



Innovative Thinking: Weed to Commercial Species

When I started my career in forestry, alder was a weed—end of story. We cursed it, killed it or ignored it depending on the situation. Today, alder is a commercial species. How did that happen? It took some innovative thinking on behalf of people who saw the potential in a species with the short rotation of alder.

Innovative thinking is something we need to foster in BC's forestry sector. Academics and researchers are thinking about things in different ways and this is a good trait we should all adopt. Innovative thinking can help with the small stuff—like figuring out new ways of doing everyday tasks—to the big stuff—like turning a former weed into a commercial species.

One of the major challenges we are all facing is climate change and I believe it will take some innovative thinking by all of us to make sure the forests thrive under changing climate conditions. With all the devastation caused by the mountain pine beetle in the Interior, lots of members are questioning what species we should use to replant. Will climate change make it so that pine no longer grows in an environment that was once perfect for it?

I recently attended the Society of American Foresters' (SAF) conference and had the opportunity to speak with people from across North America. It was interesting to learn that they are all dealing with the same issues as the ABCFP. Issues like declining memberships due to aging populations and forestry not being the first choice of students are common to most of us. In order to counteract this situation, some schools have rebranded to offer natural resource or conservation programs. I was impressed with the SAF student chapters in many schools. We can learn from the SAF as they are focusing on showing the students the benefits that can be realized by a membership with the organization.

I'm sure innovative thinking by both schools in BC as well as the ABCFP will

help to bolster our membership numbers and ensure there are enough qualified forest professionals to manage the forests for the future. One thing we are doing right now is trying to appeal to a wider range of students—starting with the conservation students. We are contemplating creating a new form of membership called a Natural Resource Professional (NRP) which would give limited practice rights to qualified conservation grads. It is innovative and contributes to ensuring we have a pool of qualified people to manage the forest.

The forestry sector in BC is facing a number of challenges right now. Some challenges are so large that they are changing the way we've always done things and this is a disconcerting place to be. We can complain about what's happening or we can start looking for different ways to get things done.

A number of years ago the company I work for was facing a challenge that required an innovative solution. My employer and a commercial alder company were working on the same volume-based tenure. In the beginning, we competed with each other to get into the area first but then we realized with a little innovative thinking, both companies could benefit. They were focused on the alder, we were focused on the conifer and we both had to build roads so with a little bit of communication and a willingness to think outside of the box, we had a win-win situation.

Whether we are talking about alder, climate change or recruitment, I invite you to think innovatively to find solutions that will work for everyone. 🐼