

ABCFP Response to the Forestry – Oil & Gas Task Force Report

In 2006 the Association of BC Forest Professionals (ABCFP) requested the stewardship advisory committee (SAC) to investigate the impact the oil and gas industry was having on forest stewardship in British Columbia. SAC struck an Oil and Gas Task Force and requested proposals from consultants to do the background work and produce a report. The Task Force identified two areas of unique interest to the ABCFP.

1. Resource development occurs in a manner consistent with the principles of good stewardship.
2. Management of the forest and forestry practices, regardless of the resource sector involved, is carried out by qualified, accountable professionals.

In December, 2006, the ABCFP council received the report from SAC. The following is the response from the ABCFP to that report.

The ABCFP wants to commend the strides the oil and gas industry has made to reduce its footprint on the land base. From the time concerns were raised with the ABCFP to the time the report was completed, the oil and gas industry completely revamped the exploration stage of the industry. The use of 3-D seismic lines has significantly reduced the foot print of the oil and gas industry on the landscape. Advancements in practices that reduce the impact of an industry on the land must be recognized and encouraged.

Resource Inventories

The ABCFP was surprised to find out that the task force was unable to obtain basic information about forest harvest levels within the oil and gas industry. The consultant writing the report had to turn to the Chief Forester's most recent timber supply reviews (TSR) for the area. This finding is strongly linked to recommendations in the ABCFP's November 2006 report entitled Assessment of the Status of Forest Inventories in British Columbia. In particular the following recommendations from that report are:

Status of Forest Inventories in BC Report - Recommendation #9

Public access to summarized inventory products should be supported.

Status of Forest Inventories in BC Report - Recommendation #16

Explicit mechanisms for linking inventory data with other sources of data relevant to a particular area and time are needed.

Status of Forest Inventories in BC Report - Recommendation #18

A regular series of periodic reports, applicable to broad regions and the province, should be produced to inform the public on the state of the forest. In association with these reports, appropriate metadata should be documented for possible future use by practitioners.

Status of Forest Inventories in BC Report - Recommendation #19

The quality assurance system needs to be monitored for effectiveness, and modified when necessary, as the inventory system evolves.

Impacts on the BC Forest land base should be easily tracked and known, especially from industries which have significant impacts on the forested land base. In order to determine whether BC is carrying on practices that are sustainable an up-to-date

inventory is necessary and should be available across ministries and industries. There is only one forest in BC, there should be only one inventory and that inventory needs to be current and accessible.

Recommendations

1. The BC government must ensure that BC's resource inventories are current.
2. There must be only one resource inventory which is used by all government agencies and resource users (an inventory portal).
3. BC's resource inventories must be accessible by all, especially by government's own agencies.

Cumulative Impacts and Sustainability

Without full knowledge of the accumulated impacts of various resource uses, it is impossible for anyone to determine whether those practices are sustainable or whether the forest itself is being managed sustainably. Unfortunately the Chief Forester's TSR focuses on timber within the timber harvest land base and not on the cumulative impact on the forest ecosystem. The ABCFP is concerned that government does not have a clear picture of the state of BC's forests.

Recommendations

4. The BC government must take steps now to track accumulated impacts on BC's forest from all resource users.
5. The BC government need to take steps to assess the impacts on BC's forests from the various forest resource users.

Forest Planning and Communications

The ABCFP is concerned that there was not a higher level of interaction between various resource industries. This situation is complicated by the fact policies do not encourage such interaction. The ABCFP was encouraged to hear individual companies from various resources users had taken it upon themselves to cooperate when working in the same geographical area – but this is not a normal practice. The ABCFP was told of examples of multiple roads being built by different resource extraction industries to access the same geographical areas and of wildlife tree patches being removed to build pads for oil and gas extraction.

The ABCFP is also concerned the oil and gas industry and the forest industry are not working within the same planning environment. It is government's responsibility to set goals and objectives for its forests. This is done through a number of ways. There are provincial level objectives, such as goals for the amount of protected area in the province and through processes like the Land and Resource Management Plans. Once these objectives are set all resource users should be working towards managing those objectives.

Recommendations

6. Government should set regulations and policies that encourage land and resource users to cooperate.
7. Forestry and Oil and Gas companies are encouraged to continue the trend to communicate and cooperate with each other.
8. Government must set regulations and policies that ensure all resource users are working toward achieving government forest objectives.

Multiple Agencies Responsible for One Land Base

Currently there are a number of government agencies responsible for multiple resources all sharing one land base. These include the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Integrated Land Management Bureau, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forests and Range, Ministry of Energy Mines and Petroleum Resources, and the Oil and Gas Commission to name a few. All have different mandates but all work within a single land base with a common goal for long term sustainability.

Recommendation

9. Government should consider processes that encourage a cooperative approach between agencies or explore the possibility of a single ministry of natural resource management.

Resource Utilization

While the ABCFP recognizes that the public is being compensated for the removal of timber from the land base by the oil and gas industry it understands the current policies do not encourage the utilization of that timber.

Recommendation

10. The BC government should put into place policies that encourage the oil and gas industry to use timber wherever practicable.

Appropriate Use of Forest Professionals

The ABCFP is concerned that the Foresters Act isn't being followed to its fullest. The ABCFP understands that there may be a misunderstanding of the practice of forestry but that misunderstanding does not mean individuals who are not appropriately trained and experienced should continue to practice professional forestry.

Recommendations

11. The ABCFP will spell out which practices in the oil and gas sector fall within the practice of professional forestry (such as rehabilitating a site back to forest or appraising timber).
12. The ABCFP will work with the oil and gas sector to educate them on the use of forest professionals.

Conclusion

There is only one forest resource in BC. There are numerous users (e.g. agriculture, commercial tourism and guiding, forestry, oil and gas, mining, and fur trapping) of the various resources provided by either the forest or that impact the forest during the exaction of the resource. The cumulative impacts need to be clearly understood and government needs to ensure the forests of BC are truly being sustained.