



Forest Service News — No.8

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In this issue, our new Forests Minister Dan Miller addresses some of the forestry issues currently on the minds of Forest Service staff and other British Columbians.

Our thanks to the regional managers and branch directors who suggested particular questions and topics for our interview with the minister.

And thanks to our minister for being open and eager in answering our questions.

Vision for the next few years

Where do you see the forest industry and the Forest Service by the end of the government's current mandate?

We will have made a major accomplishment, by the end of this current mandate, if we have regained a measure of public confidence in the Forest Service's ability to manage B.C.'s forest lands in the public interest.

With regards to the industry, if by the end of the mandate we have established a proper footing for the future well-being of the industry, I would consider that a major accomplishment.

What key words or phrases would you use to describe the direction that the Forest Service will take over the next few years?

The words I like to use, and reinforce as often as possible, are Forest Service, as opposed to Ministry of Forests, because of the implication that we are a service with a really great responsibility to

manage in the public interest. In my first meeting with Forest Service managers, I said that if by the end of the day we can be regarded as good managers of the public resource, that's going to be good for the people who work for the Forest Service and it's going to be good for the people of the province.

What would you say is the main obstacle right now in regaining the public's confidence?

I think it falls into the area of land-use planning. We've gone through a fundamental change in our society, not just in British Columbia but worldwide, particularly in terms of our views on environmental issues.

There's a much higher consciousness about these issues. There are some myths, but at the same time some very valid concerns that we must come to grips with.

So, the priority areas for the Forest Service over the next few years will be land-use planning and the processes to involve the public.

For the forest sector, the big challenge over the next few years will be to develop mechanisms that allow for better investment back in the land base, which is the heart and soul of our industry.

We've got very productive lands in British Columbia but they're not achieving their full potential.

Forest Resources Commission

I think the Forest Resources Commission has correctly identified land use as a major issue. I think there is a consensus, right across the

spectrum, on that issue. It doesn't matter if you are from a large forest company, a small forest company, the Forest Service, the public, or any group.

Everybody is saying that land use is a priority. We have to deal with it.

With respect to the other recommendations, there's more work to do. Some of the issues are very complex, with far-reaching ramifications.

I think it's important for governments, when they are establishing new policy, to really be clear about what are the ramifications of change.

It's easy to make a law. And sometimes there is a tendency to rush in and make changes to legislation. But every change in legislation has a ripple effect. And if you don't think it through carefully, you won't foresee what some of those impacts will be.

What are the philosophical arguments in favor of a Royal Commission? Will the Forest Resources Commission be disbanded or will it have another role?

Generally, in talking about a Royal Commission versus the Forest Resources Commission, it was my view initially that a Royal Commission would be more appropriate than the model chosen by the previous administration, because we have a history of Royal Commissions in forestry in B.C.

It was my view that a Royal Commission would have more status, more impact with the public, and, perhaps, more clarity.

I think one of the problems with

the Forest Resources Commission is its lack of clarity. If you contrast the FRC report with the 1976 Royal Commission by Pearce, they are completely different documents. The Pearce Commission was much more exhaustive.

However, there are people on the commission who have done some very good work and I don't want to throw that out.

I don't rule out the use of a Royal Commission in the future to look into some aspects of forest policy.

Forest Practices Code

There needs to be legislation, whether it be a law or a code there are arguments on both sides.

A code is a more general statement and I'm always mindful that sometimes it's difficult to write a law that has universal application.

It will be a challenge to bring in legislation that should do a couple of things.

One, is to indicate to the public that we are serious about having proper forest management in this province. At the same time, the legislation has to be flexible enough as a document to be used across the broad spectrum of geography that we have in this province.

Forestry is best practiced on a site-specific basis. A practice that is applicable in one region is not necessarily applicable in another.

My personal opinion is that a law or code should apply to private forest lands as well as public.

There are three or four major categories of private land, and we've experienced difficulty in most of them. Some large areas held by major forest companies have been overharvested in terms of their capability.

We've also had some difficulties on the agricultural leases. It's been documented that some people have simply acquired those lands for the timber rights, and then abandoned them.

So I think there is a need to look at legislation, but I don't want to intrude on the private landowner's right to do what they want with their land, and the model I proposed as a

private member was relatively non-intrusive.

I think private lands can make a contribution to the supply of timber, with the proper management for other values, wildlife, etc.

Clearcutting

I'm of the view that we have to reduce the size of clearcuts, but I'm not of the view that we should ban clearcutting.

I've talked to a range of people and forest managers who indicate it is an acceptable technique. But the past history of progressive clearcuts is unacceptable.

I think we can look at alternative methods of harvesting. But I wouldn't want to be misleading and suggest that alternative harvesting means we can do selection logging on every site and therefore eliminate clearcutting. I think that's a gross oversimplification.

But we can clearly look at alternative harvesting methods in terms of land management. Soil, for example. Some harvesting methods degrade the soils.

