

Frequently Asked Questions

Guidance on the Replacement of Forest Stewardship Plans

March 2016

Who is this guidance for?

The new guidance has been prepared for district managers (DM). The hope is that it will also support the district staff who review FSPs on behalf of the DM. It will also create transparency for licensees who can see the guidance that the DM is following. Districts are expected to share this information with their FSP-holders and other organizations that may be affected by decisions to extend an FSP.

Why guidance? Why now?

The term of many of the province's FSPs will expire within the next two years. Since the province has operated under approved plans for a decade, there is uncertainty and inconsistent understanding in the forestry community about what happens when an FSP expires, and what government expects given the range of concerns voiced publicly about FSPs.

The Chief Forester has a mandate to champion improvements to forest management. As a member of the FLNRO executive, the Chief Forester is also well-positioned to influence forest policy as needed to achieve sound stewardship of the forest resource.

What is an FSP? What changes can we realistically expect from implementing new guidance?

An FSP is a high-level operational plan that forms the legal understanding between the DM and licence-holder about how government expectations for forest management will be carried out. Detailed forest management planning information is contained in other planning documentation.

Since the FSP is the only legal planning document that is reviewed by government, the plan should contain enough information to demonstrate how forest management under the plan is evolving with the on-the-ground conditions in B.C.

The guidance suggests addressing a wide range of potential new and emerging issues. Are licence-holders expected to include things in their FSP that aren't required explicitly by law?

The government can only require that licence-holders do what is contained in the law. Other groups, such as local communities, other licenced-users or First Nations, may also have expectations for forest management. These expectations should be addressed, and government is working with the forest industry to find improved ways to do this. In the interim, licence-holders are encouraged to demonstrate how they plan to address these interests. One way to do this is by including these plans and commitments in their FSP.

Why aren't expectations being set provincially for licensees?

Provincial-level expectations are contained in law, and provincial policy and guidance. The Minister, Deputy Minister and Chief Forester have all communicated their objectives and suggestions for improvements under the FRPA regime and FSPs in particular, however, only the statutory decision-maker is empowered to set the expectations for the decisions they have the jurisdiction to make. If the Province is not satisfied with results under the current law, then they may change the law.

What if local decision-makers create different sets of expectations?

FRPA is a flexible model designed to enable the management of local conditions in each of FLNRO's Natural Resource Districts. District managers have already been working to identify resource management issues that span district boundaries so that they can create better consistency for licensees who work across these same areas. The Resource Practices Branch is working with district managers to support consistent elements and characteristics of expectation letters, however, under FRPA, the final factors and considerations are the sole jurisdiction of the district manager.

The Guidance suggests 8 months – I'm not sure that's enough time.

Factors such as depth of information sharing with First Nations, if a plan is multi-signatory, and other considerations will affect the reasonable length of an extension. Relevant factors should be identified as a priority between districts and plan proponents. The DDM should articulate these factors in their rationale for extension. Harvesting operations should not be interrupted as a result of transitioning to a replacement FSP. Other tools, such as approving authorizations under the current FSP or declaring areas, can help FSP transition.

How specific should a letter of expectations be? Can it be prescriptive?

Decisions about FSP approvals require the discretion of an individual, the delegated decision-maker. It is fair and reasonable that anyone who is directly affected by the decision can understand the factors that will affect the decision at hand. A letter of expectations is the most consistent and transparent way to communicate the factors that affect the outcome of the decision.

A letter of expectations should not dictate the detailed content of a final plan, but it should outline the *general areas that require management emphasis* over the course of the new plan, and the *reasons* for this emphasis.