



President's Report

By Rick Brouwer, RPF

Taking a Walk in the Forest

Photo: Lloyd Davies, RPF

When I started down the road that led me to become an RPF, I was fresh out of university and, even though I had a degree, I really didn't know very much. Yes, I had the book learning. Yes, I recognized that memorization wasn't knowledge, but that sometimes you still had to memorize things. Yes, I understood that I had to gather information and synthesize it. And I also knew that to grow a good tree you needed good soil. But I had no real experience. There was still so much more to learn.

Over the years, I have been taught by a host of people: road builders, loggers, scalers, biologists, archaeologists, technologists, activists, retirees, students, professors, foresters, camp managers, vice-presidents, auditors, inspectors, LSO 3s and STO 4s, fireline bosses, helicopter pilots, fallers, owner operators, friends, family and children. It was only through discussions and time spent with these people that I came to truly understand that the best way to air and reconcile differences was to take a walk in the forest with others. I finally understood the connection between our natural resources and our way of life. And I learned that a tree is not just a tree, that there are many definitions of a good tree and that good soil can be a metaphor for much more than the medium in which we grow a forest.

When our profession first started out, we were seedlings, planted in an "era of timber management"—the soil that allowed forest management to put down its roots. I believe we then moved into an "era of bureaucratic forestry"—which was necessary as our profession grew and we spread our forest management branches.

As a profession, we came to realize that the tree is more than the timber in its trunk and the forest is much more than the trees.

Now, I see indications of another change—an evolution. In my metaphor, we no longer think of our profession as a tree, but as a forest. This is what I hope will be an "era of true forestry," where we are implementing all that we have learned, and where we are recognizing that the forest profession applies across the landscape, and is more than what we originally thought it to be.

In this era of true forestry, I see forest professionals fulfilling multiple roles across the landscape, synthesizing options and opportunities within the three environments: the physical environment, the cultural environment and the economic environment.

I see us at the heart of a cultural renaissance, where the forest is part of our day-to-day culture. Not a distinct and separate forest, as was so mystically and strikingly portrayed at the Olympic opening ceremonies, but a forest that is part of our everyday life and part of the foundation of how we define ourselves.

I see a greater understanding and implementation of professional reliance and the balancing of innovation and risk. I see us leading the way past forest-based management to land-based management. I see us back in our boots—out in the forest, kicking the dirt, having great discussions, exchanging ideas and making decisions, right there, right then.

And I see society valuing us, the forest professionals, more. 🌱