

Developing Professional Development Locally

Continuous learning is important to maintain for BC forest professionals because it promotes innovative forest stewardship, as highlighted by Mike Larock in his article in the July/August issue of **BC Forest Professional**. Continuous learning raises awareness of relevant issues and complex values related to proper forest management. Sharing knowledge is especially important for upcoming forest professionals as more experienced professionals are an excellent source of information and mentorship. Exchanging and sharing knowledge creates opportunities to develop stronger professional relationships.

The cost of continuing education can have a significant influence on the learning cycle. Society has higher expectations for fewer forest professionals whose resources are already expended. Continuing education is a burden for many practicing foresters; it is an expensive and time-consuming task. Therefore, it is im-

portant to create local opportunities for forestry professionals to be able to exchange ideas that are relevant to local practice and to motivate individuals to participate. Educational institutions could take on a lead role to try to rekindle enthusiasm for and involvement in continuing education that is lacking for many forest professionals. These institutions would be eligible for funding from the government and could hire personnel to coordinate workshops. Focused workshops that are based on relevant issues faced in local practice and are not a substantial time commitment would enable more professionals to participate. Experts in specific fields could present their thoughts and opinions, thereby opening dialogue between local professionals and academics. For academics and student this may create opportunities for mentorship by professionals. It is critical for the forest professionals to develop and maintain an upsurge in enthusiasm for continuing education programs.

TARA SALMON
UNBC STUDENT



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BC Forest Professional is published six times a year by the Association of BC Forest Professionals

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DESIGN: Massyn Design
PRINTING: Mitchell Press
DISTRIBUTION: PDQ Post Group

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER: Brenda Martin
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Tel: 604.639.8103 • Fax: 604.687.3264
E-mail: forest-ads@abcfp.ca

ISSN: 1715-9164

Annual Subscriptions: Canada \$44.80 incl HST
U.S. and international \$80 Canadian funds
Publications mail agreement No: 40020895
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
ABCFP Circulation Department
330-321 Water St, Vancouver, BC V6B 1B8



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A Deafening Silence: Building a Case for Advocacy

Rick Brouwer's latest **BC Forest Professional** report compelled me to take action. Government has recently made significant changes to the mission and organization of the ministries involved in forest resource use and management. I expected to see a critical analysis in the BCFP (the voice of BC forest professionals) of these changes. Yet there was nothing other than a vague reference to a growing role that staff plays in working with government to shape policies as part of the Associations' advocacy mandate.

The deafening silence on these recent government changes, and the past squelching of an initiative by a group of foresters that would have been critical of government policy suggest that the Association is unwilling or afraid to take action that could be interpreted as partisan or critical of government – but isn't that part of advocating?

I can understand the reluctance. Government has the authority to change legislation, including the *Foresters Act* and

the right to practice, therefore the body that depends on the existence of that Act is motivated to be conciliatory rather than critical. The Association is the only collective voice of BC forest professionals, so if it is not engaging in critical analysis and advocating for change when needed, the profession as a whole becomes ineffective.

I think we need a model that has one body for registration and upholding standards, and another body that takes on the advocacy role. This model aligns with other professions that have a legislated right to practice such as doctors. With due respect to the medical profession, policies and decisions regarding forest management at multiple scales have longer term, and deeper-reaching consequences on our environment and our economy, and ultimately our health than those made in the medical arena.

For the reasons cited above, I do not see the ABCFP, as currently structured, being able to carry out an advocacy role. At the

least, we need an independent body whose mandate is to influence the evolution and development of public policy concerning forest resources, but who is not tied to government through right to practice legislation. Maybe we should consider combining with other resource professionals to create a natural resources association that is able to address a wider range of resource issues. Many questions need to be answered. But our forests are too important to continue along the path we are on.

KATHY LEWIS, RPF
PRINCE GEORGE

Note: This letter has been edited for length. The unabridged version has been posted on the Discussion Forum.

Take Continuing Education One Step Higher: Reach Beyond

Forest resource professionals should reach beyond maintaining our competency in our areas of practice, especially if we are to overcome the uncertainty that exists today in the forest industry. By this I mean, the retirement of the baby boomers, budgets cuts, reduced staffing, and mid-term shortfalls.

I truly appreciate Chris Hollstedt's viewpoint article, "Staying Current and Embracing Change: The Role of Continuing Education in Emerging Areas of Practice" (July/August 2010). However, to add to this, I feel strongly that new initiatives such as the Resource Management Coordination Project (RMCP) being undertaken by government will allow forest professionals to stay current, embrace change, and expand our minds to incorporate new concepts such as "virtual integration." Some visionary statements expressed by RMCP include: "one entity, single land base, collaborative, proactive and integrative." To me resource management coordination makes sense, it brings to mind the phrase "united we stand, divided we fall."

RMCP will require us as professionals to reach out to each other, promote

networking and diversify our knowledge base, thereby reducing the uncertainty in our forest industry and strengthen professional reliance. Are we not seen as stewards of the land? Of course we are. So then we should have no problem reaching beyond a minimal competency level given that we can all access, as Hollstedt's concludes, "a functioning and well resourced system of continuous learning."

So, if you are wondering where to begin in the process of renewing continuing education for forest professionals, start by showing your support for ABCFP's decision to raise fees. Enable them to provide the services that you, as members of the association, need to fulfil your role as forest professionals.

APRIL BILAWCHUK
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Put in Your Two Cents

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