

The Future Forest Ecosystems of BC – Exploring the Opportunities

Workshop Overview Summary – Key Opportunities and Messages

This document provides an initial summary of the key opportunities identified, and messages advanced by participants in a series of workshops held at the University of Northern BC on December 7, 2005. The workshops followed a day-long symposium in which speakers examined changes and variability in climate and ecosystem processes, and the possible implications for forest management strategies.

Approximately 75 participants, with a variety of perspectives and experience from research, provincial and federal government agencies, First Nations, forest and range industry, independent consulting and environmental organizations contributed to the workshop results.

Participants worked in six multidisciplinary groups to identify knowledge requirements and discuss potential changes that would enhance the capacity of forest management in BC to respond to expected future conditions. The results of the workshop discussions will be included in a full Symposium and Workshop Report in late January, followed by analysis, recommendations and follow-up work plans before March 2006.

Common Opportunities

Participants identified a large number of opportunities to change current management processes and policies in ways that could significantly improve the chances of effectively managing British Columbia's forests to meet the long term needs of our citizens and our global obligations. Each of these opportunities will be analyzed in the coming weeks to determine how it can be addressed and what impacts it might have beyond ecosystem processes to the province's social, cultural, and economic objectives.

Broad themes that emerged as opportunities included:

- Circumstances have created both a need and an appetite for change, opening a pathway to consider new and innovative responses. The effects of climate change, global competition in forest products markets, new working relationships between governments at all levels and First Nations are examples of phenomena that open the door to change;
- Flowing from the work done together in this workshop, is the opportunity to continue the multidisciplinary, multi-interest dialogue and collaboration process that can then inform decision makers at all levels; and
- Emergence of a new framework or model for managing that carries forward the best attributes of our current approach, but is better able to deal with the uncertainty and risks inherent in making decisions today that have consequences for decades to come.

Common Messages

Many messages were conveyed by the workshop participants, some broadly supported and others divergent. The strong, common messages that were heard included:

- The need to adopt a principle of managing for resilience of systems, (in this case ecosystems, but similarly for the social, cultural and economic systems). This was seen by participants as a much more grounded strategy for dealing with uncertainty and natural variability than focusing on unattainable objectives like stability;
- Adoption of a strong knowledge-based and inclusive approach to setting objectives and assessing risk. This includes areas of new or expanded research, better use of existing knowledge, scenario modeling and better methods of valuing a broad range of environmental services;
- Building adaptive management into forest management practices and decision making models, including an assessment of current policies and structures for their ability to address the resilience principle. This was seen as an essential strategy for dealing with uncertainty; and
- A need to constantly track the interactions between changes to ecosystems, human communities and economies and respond with a mind to balance and resilience.

Beyond these broad messages, many more specific or subtle messages emerged, some of which are found in the following workshop highlights, and others that will come from a more detailed review of the symposium and workshop results in the coming weeks.

Highlights of Individual Working Group Discussions

1. Ecosystem Process

- Emulating natural disturbance patterns and processes is appropriate as a “coarse filter” for maintaining resilience, but there are other ecological processes that we need to better understand and consider.
- Move toward managing for variability, and away from our current focus on simplicity.
- Develop and apply methods for defining the risks associated with various management choices, and clarify who takes and accepts the risk.
- As changes are proposed to the manner in which forests are managed, they need to be analyzed in terms of their economic costs and benefits, and made relevant to the industry that is expected to implement them.
- Provide incentives for ecosystem modeling and adaptive management in new forest management models.
- Better define and measure a broader range of ecosystem services and incorporate this information into decisions.
- Better reflect natural disturbance in decisions about conservation areas, rate of timber harvest and other forest management interventions.
- Adopt coordinated long-term research and adaptive management strategy is required.

2. Fire

- Change thinking to see fire as an ecosystem process, and where appropriate increase the presence of fire, including prescribed fire on the landscape.
- Develop a provincial fire management strategy with clear vision and objectives, and consideration in all land use plans.
- Incorporate fire management into FRPA objectives.
- Improve risk management, training, understanding of First Nations experience and fire related management capacity.
- Determine how to make fire management decisions based on a broader spectrum of values than just timber.
- Address social science questions about public perceptions and acceptance of fire.
- Improve the understanding of fire ecology, including the relationships between fire and insects and disease.

3. Biotic Disturbance Agents

- Work from our existing good basis of information and knowledge.
- Incorporate “forest health” into FRPA objectives.
- Manage using a systems approach that matches the biotic distribution regime and encourage diversity in approaches.
- Implement thorough and regular forest health monitoring at all scales.
- Undertake an expanded program of forest health extension and training for public and industry.
- Capture and synthesize forest health risk assessments in the context of climate change, using known science.

4. Scientific Foundation and Models

- Continue to use BEC to provide a sound scientific foundation in the context of climate change, but it will need some enhancements and modifications, including more information on climate and site relationships.
- Communicate BEC as a “BC advantage” and transition it to a dynamic rather than static tool.
- Enhance BEC to better fulfill its current purposes and to serve more functions (e.g. non-timber forest products, range, etc.)
- Shift to a model of “ecosystem resiliency management”.
- Restore the research function and focus on increasing and passing on knowledge of BEC to continue getting full benefits.

5. Species Selection and Genetics

- Remove some of the current bias (e.g. about hardwoods) from the free growing policy and decision making.
- Revise policies to reflect new information and perspectives - for example, species selection guidelines and seed transfer rules will need to be revisited. Remove practice impediments that are based on outdated thinking.
- There is a need for a range of metrics, better public input to objectives and incentives to meet broader interests than are addressed by current models.

- There are new information requirements resulting from the need to respond to climate change. These include: the role of shade, information on genotype fitness outside current seed zones, fringe species and isolated populations, and modeling smart species mixes.
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6. **Alternative Models**

- Shift to models that focus on resiliency of ecosystems, markets, and communities (including First Nations communities).
- Undertake a “resilience review” of existing models and policies and be prepared to make changes.
- Develop new management models to deal more effectively with risk, including the distribution of risk.
- Move away from arbitrary thresholds to more flexible approaches (e.g. free-to-grow, AAC impact ceilings etc.)
- Close the gap between LRMP level plans and FSP’s or similar plans with comprehensive forest-level (multiple landscape) spatially defined plans.
- Manage change responsibly - recent changes are not yet fully implemented and we need to know the outcomes.
- Think about valuing and property rights for a wider range of environmental services and products.
- Focus on knowledge driven adaptive management systems.

Next Steps

The Chief Forester has committed to following up on the Symposium and Workshop by posting the presentations from December 6th on the web site immediately and:

- Using the Workshop Overview Summary to begin immediately communicating to various key groups about the change agenda under discussion;
- Producing complete reports from the working groups by mid January 2006.
- Producing a Symposium and Workshop Report, with input from the working groups by late January 2006;
- Carrying out a high-level analysis of the concepts and recommendations arising from the presentations and workshops, and making the results available in February 2006;
- Incorporating key results of the analysis into appropriate work plans; and
- Supporting a continued dialogue, including broader participation, on the future forest ecosystems of BC as well as their interdependence with future social, cultural and economic circumstances.