



Species-at-Risk Management in BC: The Will to Simply Get On With It



Photo: Chris Schmidt

THE CHALLENGE TO US IS HOW DO WE CONSERVE and manage species and ecosystems at risk, while still meeting the economic objectives the public also places on us?

Someone has to make the decision to set the objectives and enact the tools we have. And that someone is the government entrusted with stewardship of our natural resources, not individual forest professionals or forestry companies. Yes, professionals and licensees have a critical role to play in information collection and implementation, but they can't make the decisions to designate species and habitat for protection.

Many British Columbians come to the Forest Practices Board with their concerns about forest practices and their potential impacts on species at risk. Unfortunately, most of our investigations tend to conclude that the tools to address species under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* are not yet in place or are not being fully implemented, despite great effort on the part of many.

At the present time, there are over 800 red-listed species and ecosystems (rare, threatened or endangered) and another 700+ blue-listed species and ecosystems (of concern) in British Columbia¹. Of course not all of them occur in forests but a great many of them do. It is quite clear to the board that we have not completed the work necessary to protect these species.

We are all aware of the effort and expense that has gone into recovery planning and habitat identification so far, almost exclusively focused on individual species rather than the landscapes and ecosystems of which they are only a part. We have recovery planning for 50 species with no approved action plans in place, only 28 of 88 species and ecosystems from the

Identified Wildlife Management Strategy are included in Section 7 notices. Wildlife habitat areas are in place for only 33 species, no regionally important wildlife, wildlife habitat features or temperature sensitive streams are currently identified. With so many species in need of some degree of protection, it would appear that our piecemeal approach to species management is not very efficient. And we haven't done the monitoring to find out if what has been put in place so far is actually effective.

But rather than focus on what has not been done, which could get quite depressing, what if we spend some time envisioning where we would like to be with species at risk?

Fortunately, that has already been done by Biodiversity BC—a group comprised of representatives from industry, NGOs, and provincial, federal and local governments. They developed a biodiversity strategy for BC in 2007, the intent of which is “to provide a roadmap of priorities for NGOs, industry, governments including First Nations, and everyone else with an interest in conserving BC’s diverse natural wealth.”² And we have the Conservation Framework, British Columbia’s new approach for maintaining the rich biodiversity of the province³. Developed by the Ministry of Environment in collaboration with other scientists, conservation organizations, industry and government, “the framework provides a set of science-based tools and actions for conserving species and ecosystems in BC.” It is intended to “ensure that British Columbia is a spectacular place with healthy, natural and diverse ecosystems that sustain and enrich the lives of all.”

So we have a strategy, we have a framework,

we have provisions for legal tools in the *Forest and Range Practices Act*, described earlier. The challenge now is to do it. But to make real progress on the ground will require leadership. Elected officials are challenged with balancing society’s desire for jobs and economic growth, with its desire to maintain species in self-sustaining numbers on the land. They are responsible to guide these often extremely difficult decisions. The easiest thing to do in such a difficult situation is to call for more research, take more time to come up with the definitive answers and try to achieve consensus on what should be done. But enough research, planning and consultation have been done. It is time for action.

We will never have all of the information or complete agreement on what to do. Perhaps the biggest issue facing species at risk today is marshalling the will to simply get on with it. 🐾

Darlene Oman was involved in environmental assessments of forestry and natural resource developments in Ontario and BC before joining the Forest Practices Board as Director of Special Projects and Communications in 1997. She has a BA in Geography from York University.

Forest Practices Board Chair since 2003, Bruce Fraser, PhD, has an international background in land use planning, community economic development and institutional management. He holds a PhD in Plant Ecology from the University of British Columbia.

¹ BC Species and Ecosystems Explorer Tool, Ministry of Environment, <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/atrisk/toolintro.html>

² <http://www.biodiversitybc.org/>

³ <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/conservationframework/whatis.html>