Your party has called for the re-establishment of the Environment and Land Use Secretariat. What would be the role of the Forest Service, relative to the secretariat, in developing and implementing land-use strategies and in planning for provincial forest lands?

Land-use planning

I'm coming to the view that the Land Use Secretariat really should be around the Cabinet Committee on Sustainable Development.

Essentially, the reason for the secretariat was to try to coordinate the activities of various ministries that all had a role to play in land-use planning.

I think the need is for a coordinating role. If we are going to function properly as a government, ministries have to operate together.

Beyond that, it will be the people of British Columbia, involved in land-use planning, that will resolve the valley-by-valley conflicts, end the "war", if you like.

I think it's wrong to say you can

draw lines on a map. For example, within this circle, there will be only timber harvesting, or just a park, or whatever.

A real challenge, one that no forestry-based country has met, is to really integrate the various uses.

Timber harvesting, wildlife, water, all those things go hand in hand. We can't separate one from the other. What we have to do is develop management practices that allow the integrity of all of those values to be maintained.

Developing a land-use strategy of this kind is not analogous to the type of planning done by municipalities. It's not that kind of zoning. It's far more complex.

I think we have to do it on a regional basis. It may be that the existing timber supply area boundaries are entirely appropriate for planning purposes.

Generally, the communities that would be involved in planning would be those that are contiguous with the region, or have an interest or a stake in it.

Determining legitimacy of representation is a difficult question. But I don't want to play games with that. What we want to do is be inclusive. We want to consider all interests.

Tenure

I think tenure is a question that must be addressed in the province. It has been a controversial subject since its inception in 1946, and I think we are going to have to visit the topic once again. Precisely when, and in what manner, hasn't been decided yet.

But there are measures we can take to reduce the control that was given to big logging companies over yearly harvesting levels and silviculture projects. We can deal with it on two levels.

One is the economic control that is exercised through the tenure system. The argument is that this kind of dominance by a few companies has not allowed a marketplace to develop that would produce the true value of the resource.

I think it's important in British Columbia to have the proper mix of companies. We clearly need large forest companies that can raise the significant amounts of capital needed for investment in very large milling and pulp facilities. We also need a good mix of medium-sized companies and small businesses.

I don't think a government can say that there shall be a fixed percentage. But, overall, we need a healthy mix. That's good for the economy.

How this will be done goes back to the question of tenure. In the meantime we intend to continue with the bid proposal program, with its stated intention to increase the level of value-added manufacturing.

In terms of silviculture, we are spending a lot of money to make up for lost ground, but we have not yet developed mechanisms for more intensive investment in the land, what's called incremental silviculture.

Large companies are not doing it and the Crown is not doing it in any substantive way.

So I think one of the biggest challenges we face is to develop those mechanisms. It goes to the heart of continuing to have a healthy and prosperous forest economy, and as well, in taking care of the other values that are so important in British Columbia: wildlife, wilderness, etc.

I appreciate that the people in the Forest Service are going to have to work very hard with the resources that they currently have available. At least for this forthcoming fiscal year, the budget will not allow any increase in staffing to police the forests.

But I want people in this province to understand that the Forest Service, through the government, has the responsibility to manage, and protect the public interest. That's their job. I think people in the Forest Service want to do that, and they certainly have my support in doing that job.

I don't under-rate the difficulties that we face, but I think we can work together to regain public confidence.

Creating jobs

Are you still calling for a commitment from companies to create new value-added employment in exchange for industrial access to public forests? How do you see this being implemented?

The premise under which tenures were developed was the commitment from forest companies to create new value-added employment in exchange for industrial access to public forests.

That has always been at the heart of forest policy, but I think we strayed away from it.

We allocate the public's resource to private companies in exchange for those companies being prepared to make an investment and produce the economic benefits and the jobs.

It's a strong link in the history of our forest policy and I think we have to reinforce that, but not to the point where the marketplace can't work though. We have to be mindful of that.

My yardstick to determine if companies are meeting this objective is: Can we develop stable communities?

There's a great deal of instability in many of the small, forest-resource-based communities in this province.

We need to have healthy companies that are prepared to make investments into modernizing their plants, as well as investments into more value-added products.

We're also prepared to assist on the marketing side. We think there is a role that government can play to help some of these small companies develop. What are the markets? What kind of products will there be a demand for? What kind of research needs to be done to assist that sector?

There are a variety of things that governments can do to assist. But it's the entrepreneur with the ideas that will make it happen.

I think we are going to go through some very difficult times. Were dealing with a couple of really big issues. One of which, is overcapacity. Currently, in most of the province, our milling capacity is about 30 per cent higher than the available timber supply.

At the same time there have been

some recent reductions in many of the allowable annual cuts in some timber supply areas. There is a lack of sufficient inventory data in some forest regions, and as a result of that, I anticipate that we would be looking at further reductions.

So how do we deal with those twin pressures in our communities?

