



# Implementing a vision for the forests and forest-dependent communities of British Columbia

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## Executive Summary

Catastrophic wildfire. Massive mortality associated with bark beetles. Mill closures. Job losses. Depletion of old growth. Extirpation of at risk wildlife. Habitat fragmentation. Softwood lumber tariffs. Floods. Smoke pollution. Spreading plant diseases. More insect infestations appearing. It is hard not to believe that the forests and forest sector of British Columbia are in a dire condition. Some of the problems faced today are the result of global problems, such as climate change. Others are self-induced, often through a failure to recognize the need for change as circumstances and knowledge evolve. There is increasing recognition that the forest institutions, legislation, policies and practices in place today in British Columbia are not meeting our evolving needs, and that the situation will likely worsen if the *status quo* is maintained. This recognition is accompanied by a growing belief that substantial change is required. But what needs to change, how could this change be implemented, and how long will it take?

In February 2020, a diverse array of individuals gathered at UBC to work on the development of a vision for the forest sector of British Columbia. They were set the task of envisioning what an ideal situation would be like 50 years from now, and came to a remarkable level of agreement: *“50 years from now, British Columbia has healthy and resilient forests that are the foundation for all forest-related activities”*. A number of specific goals were suggested, including the restoration of damaged ecosystems, greater involvement of First Nations in the management of forest lands (including transfer of title), a diverse forest products industry and the presence of vibrant and dynamic and rural communities. The word cloud on the front of this report, produced by the participants, illustrates this vision.

The next stage, addressed in this report, was to identify the barriers to achieving this vision and the steps that might be taken to overcome those barriers. A steering committee identified six priority areas and established working groups for each: 1) governance, 2) forest management and conservation, 3) carbon, 4) forest revenues and product diversification, 5) knowledge and education, and 6) dynamic and resilient communities. The chair of each group selected about ten individuals to participate in their group, with those individuals being drawn from all over the province. The summaries produced by each group are available in a separate document.

In synthesizing the numerous identified barriers and the approximately 200 recommendations, a number of trends became apparent. The most obvious is the cumulative nature of both the barriers that have existed for many years, and the new barriers that are emerging. The focus on barriers fails to take into account the many successes that have been achieved by the forest sector in the past, and the quality of many aspects of forest management in BC when compared to other jurisdictions. However, the challenges facing the forest sector have steadily accumulated, to the point where almost everyone is seeking change (although not necessarily in the same direction). At the same time, tremendous new opportunities are emerging, some of which are immediately

available, and others that will require barriers to be surmounted. The knowledge and understanding of some of these is quite variable, and four examples follow:

- There is mixed understanding of the Government’s commitment to reconciliation with First Nations, or the implications that this will have in terms of moving eventually beyond co-governance and co-management to First Nations-led governance.
- The resistance to and lack of understanding of the opportunities offered by carbon offsets. Experience to date in British Columbia justifies the caution held by some, but worldwide there is much better understanding of what is possible, and of the institutions, mechanisms, rules and processes that can make it work. The creation of a mass timber carbon protocol could boost the BC market for solid wood, particularly in the critical industrial and mid-rise areas while other protocols could enable forest conservation and restoration to be financed and implemented.
- The extent and depth of the silos across Ministries within the Provincial Government. These are accentuated by the ‘cultures’ that dominate some Ministries. Many identified strategies will require a cross-governmental approach, but the current structure mitigates against this. Fundamental to this would be a complete overhaul of the Forest Act and associated legislation, a suite of legislation and policies designed for a very different world to what we live in today.
- As is often the case, much disagreement and discord arises from inadequate communication. This is particularly evident in the use of the term “value-added”. On the one hand, government advocates for a diversification of the industry into more value-added products while on the other hand, the industry argues that it has already diversified into many different value-added products. The Province needs to take steps to create the conditions where innovation can flourish while recognizing the extent of diversification already present.

While there are a large number of recommendations provided in the report, they are not comprehensive, and many require analysis, further discussion and costing. This could prolong what has come to be called “talk and log” – on-going discussions amongst interested parties about a particular resource while that resource continues to be depleted. This implies a need to place time bounds on discussions, and also to restrict activities causing the loss of specific resources while those discussions are underway. Some of the recommendations listed here have already been made by others, and some of these have been accepted by the Provincial Government, such as the recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review, although few have been implemented.

