

**Principles of Stewardship of Forests, Forest Lands, Forest  
Resources and Forest Ecosystems**

**ASSOCIATION OF BC FOREST PROFESSIONALS**

June 1, 2011

Stewardship Committee

## 1.0 Preamble

The ABCFP provides bylaws to direct the professional practice of members and guidance documents to influence the behaviour of forest professionals in their professional practice. The bylaws and guidance documents related to the principles of forest stewardship provide a measure of professional performance and establish a platform for advocacy of the profession. The purpose of this document is to promote discussion in the interpretation and application of “principles of stewardship”. The first part provides six principles of stewardship with descriptions, and the second part provides the forest professional with an option of using four tests to demonstrate how their practice is consistent with the principles. The discussion document may lead to guidance for members in the application of principles of stewardship for forests, forest lands, forest resources and forest ecosystems.

### **ABCFP Members:**

The requirement for Principles are stated in the *Foresters Act* and members are directed to adhere to these Principles in a way that references potential disciplinary action (i.e. conduct unbecoming a member). Together the Principles and the Code of Ethics present powerful direction to members. They are linked through the Code of Ethics where a member has positive obligation to act if they believe a practice is detrimental to good forest stewardship of forest land. As a result, we need to ensure the Principles are technically sound to the extent that a forest professional can apply the principles in practice. Equally, the Principles are a protection to ensure that the forest professional is not overburdened with unreasonable expectations. The Stewardship Committee (SC) appreciates your opinion and comment.

Thank you.

ABCFP Stewardship Committee

## 2.0 Background

The *Foresters Act* establishes the profession by defining the practice of professional forestry, the classes of membership and the Association of BC Forest Professionals (ABCFP). It identifies that the ABCFP is composed of all of the members of the association and the members of council.

The word “stewardship” occurs three times in the *Foresters Act* and “principles of forest stewardship” are two of those instances:

- 1) Section 1 defines “conduct unbecoming a member” to include member conduct that “undermines the principles of stewardship that are the foundation of the practice of professional forestry.”
- 2) Section 4(2)(b) specifically directs the ABCFP “to advocate for and uphold principles of stewardship of forests, forest lands, forest resources and forest ecosystems.”
- 3) Section 11 (1) allows that Council may pass resolutions, including for “(1) the promotion of good forest stewardship.”

Specific words in the *Foresters Act* provide direction for the ABCFP and individual members – words such as **advocate** meaning “to recommend, support or advance something”; **uphold** meaning “to maintain, defend or act on something”; and **undermine** which means “to subvert, weaken or ruin by degrees”. **Principles** have been defined as “important underlying laws, similar to standards, rules, beliefs, or tenets” – also called “enduring truths”.

**Stewardship** is a broad and widely defined word. Stewardship specific to the forest profession is used in the *Foresters Act* as indicated above, and is described in ABCFP Bylaws 11 and 12.

**Bylaw 11 (Code of Ethics)** requires members “*To advocate and practice good stewardship of forest land based on sound ecological principles to sustain its ability to provide those values that have been assigned by society (11.3.1); [To deal with practice that is detrimental to good stewardship of forest land] (11.3.4); and To work to improve practices and policies affecting the stewardship of forest land (11.3.5).*”

**Bylaw 12 (Standards of Professional Practice) directs members to** “*demonstrate stewardship by balancing present and future values against the capacity of the land to provide for those values. The Guidelines for Interpretation of Bylaw 12 add that forest stewardship as “the care of natural resources taking into consideration the values of the landowners and society. Stewardship includes the application of an ecological understanding at the stand, forest and landscape levels, and is based upon an ethical responsibility to the land and the place of people in the natural world. Stewardship employs well-crafted solutions tailored specifically to each problem and embraces the diversity and complexity of the task at hand.”*”

The principles of forest stewardship in this document extend from the *Foresters Act* and are consistent with and utilize ABCFP Code of Ethics (Bylaw 11) and ABCFP Standards of Professional Practice (Bylaw 12). The discussion document may lead to guidance that would be intended to serve all or some of three distinct purposes for forest professionals:

1. Provide a guide for the measure of professional performance for members (Sec. 1);
2. Support the purpose of the ABCFP and its professionals (Sec. 4);
3. Establish a platform for advocacy by the association and forest professionals (Sec. 11).

The following principles of forest stewardship are complete when considered together and each one is informed by and overlaps with the other principles.

## 3.0 Principles for Meeting Forest Stewardship Obligations

### Stewardship

Stewardship, the term, has existed for about five hundred years. It arises from an ancient belief that humans are responsible for the world, and should take care of it. In the context of forest management it generally refers to caring for the land and resources and ensuring their management considers the needs of future generations. It is also an expectation that sufficient care will be applied to sustain ecological system attributes and to provide for short and long term benefits to an owner and society.

