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## Get Involved in Your Forest's Management

August 2015

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**ARTICLE**

It is hard to imagine the moniker Super Natural British Columbia holding up if our province didn't have such vast forests. Almost 60% of the land base in BC is forested and 94% of the land is publicly owned. The fact that the majority of land is owned by the public makes BC unique in the world. Because the public is the primary landowner in the province, you have a responsibility to understand how that land is being managed and to speak up if you have concerns.

The good news is that you, the public is not alone. BC Forest professionals are located in every corner of the province; more than 5,300 registered forest professionals reside in communities from Fort Nelson to Port Hardy to Fernie, BC.

Our forest professionals have training and education to help them 'see the forest for the trees' and even then, it's not only about the trees but all the associated values that contribute to healthy ecosystems and healthy communities. These values include recreation opportunities, jobs, clean air and water, spiritual values and much more. Forest professionals are relied upon to hold together this rich tapestry of values in tandem with multiple other land users such as the public, tourism operators, ranchers, trappers, miners, and oil and gas extractors.

One doesn't have to be an expert to take an active interest in how BC's forests are managed. We urge the public – whether you live in a forest-dependent community like Prince George or in a condo in Vancouver – to learn more about the management of our forests. BC's forests serve as the backbone of the provincial economy by providing rural community stability and filling the coffers for socially supported medical services, public education and highway improvements. Sustainable decisions made in our rural and urban forests directly affect the high quality of life that citizens of British Columbia enjoy.

If you're wondering how the forest management framework works, you are not alone. Here's a 4-step primer. Step 1: The objectives for the land are set by government. Step 2: The forest companies (or other license holders) propose results or strategies to achieve the objectives. Step 3: The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations have a decision-maker who approves (or not) those results or strategies. Step 4: If approved, the forest companies decide on a method to accomplish the result. Forest professionals help the government and the forest companies work within this 4-step process. There are many other situations, rules, rights to follow and many different variables in the forest to consider – such as maintaining archaeological sites, water quality and protecting wildlife/fisheries habitat. The role of the forest professional is to plan and prescribe the path to achieve these objectives.

These forest management decisions are made with input from other natural resource professionals (such as engineers, geoscientists, biologists, agrologists and archaeologists) and in consultation with stakeholders and First Nations. In some cases, a tremendous amount of planning will be 'on the books' for several years while crucial professional assessments on terrain, wildlife, fisheries, visuals and timber value are conducted in conjunction with public consultation meetings. Additionally, the increase in land users (such as mining, forestry, recreation, oil and gas extraction) which are governed by other regulations, increasing access opportunities, and changing forests all add up to a greater requirement for public engagement.

Here's how you can learn more about the use and management of our forests. If you want to understand the complexity of the forest ecology, or management of forests for uses like recreation, then ask a forest professional. Chances are, one of our members is living in your community. Similarly, question published articles on issues which may overlap forestry management (e.g. water impacts from logging mountain beetle-affected stands or wolf culls to protect caribou populations) if a forest professional has not been consulted to provide information. Seek out a forest professional to discuss any unanswered questions you may have.

If you want to influence the goals and objectives of government, then communicate with your elected officials. Get involved when Forest Stewardship Plans (FSPs) and supplemental materials are advertised in your local paper for comment and review.

As a part owner in this fabulous natural resource, it is best to be informed. And when you begin to learn a little about the forest resource you will find that forest professionals have been there all along. You will see first-hand that forest professionals operate with factual information and research and with knowledge of forest uses. It's your job to decide what the public wants from its forests. If you want to know how to achieve what you want, well that is our job. Talk to your forest professional and get involved.



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