Many recommendations relate to the nature and operations of the forest industry, and to its relationship to the resource, namely the trees present in forest ecosystems. Forest professionals and other workers in the industry are for the most part doing their best every day to live up to their professional obligations and to do a good job. However, in some quarters, there is a need for a change in attitudes, seeing trees and forest ecosystems rather than fibre and timber supplies. Nonetheless, sawmills require a supply of logs and other forest product companies require various associated materials, often classed as waste (whether it is the material left in the forest, or the by-products of sawmilling). The logs have to be the right type for the product profile of the mill, and at a price that makes it economically feasible to derive a marketable product. Pulp mills also require raw materials, much of which is derived from sawmill waste streams. This is particularly important given the role that pulp mills are likely to play in new products. There are potential alternative ways to achieve these flows of materials that need further exploration.

A particular concern, and one that is associated with several recommendations, is the designation of areas for specific forms of land use, including conservation and timber harvesting. Two issues hinder this. Firstly, existing inventory data are limited and outdated. Secondly, land-use plans are inconsistent and out-dated. High quality data are needed for all levels of planning, but particularly for forest landscape plans, with First Nations and Government playing a major role in the initial scoping of such plans. Such plans need to be long-term, extending at least 250 years, spatially and temporally explicit, and closely tied to higher level plans. They will be essential for not only creating some level of certainty about timber supply, but also for planning carbon and conservation management actions. With carbon prices set to increase, the economics associated with harvesting economically marginal areas and with salvage are changing rapidly. However, benefiting from carbon will require a much better monitoring, verification and reporting system than currently exists.

Our key recommendations can be divided into five groups:

### **1. Address First Nations reconciliation issues**

- Canada's and BC's acceptance of UNDRIP requires that First Nations will play a much greater role in the management and development of their traditional, ancestral and unceded territories. This implies governance by First Nations, a significant step beyond co-governance and co-management.
- Capacity building amongst First Nations is required, and in particular the training of land managers that can blend traditional and 'western' knowledge and practices. Training of non-Indigenous land managers about Indigenous rights and titles is also needed.

### **2. Deal with land use and forest policy issues**

- The province needs a vision for the forest sector, broadly defined to include all aspects of forests and their products, supported by legislation and policies. This should be the basis for regionally-developed visions led by the Provincial Government and First Nations.
- The Forest Act needs to be modernized so that the provincial vision can be achieved (once developed), to make it consistent with the principles espoused in UNDRIP (as required by BCDRIPA), to accommodate changes including those associated with climate change adaptation and mitigation (especially carbon accounting). Associated legislation, including FRPA, needs modernization.
- Forest landscape plans should be developed based on updated regional land-use visions and plans. Forest landscape plans should be spatially and temporally explicit, and should adopt a zoning approach, with reserve areas and 'working forest' clearly and legally demarcated.
- Concerns about hydrology (e.g. flood risks, water supply) need to be incorporated into forest landscape plans.
- Follow the pathway outlined in the Old Growth Strategic Review to conserve and manage old growth in British Columbia. The most at-risk old growth types need to be identified and protected while discussions continue about the remainder of the resource.
- Much more emphasis needs to be placed on the maintenance of forest health, achieved through the application of sound silvicultural practices throughout the lifetime of forest stands in a changing climate. This needs to involve sound restoration strategies for damaged and compromised forest ecosystems.
- Sustainable intensification should be considered for some parts of the working forest.

### **3. Use innovation and new technologies to lower costs, improve efficiencies and support better carbon accounting**

- Greatly improved and up-to-date inventory data, including province-wide Lidar coverage, are needed to support better land-use planning, carbon accounting, and the need for stability,.
- The Province needs to develop a set of carbon offset protocols that include conservation of old growth, increasing landscape resilience, restoring degraded lands, restoring carbon stocks in disturbed forests, and storage of carbon in mass timber construction. Other policies could promote substitution of oil/coal/gas/concrete/steel products with sustainable bioproducts.

#### **4. Embrace and support the BC Forest Sector to be the carbon solution provider**

- Develop a more diverse manufacturing industry based on forest products derived from secondary forests by providing more opportunities for all sizes of enterprises to obtain fibre. This needs to be done while ensuring that the traditional industry has a secure, sustainable supply.
- Support growth and investment at all levels in the bio-economy and support it with good forest management. Establish favourable conditions for investment in small- and medium-sized enterprises that can develop and produce innovative forest-based products
- Invest in education, training and research, as well as in an effective public outreach program. This needs to include multiple components, including the training of practising foresters in sound silviculture and the maintenance of forest health.
- Increase the resilience of rural communities by providing the conditions necessary for the development of a diverse range of forest-related businesses.

#### **5. Create an independent panel to recommend how to remove the barriers identified in this report and how best to implement the recommendations**

This report does not pretend to represent a consensus view of all British Columbians. Instead, it presents the suggestions of a significant number of informed British Columbians as to how we might move out of the spiral of decline described in the first words of this summary.

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