In this ABCFP discussion document forest stewardship is defined as follows:

### Definition of Forest Stewardship

Forest Stewardship is the responsible use of forest resources based on the application of an ecological understanding at the stand, forest and landscape levels, and based upon an ethical responsibility to the land and people.

### Expectations about Principles of Forest Stewardship

When guided by the principles of forest stewardship a forest professional will draw upon the science of forest ecosystems, the effects of disturbance and the interests of society – for both current and future generations. The application of stewardship employs well-crafted solutions tailored specifically to each problem and embraces the diversity and complexity of tasks at hand. The principles of forest stewardship will inform the opinions, advice and prescriptions of forest professionals in providing professional service to their clients or employers.

The following provides a description for the principles of forest stewardship that are the foundation of the practice of professional forestry and provide a measure for members to meet the principles of stewardship requirements of the forest profession.

### 3.1 Principles of Stewardship

1. **Resource Ownership:** Stewardship provides a flow of benefits consistent with the values of the owner and the interests of society, while protecting the ability of the natural system to continue to provide benefits.

Forest resources management begins with an understanding of the natural resources present and the landowners' objectives. In some cases, such as some private managed forest land ownership, the objectives are specific and clear. In other cases, such as extensive public ownership (Crown land), objectives may be less defined and resource managers will consider the needs of both current and future generations. In both

situations the management practices carried out today need to consider what changes are expected in the future, and also to recognize the risks and uncertainty associated with forecasting the future. Given the dynamic nature of forested landscapes, the forest professional should address uncertainty by considering a reasonable range of options and prescribing management decisions that meet the land owner objectives and maintain future decision flexibility (e.g. species selection, retention, silviculture systems, recreation, visuals, etc).

2. **Human Well-being:** Stewardship “manages” ecological systems for human benefits or well-being, recognizing that we live in social systems that are inextricably linked to ecological systems.

Human desires are the catalyst for stewardship, but not the focus. This principle recognizes the balance between understanding and managing our social systems and understanding and managing our ecological systems. This linked or embedded social-ecological system is complex and adaptive, meaning it does not always change and evolve in a predictable way. Understanding and managing the dynamics and trends on both sides of this complex adaptive system is therefore necessary for success.

3. **Ecological and Social Foundation:** Forest stewardship considers and weighs complex adaptive social and ecological interactions. A good stewardship model will adapt and continuously improve management systems to maintain or enhance the function and resilience of the social and ecological systems being managed.

Objectives for stewardship are also informed by an ecological and social context. That is, the condition and functioning of the ecosystems being managed as they are impacted by relevant human social influences currently and over time. Not all of these social influences will be related to forestry nor will they necessarily originate in the forest being managed (e.g. climate change).

Forest science and ecological knowledge are the basis for understanding the function and resilience of ecological systems. Understanding social influences requires knowledge and cooperation beyond these disciplines. Stewardship utilizes what is known about our social and ecological systems and how they interact, while being mindful about risk and uncertainty. Accordingly, stewardship makes use of the best available knowledge, science and expertise with regards to the complex adaptive social-ecological systems being managed. At the same time, stewardship requires the weighing of risk and uncertainty and the development of appropriate strategies to reflect this when required. The ultimate goal is to manage towards resilient social and ecological outcomes that reflect a desirable state – or one that has a capacity that can reasonably be expected to provide opportunities for current and future generations to access goods and services that support quality of life.

4. **Temporal Options:** Stewardship ensures current management actions intended to create benefits in the present, maintain future options.

Stewardship ensures appropriate temporal scales in the context of “Balancing this moment against future” or “Keeping options open for the future”. Stewardship can deliver on the short term benefits without losing sight of the long term implications and the ability to provide values over much longer periods. This requires decisions today that can manage uncertainty by maintaining future options. Expectations about the future should weigh and account for foreseeable future events as well as possible shocks and surprises. This also implies that there is a vision for the structure and composition of the future forest that links to the ability to provide for a range of potential options.

5. **Spatial Strategies:** Stewardship ensures appropriate spatial scales are used to assess, plan and implement forest management.

Stewardship occurs at a variety of spatial scales. The spatial scale applied for one specific stewardship practice does not exclude the use of other possible scales for other stewardship practices. Over all, the variety of spatial scales necessary to apply stewardship must nest within each other and together. To appropriately integrate management into this complexity in an efficient manner, while avoiding unexpected outcomes over time, stewardship considers the appropriate spatial scales in all decisions. In this way, the context provided by the changing biophysical environment, and societal/landowner values at numerous scales is continually analysed and integrated. With that in mind, strategies to address challenges or opportunities over time generally must be applied at different or multiple spatial scales. The “appropriate scale” (management unit, landscape, watershed, stand, ecosystem/site, etc) is defined as the best scale suited for the task to ensure other stewardship principles are addressed. The appropriate scales will therefore be a function of the challenge or opportunity being addressed, and the context provided by the biophysical environment, social values and objectives. In some cases the appropriate scale will be landscape level and in other cases it may be the tactical, stand or some other level(s). For example, by the time the professional is making or implementing a decision at the stand or site level (e.g. deciding on species choice for reforestation), they may only have to consider one scale (e.g. subwatershed), because the practitioner is confident that the decisions already made at larger scales do incorporate the appropriate considerations into that level.

