fibre. And unfortunately, to make matters worse, people have been effectively excluded from many of the forest decisions that affect them.

To adapt to today’s changed social, economic and environmental climate, we must first confirm the retention of our forest lands in public ownership, and then build upon that base by moving responsibility for our forests over to people and community, separate from Industry and Government. Moving the responsibility away from our traditional power and control systems requires something better to go to. That something is to adopt the concept of a Forest Trust: **people taking care of our forest asset.**

KEY POINTS

So what is a Forest Trust? It is the concept that individuals, groups and communities take on the forest stewardship responsibility for the areas where they live, rather than relying upon Industry and Government. It means that people have a stake in decisions, including resource management, employment, investment, and community well-being. It opens up the opportunities for making local choices. It’s a simpler way.

Building on the principles of the Fulton Report, there are a few key points to the Trust concept:

- BC’s forest lands remain in public ownership.
- The responsibility for forests transferred to people and community under a Trust.
- Forests and resources managed locally by people with their fingers-on-the-pulse.
- Industry and Government will not make the decisions on their behalf.
- Social, economic and environmental priorities set for local conditions.
- Objectives, practices and targets not set from an arms-length corporate perspective.
- Political-type interferences from players outside the Forest Trust area minimized.
- First Nations involved much more directly.
- People more connected with their forests, as part of a forest ethic and culture.
- Various resource uses permitted (or not) within a Trust area.
- Responsibility for stewardship and practices separated from logging and milling.

CENTRAL THEME - Forest Trusts

The cornerstones of the Forests Society Centennial Plan for BC's forests are:

- To retain public ownership of our forest lands, and
- To have local responsibility for resource management.

The principle concept to deliver our Plan is a Forest Trust, where people are responsible for public forest management in local landscapes:

- Trust: "An asset that shall be cared for and sustained in perpetuity".

The first priority is to confirm our forest lands under public ownership for the long term. Then, the responsibility for administration and management is shifted to 'community' (rather than Industry and Government) - the Forest Trust. This means that people will be more directly responsible for resource management, including timber harvesting, than at any time in the past 100 years.

The simpler Forest Trust approach focuses on forest lands around communities, being assigned to them for stewardship. It offers personal buy-in, ownership and pride from people, who can participate in a more meaningful manner. Resource planning and practices would be a Trust responsibility. Timber operations functions, including road building, would be performed under the scrutiny and approval of the Forest Trust staff. The management of non-timber resources would also be authorized locally, not secondary to timber interests but treated in their own right. Staff (professional, technical, administrative) would be hired to work on behalf of the Trust organization, prepare plans and issue permits. They would be based in one or more of the communities assigned the responsibility for overseeing and managing the Trust.

Many Trust arrangements exist in countries around the world. Some general advantages of having a Trust:

- People are included (vs excluded).
- Decisions are made and priorities set locally (vs from a distance).
- Community is empowered and capacity built (knowledge, skills).
- Local economy (including employment) can have more predictable stability.
- Social, economic, and environmental benefits can accrue to community.
- Business innovativeness, with flexibility and adaptability, is an opportunity.
- Resource stewardship doesn't take second place to timber demands and profits.

The concept of a Forest Trust is to have people and community make appropriate social, economic and environmental decisions for themselves. Many of our forest sector woes result from becoming too big and too distant, and being unable to adapt. And unfortunately the various kinds of partnerships tried since the Fulton Report have also contributed to the problems. Examples include Tree Farm Licenses and ever-changing Government resource ministries. The Forest Trust can overcome this situation, by separating stewardship from operations, and placing the responsibility onto people and community, where it belongs.

INFORMATION APPENDICES

1. HISTORY
2. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
3. SYMPTOMS
4. HOW WOULD IT WORK?

APPENDIX #1 - HISTORY

One hundred years ago, a very significant and historic forest event took place in British Columbia. It was the development of the first Forest Act. Until that time, it had been more or less a free for all in BC's forests, with trees and forest land treated as somewhat unimportant, and open for giveaway and exploitation. Provincial leaders decided to bring a semblance of order to forestry, and to conserve forests into the future.

