



President's Report

By Rick Brouwer, RPF

Balancing

AS FOREST PROFESSIONALS, WE ARE OBLIGATED TO PROVIDE BALANCE in our advice and decisions, and this is key to professional reliance. It takes both a formal education and on-the-ground experience to gain the knowledge required to understand and find that important balance. But do we really understand what we mean when we talk about balancing?

Commonly, we speak about balancing between environmental, social and economic factors. But I find these terms difficult to work with: social factors are driven by the environment and the economy; economic values are influenced by the needs or wants of society... aargh! It's all muddled together!

So, instead, I have taken to thinking in terms of there being three distinct environments in which we work:

There's the physical environment – the ecosystems and infrastructure that determine what the land has provided in the past and what it can provide in the future.

There's the economic environment – the engine that allows us to implement our desires and plans on the land.

And there's the cultural environment – the framework that provides us with the bounds of how we can, or should, treat the land.

This approach helps me better grasp the concept of balancing and how I must use it to make decisions or provide advice. We are balancing the physical, the cultural and the economic environments every day at work.

For instance, if a species is identified as at risk, does this mean we should stop all activities that may impact that species? Our cultural mandate seems to indicate that curtailing harvesting activities would be prudent; but our economic mandate also comes into play. There is a certain quality of life to be maintained in BC, by way of standards of health care and education, that comes from forestry revenues. In addition, we should look beyond our own borders to how we interact with the global environment. Our physical environment will constrain the range of options available that will influence the at-risk species in different ways. The economic environment shows the costs and benefits that could accrue from the available options.

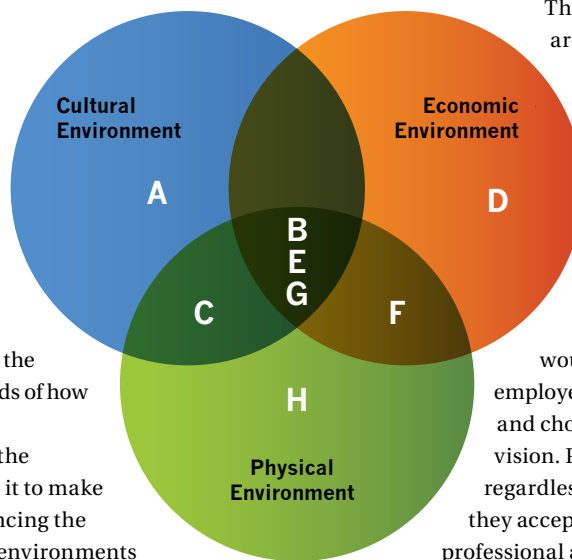
Often the information is in qualitative, rather than quantitative form, but having the following information at least allows the balancing to begin.

Only those physical and economic options that pass through our cultural filters will be acceptable for consideration. For instance, we should not carry out or recommend an action that we know will cause the species to cease to exist.

Only those physical and cultural options that are economically achievable will be accepted for consideration. For example, we should not implement or recommend actions that are beyond the ability of society to support.

Only those cultural and economic options that are physically possible will be accepted for consideration. For example, using a Star Trek transporter to selectively harvest trees might be both culturally and economically desirable but it doesn't exist in the physical world.

Let's consider another example: the Protected Area Strategy of the early 1990s, and let's look at the problem in the form of a diagram.



The balance has been achieved when solutions are found that fall within the intersection of the three circles in the diagram. The question then becomes: Which of the range of possible solutions are to be chosen? As professionals, this is what we are mandated to look for and recommend. In accordance with the concept of balancing all of the solutions in the darkest zone, i.e. Options B, E, and G, are acceptable; the prescribing professional would put these options in front of the client/ employer, who will exercise management prerogative and choose the option that best conforms with its vision. Professional deference would require that regardless of reviewers' personal or professional biases, they accept the recommendation of the prescribing professional as long as it falls within the clear zone.

Balancing is a difficult concept to implement, and this is why it is so important that we continue to have qualified, competent forest professionals involved in decisions being made on the landscape. I believe that a core precept of professional reliance is that professionals have a good understanding of balancing.

Your council just went through a difficult balancing process: after much deliberation, we concluded that without adequate resources, the ABCFP will not be able to provide the services that you, as members of the association, need to fulfill your role as forest professionals and to deliver professional reliance. Nor will we be able to continue to fulfill the objects of the association as described in the *Foresters Act*. This is in spite of the financial efficiency efforts that have occurred over the past few years. Therefore, we have instructed CEO Sharon Glover to prepare for a fee increase ballot. As you read more about the proposed increase in Sharon's CEO Report, on the ABCFP website and in the special insert in this issue of BCFP magazine, consider all that is necessary to deliver professional reliance, and find where the appropriate balance lies. 🐻