



Access Management: Resolving Complex Road Issues

ROAD ACCESS CAN BE EITHER BENEFICIAL OR DETRIMENTAL TO SOCIETY depending on the perspective and the values being considered. The challenge is to manage road access to public resource lands in a way that attains an acceptable balance between economic, social and environmental values and also provides an equitable allocation of the costs and benefits associated with the road.

In addition to providing access for a variety of purposes, roads can also have significant environmental impacts both directly through site impacts, and indirectly through bringing people and motorized vehicles to sensitive areas. Access management of resource roads can be a very broad issue that is central to the implementation of land use plan zoning.

The issue is large. There are 400,000 to 500,000 kilometers of resource roads in BC (FPB, 2005). Resource roads are presently administered under a number of provincial acts and associated regulations including the *Forest Act*, the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA), the *Land Act*, the *Petroleum and Natural Gas Act* and the *Mines Act*. An initiative was started to consolidate all resource road administration under one act—the *Resource Road Act*—but this has not been finalized.

At present provincial policy avoids the creation of more “non-status” roads. Therefore in order to avoid continuing responsibility for maintenance, industrial users are encouraged to de-activate roads they no longer require. This can lead to a situation where some stakeholders may want the road left in a drivable condition and others don’t.

As an example of the potential level of complexity we could have a situation like this:

- The forest company holding the road permit finished the first pass, no longer requires the road and would like to de-activate it.
- An independent power producer wants the road for periodic access but wants it closed to public use.
- A commercial recreation operator uses the road for access to his tenure.
- Recreationists use the road to access a trailhead.
- There is concern about the impact of access at certain times of the year on wildlife.
- First Nations use the area.
- No one wants to be responsible for a gate.
- Individually, the non-industrial users are cannot afford the maintenance costs of taking over responsibility for the road.

When the Forest Practices Code (FPC) was first introduced there was a requirement for forest licensees to include an access management plan with the forest development plan (FDP). This provided an opportunity for planning and public consultation on road access issues. The requirement for access management plans was eliminated with the “streamlining” of the FPC in 1997 (FPB 2005) and FRPA has no access planning requirements. Strategic Land Use Plans can provide general, high level direction for access but usually lower level strategic planning is required to address this effectively.

In situations where the access issues are complex, it is helpful to have a structured, transparent, planning process in which all stakeholders can participate as equals, issues and interests can be clarified, options generated, solutions agreed upon, and implementa-



Photo: Sandy McKellar

Current provincial policy avoids the creation of more “non-status” roads. This encourages industrial users to deactivate roads and can lead to complex stakeholder debate.

tion plans produced. The coordinated access management planning (CAMP) process has been used by the BC Ministry of Forests since the early 1970's. It provides a mechanism for all forest road users to provide advice with respect to access management decisions.

The following principles can be helpful in guiding access management initiatives:

- Sensitive values and objectives should be clearly defined and communicated both within the planning group and to the public so it is clear why changes in access are occurring. Successful implementation will require a significant information and education initiative.
- All stakeholders should recognize the problems giving rise to an access plan and assume some of the responsibility for successful resolution.
- The access management planning process should address both restricting access and maintaining access. In many cases access management has been primarily oriented towards deactivating roads or restricting access through installing gates, removing bridges, etc. In some areas where the use is shifting from an industrial to recreational and local conditions require significant maintenance to keep roads passable, the recognition of particular roads as priorities for on-going non-industrial access can be critical to gaining acceptance of the plan.

- Access decisions should be made in the context of a large enough plan area in order to accommodate the full spectrum of user demands.
- Consider operational aspects including choosing workable locations for access control points, funding levels, safety of road users, providing objectives and leaving operational flexibility with respect to achieving them so that the most appropriate tool can be used for each situation.
- Consider ways of transferring maintenance responsibility to other users or groups of users.

Resolving complex road access issues is a critical component of successful natural resource planning and management. Finding the right balance between continued access for resource users, protection for sensitive areas, and sustainable road maintenance costs is a major step towards effective management of our public resource lands. While the best approach for attaining this balance will vary according to local conditions, careful consideration of general access management principles is a good starting point. 🐾

Greg Rowe, RPF, is a consulting forester based on Vancouver Island. He has worked in consulting, government and industry throughout BC for the past 30 years with involvement in a wide variety of strategic and operational planning projects.