



Advocacy and Awareness Building

IN RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH MEMBERS, IT has become clear to me that not everyone has the same definition of advocacy as I do. Many people confuse advocacy with awareness building but, really these are two very different activities. Members often ask me why the ABCFP isn't "out there" more or why we aren't advocating for a particular issue, so I wanted to tell you about our advocacy activities and how they differ from awareness building.

Advocacy in our Act and Mandate

The inclusion of advocacy in the ABCFP's mandate in 2003 has caused confusion for members and the public. Some members believe that the ABCFP's advocacy mandate means that we can advocate for anything the association or our members want. However, the Foresters Act is very clear in what is acceptable and what is not. The word 'advocacy' appears only once in the Foresters Act in the section that lists the ABCFP's duties and objects: **Section 4 Duty and Objects of the Association:** (b) to advocate for and uphold principles of stewardship of forests, forest lands, forest resources and forest ecosystems;

In Section 11 (Resolutions), the ABCFP's advocacy mandate is referred to indirectly by saying that council can make resolutions that promote good forest stewardship: (l) the promotion of good forest stewardship;

Thus it seems clear that advocacy is tied to the ABCFP's stewardship activities and not matters such as fair wages, working conditions, standardized charge out rates etc. In other words, the ABCFP's mandate allows us to advocate for matters that are in the public interest but not on behalf of our members.

The ABCFP's Advocacy Activities

There are many ways to advocate for something and it is important to remember that advocacy does not always take place in the public realm. Many organizations choose to advocate quietly out of the public eye in meetings with government or other stakeholders. Others choose very public advocacy activities such as protests or sit-ins because they generate media attention.

Advocacy activities can include:

- Meetings with government or other stakeholders
- Public rallies/demonstrations
- Writing opinion editorials (op-eds)
- Issuing news releases
- Hosting press conferences
- Using social media such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter to spread a message
- Paid newspaper or radio advertising
- Lobbying governments at the local, provincial or federal level

Different organizations use different methods to advocate based on their needs and goals. The ABCFP wants to maintain the good relationships we have built with governments at all levels so we prefer to meet with government officials to discuss concerns rather than making our conversations more public. Other groups believe they must advocate in a manner that will bring the public to their side so they use the media to spread their message.

An organization can also move through a continuum of advocacy activities. If meetings with government or community stakeholders do not work, the organization may issue a news release, write opinion editorial, and make use of social media such as Twitter to make sure the issue is understood by the public. The ABCFP's preferred methods of advocacy are meeting with government and other stakeholders, writing opinion editorials and issuing news releases. The next logical step will be to use social media.

In the past year, we have tackled issues such as:

- Principles of stewardship drafted
- Land Based Management
- Response to the Zero Net Deforestation Implementation Plan
- Response to the Forest Carbon Offset Protocol
- Practitioner Competence and Awareness of Issues affecting stewardship including:
- Species at Risk
- Use of forest professionals – (IPP industry, Environmental Impact Assessments, etc.)
- Professional contribution to safety
- Water Resource Importance and Information

Advocacy activities are varied and can be very public or can take place behind closed doors. While the ABCFP has used techniques such as opinion-editorials (op-eds) in the newspaper, more often than not, we meet with government about issues and present our views that way. We also invest a lot of time and energy into researching and writing reports to inform government decision making. We often ask for member input into these reports such as the recent mid-term timber supply review.

What is the Difference between Advocacy and Awareness Building?

Many people get advocacy and awareness building mixed up perhaps because some of the activities are similar; however, the two are quite different. Advocacy is the support for a cause, policy, etc. In other words, we advocate for something (good forest policies, inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in decision making, protection of a specific species etc.) We build awareness of the profession of forestry and the roles of forest professionals.

The ABCFP has undertaken numerous awareness building activities over the years; however, recent years have seen a decline in such activities due to budget constraints. The ABCFP's awareness building work has included:

- Newspaper and radio advertising
- News releases
- Social media
- Participation in career fairs and trade shows
- Meeting with stakeholders such as municipal governments and Aboriginal groups
- National Forest Week activities
- Sending BCFP magazine to community leaders and elected officials

The ABCFP has probably not done a good enough job of communicating with our members about the advocacy and awareness building activities we do. We are working on being more communicative and you can count on getting more information in both the Increment and BCFP magazine in the future. If you have any questions, please e-mail me (sglover@abcfp.ca). I'll get you the answers you need. 🐾