



Staying Current and Embracing Change:

The Role of Continuing Education in Emerging Areas of Practice

RIGHT NOW, IT'S SAFE TO SAY BC'S FOREST professionals lack a comprehensive system for maintaining competency in our areas of practices. That's not to say we are not competent. Our minds and associations are willing, but capacity for continuous learning is weak. We have a Practice & Development section on the association website. And we have several organizations and agencies that offer high quality material for self-directed study. We report on what we do to become and remain competent in areas of practices. However, where do we go for more comprehensive training for emerging areas of practice or for significant upgrading when desired?

If we assume we are all competent in our areas of practice when we are accepted into the profession as RPFs or RFTs. And we assume the half-life of knowledge—the time it takes us to forget half of what we learned—is five to 10 years. Then professionals need approximately 48 continuing learning hours per year to remain competent in a chosen area of practice.

As Weetman and Parsons point out in their article (page 18), we've lost some pretty important continuing education capacity with the closure of the Forest Management Institute of BC and the BC Forestry Continuing Studies Network. Ongoing funding for existing organizations is also at risk. In addition, continuing education capacity at colleges and universities is being directed to focus on cost recovery instruction. This leaves a huge gap in available courses for those seeking to remain current in their area of practice. The good news is training is available for practices requiring certificates. But where do you go for need-to-know, state-of-the-art information on the science of sustainable resource management?

The responsibility for ensuring competency does not rest solely with professionals. There is a vested interest from employers, regulators, associations and educational institutions to ensure resource professionals have access to timely, affordable and relevant continuing education opportunities. A commitment on behalf the employer to provide resources and/or time for professional development is critical part of an effective system. Regulators and associations must adequately resource the system so that educational needs are addressed. Engagement and collaboration among educational institutions are critical for the efficient and effective development of continuing education products to ensure what little development funding is available is spent wisely. And finally, resource professionals need to make their educational needs known and be willing to spend the time to achieve the highest standards of competence in their areas of practice while knowing when to rely on associated professionals for additional expertise.

Are professionals accessing self-directed continuous learning opportunities? Yes. While time and travel funding are severe limiting factors these days, professionals are finding ways to remain current. Since I am most familiar with FORREX, I'll provide our case in point based on statistics from April 2009 to March 2010.

More than 660 registrants participated directly in FORREX events (workshops, conferences, eLecture Series and discussion forums)

- Another 102 people accessed the recorded FORREX events.
- Related FORREX event documents were downloaded over 68,500 times.
- Each year, more professionals subscribe to receive print copies of the *BC Journal of*

Ecosystems and Management (JEM).

- Online downloads of JEM exceeded 49,000 in 2009-2010, with 7,393 unique visitors.
- Over 4,200 subscribers received regular updates from the FORREX and following extension program lists: Conservation Biology, Forest Resource Dynamics, Watershed Management, Socio-economics, and Aboriginal Forestry and Indigenous Science.

While these examples of self-directed learning fills some of the professional development and continuous learning needs, to move into a new area of practices requires a more significant investment in formal education. But where are the more structured and accredited learning opportunities?

A voluntary collaboration of natural resource sector employers, regulators, associations and education providers is trying to tackle this problem. They have agreed to try and address this gap by participating in the Natural Resource Sector Continuous Learning Forum (nrceforum.forrex.org). Thompson Rivers University Open Learning (www.truopen.ca) will accredit and document courses developed by partners as they become available. With a strategy in place and gaps identified, the ball is in the educator's court to develop and offer priority courses.

Demonstrating competency and the active pursuit of new science and knowledge is pivotal to achieving the goal of professional reliance and a self-regulating profession. A commitment by all professionals to continuous learning about science and new approaches to sustainable resource management inspires confidence in our employers, regulators and the public. It shows that we aspire to excellence in our



knowledge, skills and abilities and take our role as stewards of British Columbia's forest resources seriously. A functioning and well-resourced system for continuous learning is critical to our profession and our future forests, economies and communities. 🌱

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FORREX's Top Five Information Requests*

- Watershed Management
- Socio Economics
- Aboriginal Forestry
- Forest Resource Dynamics
- Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology

** To read the top ten information requests under each of these topics, please visit the **BC Forest Professional** section of the ABCFP website.*

Vision for the Natural Resources Continuing Education Forum:

Natural resource practitioners throughout British Columbia will have access to a highly effective system of continuing education, providing timely, relevant and affordable learning opportunities.