

## **BC NEEDS A FOREST VISION**

Many citizens who follow forestry in BC are concerned the current management of our forests will not deliver the societal expectations over the long-term. However, no formal statement such as a BC forests vision and goals or a transparent and trusted monitoring and assessment system exist to provide a measure as to whether forest management practices support their view.

The public expects Government will manage the BC Crown forest lands in the public interest over the long term and not diminish them into the future. Collectively, these can be summarized in the overall objective of achieving healthy and resilient communities which depend on conservation and use of healthy forests.

In the conservation and management of forests, it is always good to know where you want to get before acting. The late Dr. Gordon Baskerville, Dean Emeritus, Faculty of Forestry, University of New Brunswick in 1986 recommended foresters decide what they want from the forest before going to the “tool box.” Government and the forest industry have always played in the “tool box” with such documents as the Forest Practices Code, Forest and Range Practices Act, guidebooks, etc. These tools have been used without the guidance of a forest vision. The focus has been on timber production within other forest value constraints. Is this our vision? Many would say it is too narrow for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The lack of clarity around what we desire from the forest and how it will be managed prevents us from determining whether the existing legislation will achieve the broad provincial objectives—what are the priorities, how do they fit together, where are the gaps? We need a formal vision for BC’s forests to guide the development of supporting legislation, regulations and policies and the application of appropriate forest operational practices. Without this, forest management is subject to decisions that focus on political expediency or special interest pressures. We have seen and continue to see these. A recent example is the introduction of the Forest Act Amendment to enable transfer of Forest Licenses to Tree Farm Licenses. How was this expected to improve moving towards the desired future forest? To date all comments from Government are to address the mid-term timber supply in the interior. Again, this is a timber focus.

During the *Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities: A conversation on BC forests* dialogue involving communities, experts and concerned citizens over the last two years, the following forest vision and goals were developed.

British Columbia’s forest lands asset is protected, managed and restored to:

- Ensure the health, protection and long-term viability of forest values;
- Support healthy, diverse and resilient communities; and
- Support viable and sustainable forest sector community businesses.

The proposed long-term goals to achieve this vision are:

- A productive, resilient and healthy BC forest
- Demonstrated practice of Sustainable Forest Management based on up-to-date data, science and planning
- Effective and efficient strategic forest decision-making process involving First Nations, stakeholders and communities
- Forest management that contributes to community identified local forest needs
- A vibrant and innovative forest management sector

We need leadership from politicians to establish a vision and goals. Which of the political parties is prepared to commit to a formal vision for BC forests? A commitment by Government to enable this to happen and to follow through with using the vision and goals as legal guidance for forest management would be the single most important action any leader could take for the future of BC forests.

A wide range of forest values and the desires of local communities exist across BC. The implementation of a provincial forest vision must have flexibility to accommodate these conditions. Communities need to develop their visions for local forests, within the umbrella of the provincial vision and goals and reflecting local conditions with the emphases identified through local discussion and dialogue. We already have this in examples such as in the Regional District of Mount Waddington (northern Vancouver Island) draft vision where industrial forestry will be the primary focus with other values included to an important but lesser extent. A different vision has been applied to the Sea-to-Sky (Vancouver to Whistler) corridor where the focus is on tourism and recreation with industrial forestry conducted in a manner to retain these values.

Which political party will take the leadership of ensuring our BC forest legacy and the resiliency of our communities?

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