6. **Adaptive Practice:** Stewardship requires the practicing professional to develop strategies for dealing with risk and uncertainty in forest management decisions. In order to do this well, it is imperative that the practitioner also incorporate an adaptive approach to professional work in order to accommodate anticipated conditions and plan for action in the face of the uncertainty.

Change is a common factor in the management of forest ecosystems and resources. Unexpected change and uncertainty in resource management can result from many factors, such as environmental aspects, changes in objectives, economics, incorrect

assumptions, past decisions, a lack of knowledge, new knowledge, just to name a few. The adaptive approach to the practice of professional forestry is one that recognizes risk and uncertainty in decision making. It encourages professionals to be innovative by following an adaptive program of continuous planning that adjusts management over time in response to ongoing, thoughtful monitoring and research (as a minimum – investigation of pertinent literature). Utilizing an adaptive approach to professional practice is an effective way of coping with the uncertainty and informing decision making in the future. A thoughtful, adaptive approach to stewardship provides the opportunity to reduce the negative effects of unknown outcomes and their potential consequences. Adaptive professional practice is an effective management method of achieving a continuous flow of ecosystem services while respecting that we simply don't know everything we would like to about the future.

The principles of forest stewardship, documented above, are guiding principles within which the ABCFP understands the direction of the *Foresters Act* to **advocate for and uphold principles of stewardship of forests**. The ABCFP will achieve the broad legislative direction by providing guidance to members on how to conduct their professional practice consistent with the principles of stewardship.

## **4.0 Guidance on Professional Practice and Conduct Necessary to Uphold the Principles of Stewardship of Forests, Forest Lands, Forest Resources and Forest Ecosystems**

The Principles of Stewardship of Forests are intended to be broadly interpreted. Because specific practice activities in the forest are the management prerogative of the landowner or government, a forest professional may be judged on the content and the delivery of their professional work however the outcomes may be beyond their control. The following questions provide the forest professional with a method to demonstrate how their practice is consistent with the principles.

**“I am confident that my professional work upholds the principles of stewardship of forests, forest resources and forest ecosystems when it meets the following tests.”**

### **4.1 Legal Test**

**“Does my professional work (...advising on, performing or directing works, services or undertakings...[Sec1 *Foresters Act*]) comply with the applicable laws?”**

The legal test can include the following questions:

- Do I know which laws apply that incorporate the practice of professional forestry?
- Can I demonstrate that I am working within my area of expertise or I have sufficient mentorship?
- Does my work meet the legal requirements? (including standards, ethics and peer review)

## **4.2 Knowledge and Application Test**

**“Does my professional work consider the requisite knowledge and information on each stewardship principle?”**

The knowledge and application test can include the following questions:

- Can I demonstrate that my professional work is informed by the current and available information?
- Can I demonstrate an appropriate level of investigation and risk assessment using appropriate scales and timelines?
- Can I demonstrate that my professional work applies the principles of stewardship?

## **4.3 Communication Test**

**Does my professional work properly communicate the necessary information to show that it is consistent with the principles of stewardship?**

The communication test can include the following questions:

- Is my professional work supported by sufficient rationale so that, where required, others can implement recommendations or prescriptions for action and meet the objectives and commitments embodied in my work?
- Have I considered who it is important to communicate with?
- Have I explained what I did to lead to a clear understanding?
- Is the professional signature and seal on professional documents? Where no professional documents exist, is there a professional record of work sufficiently clear to provide professional assurance?
- Is there sufficient documentation and verbal direction for the implementation and results of my professional work?

## **4.4 Outcomes & Balance Test**

**Do I use a reasonable and balanced approach in my professional work?**

The outcomes and balance test can include the following questions:

- Does my professional work incorporate a clear analysis of the range of practical options?
- Have I addressed, to an appropriate level, the assumptions, contrasts, and context of my professional work?
- Does my professional work incorporate my recommendations?
- Have I addressed appropriate reporting on progress towards achieving the landowners goals for resource management?

## **Comments?**

Please send comments by e-mail to Mike Larock, RPF: [mlarock@abcfp.ca](mailto:mlarock@abcfp.ca) or by mail to:

Association of BC Forest Professionals  
330-321 Water Street  
Vancouver, BC V6B 1B8