

Guidance Communications and the Joint ABCFP/CAB Committee

August 2008

In 2007, the College of Applied Biology of BC and the Association of BC Forest Professionals signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which, in part, sets out the cooperation in areas of practice overlap between the definitions of “applied biology” and the “practice of professional forestry.” The MOU called for the establishment of a Joint Committee to promote dialogue and cooperation between the two organizations. The Joint Committee was established and convened its inaugural meeting November 21, 2007.

The MOU directs the Joint Committee to act in an advisory capacity to the respective councils and utilize, if necessary, the resources of experts and staff to participate in committee deliberations. The Joint Committee is intended to propose solutions to issues between the organizations that may arise from time to time, and jointly pursue initiatives of common interest.

One of the first initiatives of the Joint Committee is the development of guidance documents to assist members in matters pertaining to professional practice. These documents are intended to lead to positive outcomes and be helpful to members when they exercise discretion in professional practice. It is recognized that different professions and indeed, different professionals, may approach things differently from others. The documents however, are intended to be general enough to have broad application to members of both professional organizations, and specific enough to serve as good practice advisories in particular situations.

Guidance documents, while of assistance to members, are not intended to be a panacea. They are based on a combination of common sense and professional planning to improve stewardship and minimize practice risk. In short, guidance documents provide members with advice on how to conduct practice-related activities. While guidance documents are not binding, members should be able to provide a clear rationale as to why they chose, in a particular situation, to vary from the procedure/approach set out. Guidance documents supplement members’ expertise – they do not replace expertise.

The following guidance is only meant to be a high-level statement of principle. More detailed guidance on specific issues will follow on an as-needed basis.

Developing Professional Advice

Current natural resource legislation contains fewer prescriptive practice related elements than previous legislation. By reducing the specific direction in legislation, the government is relying on the resource professionals to undertake practices that return sound stewardship of all resources.

Effecting sound stewardship of resources requires a suite of expertise. Therefore, so as to ensure that the actions of practising professionals contribute to sound stewardship of all resources, it is essential that professionals respect and adhere to the need to practise within their areas of expertise, and

recognize when the expertise of others is required. This guidance is provided to assist professionals in understanding how this can be achieved.

Professionals obtain knowledge through education, reading scientific reports, legislation and policy, public opinion, etc. It is through the application over time of this knowledge, assessment of the results and adapting practices that professionals develop “expertise.”

Some of the more salient points associated with developing professional advice include:

1. Respect your area of expertise and the expertise of others.
 - Know and understand clearly your area of expertise.
 - Expertise normally relates to the skills and knowledge required to meet objective measures of practice.
 - Expertise is commonly achieved after extended periods of deliberate practice experience in a specific area.
 - Expertise means understanding the likely implications of your prescription and to a lesser degree a test of reasonable understanding if you are implementing a prescription.
2. Identify project needs and the expertise required to address them early on in the planning process.
 - The circumstances, such as values at risk or not, may determine the level of expertise required to perform the task.
 - In many cases adequate expertise can only be garnered by drawing on the team of professionals or engaging multiple opinions from experts.
3. Professional communication should be clear and unambiguous.
 - In order to ensure that professional advice is understandable and actionable, a timely and effective transfer of information should occur.
4. Professional advice should include an assessment of the risk, development of a suitable risk management strategy, and recommendations for implementation.

Society entrusts areas of resource management to professionals. Therefore, a duty of care exists not only to the client, but to the public at large when a professional is engaged in practice. By definition, this expectation means that a professional is expected to take the necessary care to ensure the protection of the public’s interest in the management of natural resources.

By reflecting on these points, practising professionals can identify if they are considering the elements necessary to develop professional advice in an appropriate manner.