

## Appraisal Practice Issue #5: What do I do when my employer's financial decisions present a conflict with sound forest management? (October 2008)

### Background

ABC FP members have the exclusive right to title and practice in British Columbia. The legislature recognizes the need for the public, government, employers and clients to rely on the application of professional judgment and accountability that comes along with such application. To maintain the privilege of exclusive title and practice rights, the entire profession must continually earn what is called public trust. The trust is demonstrated by forest professionals exhibiting competence, independence and integrity.

### What is professional independence?

“Professional independence is a group of characteristic actions resulting from the duty of care that arises out of the social contract with the public created when exclusive practice and title privileges are granted. This contract is one based on trust and confidence. Independence is demonstrated by **an objective application of professional judgment and expert knowledge to a given set of circumstances**. Objectivity is a state of mind, a quality that lends value to the member's services. It is a distinguishing feature of the profession. The principle of objectivity imposes an obligation to be impartial and intellectually honest. In the same sense, professional independence might also be described as the unfettered application of professional judgment and expert knowledge to a given set of circumstances.

There is a difference between being neutral and being independent. Foresters can advocate and take positions and still be independent, so long as they are objective, intellectually honest, and the various aspects of the issue being advocated are explicitly recognized and considered.”<sup>1</sup>

### Question: What do I do when my employer's financial decisions present a conflict with sound forest management?

Today financial pressures are at an unprecedented level throughout the forest sector. At times, the financial interests of our employers may seem to be at odds with sound forest management. At these points of crisis it is critical that forest professionals maintain their professional independence and uphold the principles of stewardship of forest land. To help find a workable resolution to this situation, there are several resources and steps a forest professional can consider.

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<sup>1</sup> Standards of Professional Practice: Guidelines for Interpretation (Jan. 2002, updated Apr 2004)

1. Maintain an open and respectful dialogue with your employer to discuss the professional legal obligations you hold. The Standards of Professional Practice include performance benchmarks for daily practice and conduct. They provide recognition of the obligations that come with professional practice privileges and are a means for the public and employers to know what they can expect from forest practitioners. This document can be found on the ABCFP website at: [http://www.abcfp.ca/regulating\\_the\\_profession/documents/guideline-practice-standards.pdf](http://www.abcfp.ca/regulating_the_profession/documents/guideline-practice-standards.pdf)
2. The Standard of Professional Practice along with the Code of Ethics will provide a good base resource tool not only to refresh yourself, but it will also help illuminate to your employer the obligations you hold and in particular the professional principles you must hold above the demands of employment. [http://www.abcfp.ca/regulating\\_the\\_profession/documents/guideline-ethics.pdf](http://www.abcfp.ca/regulating_the_profession/documents/guideline-ethics.pdf)
3. Use scenario planning as a way to describe the avenues open to the employer. An example of this may include scenarios like, “if we choose not to complete our brushing program this season for cost reasons...” (a) outline the possible outcomes in effort and dollars; (b) assess the relative risk of waiting a year on a block or standard unit basis; (c) explain any obligations as a result of agreements or tenures; (d) provide rationale and budget based on the outcome needs; (e) outline the range of management considerations regarding balanced management decisions, other than the economic focus; and (f) provide your professional opinion of the situation.
4. Use your forest knowledge and professional independence to find options for your employer to carry out good forest stewardship and realize the balance between economic circumstances, social expectations and protection of the ecology.

These discussions will help provide a balanced management decision.

Pay particular attention to the due diligence section in the Standards of Professional Practice. This section describes the documentation of an individual’s action. It also is helpful to ask mentors or peers for their advice or look into local situations similar to yours. Often there is more than one way to reach the same result or strategy and possibly there is a more cost effective way to achieve the same result.

Document your opinion using a written rationale. Do not divulge your employer’s corporate interests. Review your recommendations in a document with your employer. Be clear when presenting the anticipated results and consequences of planned actions (or non-actions).

# PPAC Task Force



It is important to know and understand exactly what responsibilities you as a professional hold to your employer. The employer may make its own decision. Professionals provide the best information they can to the employer so that the employer can make an informed decision.

As a last resort and a final consideration, if you feel you cannot be a party to a practice or action and no alternative exists then you may consider withdrawing your professional services.

**Side Note:** “Being professionally independent does not give a member the right to ignore or disregard laws, standards, resource objectives or policies with which that member may disagree. It does give the member the right to question these and, where appropriate, the duty to advocate for change.

Members must promote a culture of professional independence. To do so they must be independent in their attitudes, actions and practice. Members must be independent from:

- Their employers or clients;
- Special interest groups. Members must reach independent decision, despite pressure that may be exerted by local, provincial, national or international interest groups. Members who belong to special interest groups must still exercise professional independence;
- Majority groups. Being professionally independent means, where appropriate, being innovative, adapting to change and not being constrained to “mainstream thinking” or “joining the latest fad;” and
- Their own personal biases. Members recognize their own personal biases or opinions in decision making and must take these into account when arriving at an independent decision. In so doing, they objectively consider the full spectrum of views.

Ultimately, the member must, in fact and appearance, be an objective and trusted source of analysis, opinion and options. Achieving this end means that the standard of independence is met.”<sup>2</sup>

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