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May 9, 2002

Statutory Decision Makers
(see attached distribution list)

Dear Colleagues:

The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, in consultation with the Ministry of Forests and the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, has developed a strategy that integrates environmental considerations with current mountain pine beetle management actions. The strategy supports the continued battle against the beetle and the economic recovery of beetle-killed timber but it also addresses environmental values by building in explicit considerations for biodiversity.

Long-term landscape design recommendations are included in the strategy but the main emphasis is on the current outbreak. In that context, the strategy focuses on management of selected parts of the land base that have special biological significance, called ecological features, when they become infected or damaged by MPB. Examples of ecological features include OGMAs, riparian areas, and Wildlife Habitat Areas. The majority of the forested land base lies outside these features.

Building upon the strategic direction of the Bark Beetle Guidebook, the strategy promotes aggressive treatments, including harvesting within ecological features, where those actions effectively limit MPB infection of adjacent forest at the landscape level.

When harvesting is proposed in ecological features, intensive probes are recommended to determine the degree of attack. Based on different levels of attack, guidelines identify options for addressing the attacked trees and retaining biodiversity within the feature. Where the ecological feature is clearcut, replacement areas may be sought where there are suitable stands left.

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Salvage of stands already killed by MPB is also encouraged to recover the economic value of the timber. However, since the immediate forest health threat is greatly diminished in these situations, a review of current forest condition is recommended prior to approval of development proposals. This landscape assessment helps determine the best approach to landscape design in support of biodiversity and forest health into the future.

The assessment is relatively simple, requiring compilation on a map of existing data on forest cover, MPB attack and location of ecological features. This map, in combination with probe information on the degree of insect attack within the ecological feature, provides a more complete picture of the resource values and risks.

The MPB outbreak has presented a huge challenge to resource planners and decision makers in the Cariboo. The integration of these conservation principles with effective MPB management represents this effort to sustain both economic and biological values of our forests in the face of an extreme situation.

Please contact me at 250-398-4700 if you require further information.

Yours truly,

Original Signed by Herb Langin

Herb Langin
IAMC Chair

Attachments

cc: Steve Mazur, Regional Manager
Environmental Stewardship
Water, Land and Air Protection

Jim Sutherland, A/Regional Manager
Ministry of Forests

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Integrated Mountain Pine Beetle – Biodiversity Conservation Strategy
Response to District Manager Input

Introduction

Response to the final, draft MPB-Biodiversity Strategy document was received from all districts in the region. Questions or comments are paraphrased below along with the response from the Biodiversity Committee. Input from the District Managers is greatly appreciated and has helped to improve the strategy.

Comments/Questions and Answers

Q1: Some landscape units are not meeting biodiversity targets. The report should acknowledge this and provide recommendations. Furthermore, under what circumstances is it appropriate to draw down seral targets?

A1: The Introduction to the report implicitly acknowledges that targets may not be met in all circumstances by stating that the strategy is about mitigating impacts to biodiversity. By definition, this means the intent of the strategy is to lessen the impacts but there is no guarantee that targets can always be met.

The procedures outlined in the strategy constitute the committee's recommendations for mitigation. The procedures are linked to assessments of risk. As the risk to biodiversity increases, decision choices become more restrictive, but always with a view towards legitimate treatment of current attack and recovery of old attack.

The circumstances under which draw-downs could be applied are embedded in the strategy in two places. The first is the section on management of current attack. Where the criteria for treatment of current attack are met, seral targets are not a limiting factor. Of course the actual decision to proceed with draw-downs is a management choice beyond the scope of this technical document.

The second place draw-downs are permitted is in the section on old attack. Where the original ecological feature is so damaged that other patches have better representation, even though they may not meet the minimal seral requirements, harvesting can occur within the damaged patch provided the recruitment patch is left.

Q2: Why does the report recommend that in the *maintain low* and *salvage* zones, when no replacement areas are available, infected stems not be removed from ecological features?

A2: The MPB zonation is an expression of risk, incorporating both the threat of MPB spread and our collective capability for dealing with it. According to the zonal definitions, containment of the MPB at the landscape level is only possible in the *suppression* zone, not in the *maintain low* or *salvage* zones.

Where replacement areas for ecological features are not available, the risk to biodiversity is high. We therefore agree that selective treatment of infected stems is justified when it is specifically for the purpose of protecting the ecological feature.

Conversely where harvesting is primarily for the protection of adjacent stands, significant disturbance of the ecological feature is not warranted in the *maintain low* and *salvage* zones because there is no assurance that the outbreak can be contained.

Q3: Consultation with MWLAP is recommended in special circumstances. There is a need to confirm that MWLAP will build this function into their service plan.

A3: It is anticipated that the need for direct consultation with WLAP will be very limited. WLAP will, however, be providing information on best management practices which should serve to address the need for additional information in most circumstances.

Q4: MPB zonal targets apply to sites, not stands.

A4: Agree.

Q5: Rather than prescribing when a detailed probe be undertaken, our preference is to indicate that the level of assessment is commensurate with the level of risk to the affected values.

A5: It is important that the prescribing forester accept some accountability, but equally, for the assessments to be meaningful, it is important that there are some consistent and appropriate procedures for evaluating risk. We have provided what we believe to be an appropriate framework for those assessments that identifies the factors that increase risk. The triggers for initiating detailed probes were developed based on those factors with input from the regional forest health expert. With the risks identified, the prescribing forester still retains flexibility in developing prescriptions to deal with it.

Q6: Integration stipulates that 50% of WTPs will be available over the rotation. The strategy recommends replacement of WTPs when they are at risk due to current attack.

A6: The Integration report states, "The equivalent of 50% of each WTP will be available for harvesting over 1 rotation in the long term. This implies a strategy rotation of 2 times normal (160 years for pine and deciduous; 240 years for all other species)."

The Integration report is saying that the WTP objective shall be met throughout time, but the actual stands contributing to that target will vary. Therefore, the strategy is consistent with Integration in that the strategy is merely identifying candidates for early harvest because of MPB attack. Even with replacement, there is risk to stand level biodiversity because existing WTPs are being removed much earlier than expected.

Q7: The landscape level biodiversity information and decision process outlined in your report depend on inventory being current. We know our inventory is not up-to-date.

A7: The only recourse in the face of data that is not up-to-date is to apply a more conservative approach to decision-making. Biodiversity concerns should manifest themselves well before seral thresholds are reached and replacement areas for ecological features should be assumed to be more limiting than current maps suggest.

Q8: We do not agree that current practices for MPB are establishing a forest structure that is predisposed to similar outbreaks in the future.

A8: The strategy report points to the need for careful thought about landscape design and that accelerated harvest over extensive areas will tend to move away from the design principles outlined in the Bark Beetle guidebook under the *Prevention* strategy. Many other factors may influence bark beetle outbreaks in future, but given the obvious uncertainties in forecasting future practices and conditions, we are recommending attention to the tangible landscape elements influenced by harvest practices today.

Q9: The covering letter represents the strategy as only having relevance in areas that have special biological significance.

A9: See revised covering letter.