I think we have to assess what timber is there, what processing plant is there, and what is the best potential in terms of creating jobs with the available timber supply. And we must then see if we can marshal those forces, private capital, etc. to create a stable community.

I think there are many areas where the government can assist, such as retraining programs and intensive silviculture programs. We will try to look in every corner for resources to assist and stabilize communities.

I worked most of my life in a pulp mill and I've long believed that people have to be involved in these larger economic decisions.

We will be moving forward on some fronts to try to create that in British Columbia.

There was a very good program that the B.C. Federation of Labor and the B.C. Employers Council were embarking on in 1986 that would see that kind of economic discussion and economic cooperation, which, unfortunately, was abandoned because of the past government's bias in the labor field.

It's quite difficult to make changes in society. I think people, quite rightly, are fearful of change. After all, from a working person's point of view, change has meant losing their job.

Sure we need change, but they are paying the biggest price. I think we have to bring labor in as part of finding solutions and we have to be prepared to offer reassurances that it is not our intent to make change on the backs of working people, and that at the end of the day there is going to be some economic stability for them.

I really encourage young people, in particular, to look at the exciting area of silviculture.

Forest Service organization

I'm a bit leery of tinkering. In other words, quite often, people recommend changing the configuration of the Forest Service as a solution to problems.

I prefer to keep it, and look at areas where it might be deficient, where it might be beefed up, or where we might have better coordination with other ministries. But I sure don't have any notion of changing it.

I don't think I'm overly cautious but I generally have accepted the challenge in the past to make things work. And I think its possible.

We've got some really good people in our Forest Service who are eager to show that they feel the same way as I do.

Although we are going through difficulties with our economy and there are adjustments, I would hope that the Forest Service will feel centered.

As a manager I've always liked to support the people who work for me.

I think you get the best results by doing that.

I haven't closed my mind about a Forest Resources Corporation, but I'm certainly not leaning that way.

I think you can get into endless arguments about how to manage integrated resources. I don't have time to ponder a lot of these things. Really. I think we should get on with the job.

Freedom to manage

I first became aware of this talking to the district manager in Queen Charlotte City earlier this year. I haven't really studied it, but there may be some benefits in that it does give the managers an incentive.

I think that some of the difficulty faced by our managers around British Columbia is that they have been left in the position of trying to interpret the public interest. And that's a pretty difficult task for them.

Really, it's up to me as a politician, it's up to my

government, to provide political direction. Then it's up to managers to manage.

Images

In the whole field of forestry I think B.C. is the province within Canada that should be the natural leader. We should be on the leading edge in policy. Not just in Canada but in the world. We are a significant forest sector.

I'd like to try to encourage more contact with students. Not in the sense that we propagandize them with these issues, but that we make them aware of the issues.

British Columbia bears no resemblance to South America. We may be deficient in some areas, but we don't deforest land for agriculture or other non-forestry uses.

I'd like to do more, but we do reforest.

Recreation

I would like to be able to double the park and wilderness system. I think the goal is a good one, but we have to cast our policy against what is realistic. And if we can't meet an objective we've set, we must be prepared to give our reasons why in an open manner.

Forest science research

I will be meeting soon with Clarke Binkley, UBC, who has some very definite ideas on a research and development approach for B.C.

But I would also like to challenge big forest companies to compare their expenditures on research and development. Quite frankly, I don't think they're very good.

MacMillan Bloedel is generally applauded for their efforts and they are clearly the leader. If you look at the next company down the list I think there is a heck of a gap.

The challenge I'd like to put to those corporations is what commitment are they willing to make. How can we work together to raise the level of research and development?

I have to be clear that, particularly in the forthcoming fiscal year, we are

looking at some very difficult times. Don't look for significant budgetary expenditures.

Forest Renewal Program

In general terms I support the program.

I think we have to put a lot of emphasis on silviculture and let people know that we are planting trees and will continue to restock NSR lands by the year 2000.

Inventory/integrated resources

Your party has stated that forest resource inventories are inadequate and there will be a moratorium on tree farm licences until a comprehensive inventory is completed. What would this inventory look like? Will a priority be given to funding it adequately to complete it? Will existing initiatives be reprioritized? Will there be one agency or ministry to pull it all together?

I think it was absolute folly to proceed on allocating the remaining forest lands in this province in the form of tree farm licences. It was completely contradicting what Pearce recommended in 1976: that we should maintain flexibility; deal with changing social values and economy.

I'm not an economist, but I think if Pearce's recommendations had been implemented in 1976 we'd be in better shape today.

Inventories are an important area and I'm mindful of the cost implications. I've said we were going to have to prioritize, see where they are most deficient, and try to bring resources to bear to get the best indication we can.

I'm also interested in the practical side. I think there are lots of people in B.C. who have practical skills and knowledge that can be applied to this question.

We have a ministry and a branch whose job it is to pull it all together, so they'll continue to do that.