Those principles for the care of our forests were laid out at the time in various documents. The following quotes outline some of the priorities:

- “The universal experience of modern times...has been that forests are best kept in public ownership....”
- “first recognition of the principle of state ownership was made by the legislature and the sale of timber lands stopped...and stopped let us hope forever.”
- “prevent the misuse of the public state by operators....”
- “a sound policy of conservation must be established....”
- “not enable alarmists to harm the common sense campaign for conservation.”
- “a thoroughly efficient forest service was a first essential of conservation....”
- “Government...adopted a...policy that timber must be manufactured in the province....”
- “emphatic prohibition of timber export....”

A major problem with our forest system was also recognized at the time - ‘political interference’:

“In doing this, difficulty arises from the changes that are inevitable in political life - changes in Governments and legislatures in which supreme control of these matters is vested. One administration may have a wise and intelligent appreciation of the benefits of conservation; the next may be careless of such considerations. Yet so great is the time required to produce, or even to foresee, results in forest administration, that sustained effort over long periods of time is essential, and *a policy that vacillates, not because fresh knowledge of forests has been obtained but simply because changes have taken place in politics, can have no value.*”

The British Columbia Forests Society believes that the fundamental forest principles formed 100 years ago were insightful and progressive. However in spite of best intentions, BC forests have often been treated as if they were inexhaustible (the principle of ‘excess’) and that trees were primarily available for exploitation. Over the years, our various shared administrative arrangements between industry and government have had difficulty delivering what people expected - balanced decision-making and careful stewardship of resources.

The British Columbia Forests Society believes that it is time to begin developing a forest ethic and a forest culture in the province, to value trees and associated resources responsibly, as a mainstream part of our everyday lives. *The key is to put the responsibility for BC forests into the hands of people and community, rather than Industry and Government, where people and forests can become reconnected in a manner of mutual benefit.*

APPENDIX #2 - FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

There are a number of basic principles that relate to the problems we are experiencing in BC forests. They demonstrate that we need changes, to develop a much stronger foundation for better forest management. The basic principles include:

- **We need a clear vision for BC's forests.** Without a clear public understanding of what we want our forests to be, we cannot make the appropriate decisions to reach our objectives. People must be key partners with development of the provincial vision.

Example wording: "To care for our forests with integrity and a commitment to do no-harm".

- **Our forest lands must remain in public ownership.** 'Public' means the opportunity for people to take care of their forests. 'Private' relies on profit-driven short-term interests to do that.
- **Government cannot represent all of the local public interest.** The expectations of people and community can best be served by having people locally responsible for their forests.
- **The forest industry cannot be relied upon to meet the public good.** The private/public partnership arrangements of the past have often been based upon a timber interest, that may not be advantageous to people and resources.
- **'Bigger' has been seen to be the same as 'better'.** Since BC is no longer the major player it once was on the international forest stage, the new economic, social and environmental climate facing BC means that 'bigger' is often too entrenched, too slow and not sufficiently flexible or responsive.
- **'Excess' has been the driver behind many of our decisions.** Legislation, policies and procedures have been designed under this principle, seen now as outdated. An improved sensitivity approach is needed.
- **Responsibility for stewardship and planning can be separated from logging and milling.** This can avoid the perception of a possible conflict of priorities.
- **People have become disconnected from BC forests.** The era of letting governments and industry make decisions, on our behalf, no longer fits our needs. We need to become reconnected, where people feel at ease with their forests, and are inclusive in the decision-making process.
- **More local forest offices are needed** to ensure people have the opportunity to learn, participate and be heard. Forest information, education and extension are basic to a healthy forest culture and should be a natural part of everyday lives.
- **First Nations need to be more involved.** Too often decisions have been made centrally about BC's forests, with First Nations not included in a meaningful manner. 'Local' can be more inclusive and responsive.
- **Private forest lands** should be a more significant and inclusive part of BC forests. Rigorous provincial standards are needed to improve private land management, address the opportunities for unmanaged forest lands, and to return as much private land as possible to public ownership.
- **The missing link** in forest management is the lack of effective monitoring and auditing. Only by setting local targets and independently measuring them can we know if we're on track.

