

---

## **How Does the ABCFP Achieve the Public's Trust?**

(Third in a series)

August 2015

By Mike Larock, RPF, director of professional practice and forest stewardship; and  
Megan Hanacek, RPF, RPBio, forest stewardship specialist

**ARTICLE**

In the first two articles in this series, we explored what public trust is and whether we (as a profession and as individual professionals) have the public's trust. In this article we're going to talk about the work the ABCFP does to earn the public's trust on behalf of the profession and our members.

The ABCFP works hard to both earn and maintain the public's trust. We put processes in place to ensure only qualified people play a role in managing the forests. We try to be transparent with these processes – especially the complaints and discipline processes – to ensure the public can participate or observe what we do. We engage employers and others on the value of forest professionals' skills and the social recognition of these skills through the *Foresters Act*. Finally, we try to provide balanced perspectives – forestry is challenging and there are very few black and white answers.

Some of the processes we have include registration requirements to ensure only people with the right education and training can practise forestry. Once you become a registered member, you must abide by our Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, maintain your competency through the Continuing Professional Development program, as well as other bylaws.

The ABCFP also provides guidance for members on such things as professional independence – a key indicator of public trust. This type of guidance helps us assure the public that even though forest professional work for a specific employer, they also provide their expertise and service in the public's interest. In most cases, the benefit to the employer is that the professional is independent and a necessary foundation to their own social licence.

We have attempted to be as transparent as possible with our processes and procedures. All information about registration requirements, complaints and discipline, our bylaws and more is publicly available on our website. We even created a number of videos aimed at the layperson to explain the complicated concept of professional reliance in natural resource management and to walk people through how to launch a complaint.

One way we can measure the success of our transparency efforts is through regular surveys and polls to judge the public's trust in forest professionals and forest professionals' trust in each other. If you have the opportunity, please participate in these surveys and polls. The results provide us with excellent information that we use for internal planning as well as to take to government.

Finally, we strive to provide a balanced perspective. Have you ever sat in a planning meeting with others and wondered "is this action in the best interests of the public?" The ABCFP can and does provide a balanced perspective for the government and

managers on forest land. At the same time we provide advice and guidance to our members based on what we learned. Professional dialogue between multiple parties with interests in forests is the key to improving the public's trust in our profession and a basic requirement for good forest stewardship.

Everyone loses perspective sometimes. The ABCFP tries to provide a balanced perspective when we see things getting out of whack. We're also happy to help out when members need us -- we answer questions from members on a weekly basis. We respond to news stories -- both publicly and privately. We also bring stories to journalists when we think the public needs to know about an issue. And, we also challenge media coverage when we feel the whole complicated story of forestry is not told correctly with informed facts.

So that we don't lose perspective, we try to engage with the right people and strive to expand our network of advisors. We work with other organizations (such as the Forest Practices Board) to stay on top of stewardship issues around the province. Our stewardship committee always has a long list of issues that need to be considered. And when the profession decides on the best issue and approach then, the stewardship committee will investigate the issue and produce a report, or other information for members. One important area of work right now is the necessary climate change adaptation tools for forest professionals.

The ABCFP pursues the public's trust in several ways. Our qualification and competence processes, the complaints and discipline process, working with employers and government on stewardship issues, and reporting to members are a few of the ways we pursue public trust. Most importantly, we try to provide balanced perspectives to the public. The forest professionals continue to be trusted and respected sources of information regarding their forests, forest lands and forest resources.



*Ensuring BC's Forests Are In Good Hands.*