

June 11, 2008

Honourable Pat Bell, MLA
Minister of Agriculture and Lands
P.O. Box 9043
Station Provincial Government
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Bell,

Re: The Planning Gap

For the past two years, the Association of BC Forest Professionals (ABC FP) has been studying the planning framework in BC with an eye toward improving it for the future. We brought experts in the field of planning together to discuss what an “optimal” planning framework might look like, we had discussions at our annual conference on the issue, and we hired a consultant to survey our members on this issue. During our study it became obvious that many problems have their roots in an information and coordination gap in the current planning framework. While there has been much good work done to establish higher level plans, we have examples of various business interests, ministries or other jurisdictions operating on the same land base with little or no coordination. Our recommendation is to focus on tactical planning. It is important to bring all forest stakeholders together in order to look at the cumulative effect of all activities on the land base. In other words, we recommend that land-based management be implemented.

We realize that government is not interested in more planning and that our recommendation comes at a time when there is a decrease in financial support and emphasis in this area. However, we are convinced that the overall net benefit will be to reduce and simplify the planning environment, and to make planning more applicable, more efficient and effective at the implementation level.

Background

As the ABCFP studied the planning framework in BC, it became evident that landscape and resource planning often occurs in silos. Separate organizations are doing planning work driven by specific management goals with limited or no coordination of objectives or outcomes. In forestry terms, this behaviour doesn't encourage investment in the next rotation and increases the risk for poor stewardship of BC's forests and lands (for example, forestry companies, oil and gas organizations, and independent power producers are working at odds with each other). The ABCFP is concerned that no single agency is either looking into or monitoring the cumulative impacts of the various resource uses on the land.

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Other organizations have made a similar observation regarding the planning gap. For example a soon-to-be released FRPA Bulletin (*Application of FRPA to other Occupiers of the Land*) to be issued by the Ministry of Forests and Range provides a guidance to work around the predicament.

The absence of a single tactical platform to set and implement objectives has resulted in fractured management of the land base, operational inefficiencies and financial waste.

Recommendation

What is needed is land-based management which will provide a clear understanding of the objectives that will achieve a vision for Crown land. In order for the vision to be delivered and carried out, these objectives must be in place and unilaterally activated across the province. Land-based management is a philosophical shift that is intended to change the way agencies that address land values and stakeholder relationships achieve their mandates. More details on land-based management are provided in the attached Land-Based Management Statement prepared by the ABCFP's Stewardship Advisory Committee and will be released publicly in the very near future.

Embracing land-based management will address and resolve many outstanding issues that have occurred due to the current circumstances of multiple jurisdictions, agencies, tenure holders, resource users, and influences such as climate change. It also has the capacity to link planning processes back to general stewardship objectives and create efficiencies for all parties currently struggling to work on the landscape.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Allan Balogh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping tail.

Allan Balogh, RPF
President

cc. Larry Pederson, Deputy Minister
Mike Lambert, Associate Deputy Minister

Attachment: Land-Based Management Statement

Land-based Management Statement

The Association of BC Forest Professionals recommends that a land-based management philosophy be adopted in British Columbia.

Land-based management means that management of forested and non-forested land in BC will be applied in a consistent, comprehensive and cohesive manner, integrating all sectors, for all interests that respect the characteristics and potential of the land.

Background

Over the past several years, the association has prepared or received reports on fire, oil and gas, inventories, stocking standards and most recently, a utopian view of planning processes in BC. Through these papers an underlying theme is apparent; land management in BC consists of separate sectors, agencies and interests, all attempting to influence what occurs on the same land base and often for reasons that are in conflict with each other. In recent years it has become evident that landscape and resource planning occurs by separate organizations driven by specific management goals with limited or no coordination of objectives or outcomes. In other words, this work is occurring in silos. In forestry terms, this behaviour doesn't encourage investment in the next rotation and increases the risk for poor stewardship of BC's forests and lands

However, there is potential for common ground. What is needed is a clear understanding of the objectives that will achieve a vision for Crown land that provides for future generations of British Columbians and for all management to be consistent with those objectives. In order for the vision to be delivered and carried out, these objectives must be in place and unilaterally activated across the province. The current absence of such a platform of objectives has led to the nature of silo-type planning and has resulted in fractured management of the land base and operational inefficiencies.

Components

Land-based management will be achieved when:

1. Land objectives are set that apply to all of the Crown land in the province, for all critical factors identified as requiring management for any sector, or for any purpose.
 - These can be set and applied at any appropriate scale, from provincially to locally and can build on work already in place, like the Land and Resource Management Plans done in the past.
2. The land objectives in place clearly indicate what is desired from the land, including objectives that describe:
 - the benefits to be derived from the land;
 - the desired current and future state for the varied physical attributes of the land;
 - which aspects of the land are to be actively managed; and
 - where and at what scale the objectives apply.
3. All land objectives are applicable to all sectors for all purposes.

- All and any activities on the land need to be consistent with, not only the objectives identified for the sector in which that activity falls, but with all objectives, regardless of the sector the objective was originally prepared for.
4. All sectors and interests that are active on or make use of the land and its resources are demonstrably consistent with the land objectives.
 - “Demonstrably” means that any sector can show how it has made the link between its on-the-ground activities and the land objectives.
 5. The land objectives and the demonstration of consistency are reviewed and updated through periodic and regular monitoring and feedback.

Recommendation

The association believes that land-based management is a critical change in philosophy that must be embraced. However, this does not necessarily require a wholesale change in legislation or government structures. We recognize that there is no desire for additional layers of planning; therefore this initiative needs to improve and extend the current agency and stakeholder relationships that exist on the land base.

The Association of BC Forest Professionals recommends that the following steps be taken:

1. The Province of BC describes and collates all existing land objectives.
2. Provincial agencies, regulated stakeholders and First Nations agree to extend the application of all land objectives across all resource sectors.
 - This will require evaluating and addressing any overlapping constraints.
3. The Province of BC (or other assigned organization), through an inclusive process, identifies where land objectives are missing and at what scale they should be applied.
4. The Province of BC describes and applies new land objectives as necessary, across all sectors and to all regulated stakeholders.
5. Provincial agencies, regulated stakeholders and First Nations agree to implement policies that enable and encourage all users or beneficiaries of the land to coordinate planning at the appropriate level within their respective organizations.
6. Provincial agencies and regulated stakeholders coordinate, collate, adjust and revise current land-based monitoring structures to be consistent with this land-based management philosophy.

Embracing land-based management will address and resolve many outstanding issues that have come about through the current circumstances of multiple jurisdictions, agencies, tenures, resource users, and influences such as climate change. It also has the capacity to link planning processes back to general stewardship objectives and create efficiencies that all parties currently struggle to obtain.

This simple change to a philosophy of land-based management in BC – moving towards a common ground – may be the most important land management decision made in the province of BC in this century.