APPENDIX #3 - SYMPTOMS

There are many problems in BC forests that need to be addressed and resolved. Some of them were identified during the Fulton Report 100 years ago, and still remain. During discussions with citizens, the Forests Society has identified some recurring 'public perceptions' as symptoms of some larger issues:

- Access: Public access to public forest lands can be cut off by a forest company.
- Certification: Forest operations can be certified without improving or changing forest practices.
- Ecosystem Services: Logging plans concentrate on wood fibre and not ecosystem values.
- Information and Education: Very difficult to find balanced information about BC forest practices.
- Insects and Disease: Severity of Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic caused by lack of pine harvest.
- Log Exports: Significant number of loaded trucks bypassing local mills and shipped out of province.
- Logging Systems: Most of the timber harvest in BC remains as clearcutting vs alternate systems.
- Monitoring/Auditing: Few targets are publicly set, measured and adjusted as to how we're doing.
- Non-Timber Forest Products: Most timber operations do not include an ntfp ('nuisance') component.
- Parks: Seen as a problem by forest sector, not as a society benefit, but just more area unavailable to log.
- Private Forest land: Forest management standards much lower than for public forests.
- Privatization: Conversion of forest land to non-forest uses is frequent and without public debate.
- Public Involvement: Few meaningful opportunities to participate and have plans changed.
- Recreation: Public use of lands often seems to be treated as a problem rather than a public right.
- Silviculture: Least cost alternatives applied rather than best ecologically suited alternatives.
- Value-Added Manufacture: Treated as a secondary inconvenience compared to lumber and plywood.
- Watersheds: The importance of water resources is under-rated, including domestic watersheds.

APPENDIX #4 - HOW WOULD IT WORK?

A. Forest Trusts

A Forest Trust is a different concept from the traditional approach in BC, where Industry and Government were given responsibility for management of our forests. Instead, people and community take on that role. Response to local conditions and needs is easier and more inclusive when operating under local authority. The Trust concept also encourages forest ethics to be developed as a base for the establishment of a forest culture.

- Communities may take on local forest landscapes that they care for under a Trust.
- A Board of Directors is responsible to oversee planning and operations, through a Manager and staff.
- Management, professional and technical staff are employed as required.
- Plans are developed for the full Trust area, for all resources.
- Licenses and permits may be issued on a competitive basis for all resources including non-timber forest products. Areas covered can be small or large, including Woodlots, Community Forests, Timber Sales, and other tenures.
- A combination of open and selected log markets are utilized.
- Contract loggers, small firms and larger companies may participate in the activities.
- Road building is a Trust responsibility, under contract.
- Timber processing facilities (small, medium, large) are encouraged to operate in a Trust area.
- There are no log exports outside the province.
- All resource values (fish, wildlife, recreation, water, etc) are the responsibility of the Trust.
- Public involvement, in a comprehensive and meaningful manner, is a Trust responsibility.
- Annual reporting and answering to community is a cornerstone of the program.
- Each Forest Trust has representation on the Forest Stewardship Authority Board (see 'B' below).

Summary:

A Forest Trust will be set up for a community or several communities, as makes sense for the local area. It will have a Board of Directors, manager, and staff (including certified professionals and technicians). The Trust manager will direct activities under the provisions of a Charter that outlines principles and priorities to follow, as determined and updated by the Board. The Trust will be responsible to generate financial returns from issuance of licenses and permits, respond to social and environmental needs, and ensure inclusiveness of people and other components in accordance with the Charter.

B. Forest Stewardship Authority

This is the concept where Forest Trusts are administered collectively, but enable local innovativeness. The Authority operates at arms-length from government and provides information, direction and continuity for Trusts throughout BC. The opportunity for political interference as noted in the Fulton Commission is reduced.

- There would be a small Headquarters staff, with most employees in Region and local offices.
- Office locations would be aligned with a grouping of communities having Trust forests.
- Trusts would have elected representatives on the Authority's Board of Directors.
- Other interests could have appointed representatives to the Board.
- The Authority would administer any forest lands not included within a Forest Trust.
- Land use plans encompassing several Trust areas would be coordinated by the Authority.
- Functions of the Authority would include:
 - Co-ordination of Forest Trust activities
 - Clarification of provincial requirements
 - Ensuring participatory public involvement
 - Providing forest information and education
 - Providing forest extension services
 - Conducting monitoring and auditing
 - Delivering forest protection and health services
 - Carrying out hearings of appeals and dispute resolution

C. Ministry of Natural Resources

For Government to work in support of the new forest system, the traditional ministries responsible for forests, water, fish, wildlife, and recreation will be combined into one Ministry of Natural Resources. Primary duties will include provincial legislation and policy, research, and international affairs. Some monitoring of the Stewardship Authority activities would be necessary to ensure appropriate provincial continuity.