



## Reigniting Passion for Silviculture: Minimum Free Growing Can't Be Our Goal

**TODAY MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, I BELIEVE THERE IS A NEED FOR FOREST** companies to become involved in executing government funded silviculture treatments that will improve future timber supplies.

There is a need to reignite the passion for silviculture that existed in BC during the 1980s and 1990s. During the years the Forest Resource Development Agreement (FRDA) program was in operation, many excellent silviculture treatments were executed through a coordinated effort between licensees and the Forest Service. Is it not possible to recreate a similar scenario today where forest professionals who are passionate about silviculture can use their knowledge and talent to execute cost effective silviculture treatment through the land based investment program?

In 1974, when I first heard the word silviculture something clicked deep within me and I knew that I would spend the rest of my life practising the art and science of growing trees. Even in first year dendrology at the University of British Columbia, I would collect seeds from a wide variety of trees species, stratify the seeds and grow them into seedlings. As a summer student in 1976, I planted over 50,000 trees in Knight Inlet and Wakeman Sound, carried out juvenile spacing, and a variety of herbicide and manual brushing treatments. After graduating from UBC in 1978, I worked for the Forest Service Research Branch in Prince Rupert and was fortunate to learn ecological classification for highly qualified mentors like Dr. Jim Pojar.

My desire to be more involved with operational forestry was satisfied when I left the Forest Service in 1980 and took a position with Eurocan Pulp and Paper at Ootsa Lake. In 1982, I survived the West Fraser/ Eurocan merger and landed a position looking after silviculture for the Ootsa Logging division in the summers and harvesting during the winters. There I gained initial expertise in broadcast burning and bark beetle management.

In November of 1985, I transferred to Quesnel to look after West Fraser's silviculture program that was three times the size of the program at Ootsa Lake. With 30% of the harvest areas east of Quesnel being Devil's club site series, the challenges and rewards of achieving successful regeneration east of Quesnel were significantly greater than at Ootsa Lake. West Fraser had recently been awarded Tree Farm Licence (TFL 52) (east of Quesnel) and the consistent direction I received from the executive was to make TFL 52 the best example of silviculture management in BC.

TFL 52 contained extensive harvesting dating back to before the early 1970s and an enormous supply of backlog NSR and poorly stocked areas that begged for silviculture treatment. For a young silviculture forester the TFL provided perfect place to go to work and there was no mistaking who was responsible for silviculture on the area. We invested millions of dollars of FRDA and Forest Renewal British Columbia (FRBC) funds to improve the quality of regeneration on these areas through aerial spraying, excavator mounding, fill planting, manual brushing and juvenile spacing. This increase in silviculture activity required additional staff and talented individuals like Steve Mitchell (currently the silviculture professor at UBC) and Doug Routledge were recruited to execute large programs of aerial spraying and other silviculture treatments on backlog areas.

To prepare high brush hazard sites east of Quesnel for successful planting, we broadcast burned all summer. We would ignite newly harvested clearcuts during every available window from the time the slash became dry enough to burn in June until conditions became too wet to burn in October. Excavator mounding was also perfected in 1988 to allow trees to be successfully established on saturated horsetail sites. I will never forget the sustained rushes of adrenaline I would experience driving up the Barkerville Highway with a pickup loaded with drums of burning fuel and all the fire fighting tools it could possibly carry. In the good

ol' days being a silviculture forester was so much exciting fun it was hard to believe you would actually get paid to do this.

For me, being a professional silviculturist has always meant achieving excellence in reforestation success on every area I manage so that future generations may be blessed with the quality of forests that I had the wonderful opportunity to manage. I find it disheartening that some, if not many, silviculture foresters see their role as achieving the minimum free growing stocking standard at the minimum possible cost. The quality of the future forests we are leaving to our children is critically dependent on our initial reforestation efforts. The quality of a silviculturist's work affects the landscape for decades and there are few greater rewards than going back to an area you reforested and seeing a thriving new forest. 🌱

*Al Waters, RPF, owns and operates A.J. Waters and Associates Inc. He plans to continue growing trees in his retirement and has established a Christmas tree farm on four acres just outside of Victoria.*

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