

File: 12210-01

October 5, 2000

To: file

Re: Rationale for Approval of Large Blocks in the Quesnel Forest District

Since 1993, the Quesnel Forest District (QFD) has been subject to an increasingly severe epidemic of mountain pine beetle (MPB). The MPB epidemic has been supported by an abundance of host material (mature lodgepole pine) and favourable weather conditions. By 1999, approximately 30 000 hectares of forest was affected by the MPB.

The primary tool used to manage the MPB is harvesting of infested stands. Major licensees and the Small Business Forest Enterprise Program (SBFEP) have directed most of their cut towards management of the MPB. The nature of the epidemic, in combination with the past logging history in the district, is such that proposals to create non-greened-up openings in excess of 60 hectares are received on a regular basis. These proposals can be either new openings in excess of 60 hectares, or smaller blocks adjacent to previous harvesting.



Section 11(1)(b)(i) of the *Operational Planning Regulation* (the OPR) specifies that the maximum size of a cut block in the Cariboo Region must not exceed 60 hectares. Section 11(3)(b) of the OPR provides that the district manager may approve a block over 60 hectares where harvesting is being carried out to recover timber damaged by fire, insects, wind or other similar events and wherever possible the block incorporates structural characteristics of natural disturbance. This block size provision is one of the key elements of the Forest Practices Code and it must be given due consideration by harvest planners and statutory decision makers.

As one of the statutory decision makers in the Quesnel Forest District for the purposes of Sections 41, 42 and 43 of the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act*, I will continue to consider proposals to create openings in excess of 60 hectares in the interests of managing the MPB epidemic. Planners proposing openings in excess of 60 hectares should be aware that I will consider several factors (listed below) prior to approving these large blocks. Proponents should address these considerations in their forest development plans (FDP's) or FDP amendments, or in the applicable silviculture prescription.

- The block must incorporate the structural characteristics of natural disturbance to the extent possible. Possible measures include reservation of some or all mature trees of species other than lodgepole pine, reservation of grey attack pine trees from which the MPB has already flown, reservation of patches of younger, less susceptible pine, and reservation of patches of mature pine if nothing else is available. Reserve patches should be designed and laid out in locations that would increase the likelihood that they will survive the natural disturbance, for

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example adjacent to riparian areas. Reservation of the standard amount of area in wildlife tree patches may not be adequate.

- These large blocks must also have a coarse woody debris (CWD) strategy which provides more than the minimum amount of CWD required under the Province's Short Term Strategy for Coarse Woody Debris.
- The nature of the stand and the beetle attack within the stand must interact in such a manner that creation of an opening over 60 hectares is the only logical approach. The proposal must be supported by **systematic and current beetle probe and timber cruise information**. Where the probe and cruise reveal an option to focus the harvest on patches of beetle attacked timber within the stand through the application of small patch harvesting, this option should be adopted.
- There are several draft landscape units in the QFD where old and/or mature timber is in short supply or in a deficit situation relative to landscape level biodiversity requirements. These units include the Umiti and Ramsey (low emphasis), Clisbako (intermediate) and Umiti (high). These units also are affected by the MPB epidemic. In these draft landscape units it is imperative that planners and prescribing foresters give extra consideration to the points noted above in situations where blocks over 60 hectares are proposed.
- Planners should also consider the importance of non-timber values when developing proposals to create openings in excess of 60 hectares. In particular they should consider wildlife habitat requirements, visual sensitivity of the site, the needs of the commercial tourism sector, areas of First Nation interest and concern and recreational use of the area. As the importance of the non-timber values increases, so also does the need to mitigate the impact of large openings.

The foregoing should not be construed as reluctance to approve openings over 60 hectares. During the current MPB epidemic numerous large blocks have been approved and I expect to continue to approve them when appropriate. There are many situations in the Quesnel District where there is no viable alternative to harvest of large blocks. However proponents need to be fully aware of the concerns associated with these large blocks.

Gerry Grant, R.P.F.
District Manager
Quesnel Forest District