

Cabinet Decision Document

MINISTER:

Minister of State for Forestry Operations Roger Harris

TITLE:

Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan Update

ISSUE: FOR DECISION

In November 2003, the Premier hosted a symposium in Quesnel, bringing together community leaders, First Nations, scientists, forest health experts, industry representatives and environmentalists. The symposium was an opportunity to review previous and existing management strategies, and to look for ways to lessen the beetle's long-term impact on jobs. This updated action plan reflects the directions coming out of the Quesnel symposium.

RECOMMENDATION:

Implement updated action plan.

BACKGROUND:

The pine beetle is a natural phenomenon and only sustained cold weather can stop the beetle. This action plan builds on strategies contained in the 2001 mountain pine beetle action plan, which was itself, the result of an MLA task force. Since 2001, this government has taken many actions to combat the mountain pine beetle epidemic:

- Appointed Beetle Management Coordinator
- Established management zones
- Made regulatory changes to streamline beetle harvest
- Increased the AAC in beetle-affected areas by 7.8 million cubic metres per year
- Slowed the spread at the epidemic's perimeter by removing small patches of infested trees.

The mountain pine beetle infestation continues to grow. It has expanded from an area of approximately 165,000 hectares in 1999 to 4.2 million hectares in 2003. As most trees attacked by the mountain pine beetle inevitably die, the epidemic is currently estimated to create approximately 500 million cubic metres of grey wood over the next one to three years, of which 200 million cubic metres could potentially remain unharvested.

In October 2003, the Chief Forester released the report, Timber Supply and the Mountain Pine Beetle Infestation in B.C., which assesses the implications of the beetle epidemic in 12 management units (five tree farm licences and seven timber supply areas: Morice, Lakes, Prince George, Quesnel, Williams Lake, 100 Mile House and Kamloops) that represent the more severely infested areas in south-central B.C. from Houston to Kamloops.

The report concludes that:

- Across the 12 management units, it is possible that an average of 50 percent of pine stands could be affected by mountain pine beetle over the next one to three years;
- About 15 years from now (when it is assumed that beetle-killed trees might have deteriorated to the point where they're no longer merchantable as saw logs), the timber supply across the 12 units could be reduced by about 19 per cent, relative to the AAC that was in place before the epidemic (pre-uplift AAC). The impacts are expected to vary greatly amongst management units;
- In the Quesnel TSA (one of the most severely infested areas), the timber supply may decline by about 29 percent, compared to the pre-uplift AAC; and
- If harvest levels remain at today's levels, about 200 million cubic metres of beetle-killed pine could ultimately remain unharvested.

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In response to the issues identified in Quesnel and the beetle epidemic generally, the mountain pine beetle action plan has been updated to:

- foster new and emerging forest-based activities;
- limit further damage to forests and the environment;
- recover value from damaged timber; and,
- support and encourage economic development and diversity in affected communities.

Minister of State for Forestry Operations is the designated ministerial lead. He will be supported by the Deputy Ministers' Committee on Environment and Resource Development. Bob Clark, Beetle Management Coordinator and Jim Sproul, Economic Diversification Director, will also provide support.

A 12-member Minister's Community Advisory Group, representing key stakeholder groups will provide advice on the action plan as it is implemented. Members include representatives from communities, First Nations, forest industry, forest health experts, logging contractors, First Nations and the federal government.

Harvest activities include continuing to re-direct harvest from green timber to beetle-damaged wood; extending cutting permits to redirect harvest to beetle wood; developing new tenure opportunities; and conducting expedited allowable annual cut reviews in Quesnel, Vanderhoof and Burns Lake.

Government will also implement Filmon Report recommendations for forest health, including prescribed burns, tree removal, falling/burning beetle-infested trees and reducing fuels in parks.

In addition to marketing activities pursued through Forestry Innovation Investment, government will also encourage innovation for alternate uses for beetle wood, by seeking expressions of interest for new uses of beetle damaged wood. Potential uses could include products such as OSB or pellet manufacturing, or hog fuel for cogeneration facilities.

Beetle wood will also be promoted through a combination of efforts to support access to international markets, and then to accelerate the use of beetle wood in those markets. In November 2003 the Premier witnessed the signing of a letter of intent with the Chinese Academy of Forestry, which will enable the use of beetle wood in structural applications in subsequent phases of the Dream Home China project.

To assist communities, the director of economic diversification will interact with the Northern Development Initiative. His role will be to ensure that local governments, First Nations, and industry in the beetle-infested areas are aware of medium and long-term economic impacts and their role in mitigating the impacts and can readily access the support available from senior governments to facilitate economic diversification.

The economic diversification director will also ensure all regions and communities impacted by the pine beetle epidemic are included and participate in economic development activities that recognize their individual strengths and challenges.

With the beetle management coordinator, the economic diversification director will ensure all fiber and non-fiber economic development opportunities, regardless of their size, are explored for their potential to contribute to a broader economic base.

A presentation was made to the Cabinet Committee on Environment and Resource Development on March 22, 2004.

FISCAL MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS:

It is estimated that it will cost approximately \$50,000 to pay meeting and travel costs for the Minister's Advisory Group.

SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS:

LEGISLATION REQUIRED?

Not required.

CONSULTATIONS?

The Premier held a symposium in Quesnel in November 2003. The major elements coming out that symposium are reflected in this updated action plan.

Additionally, the Minister's Community Advisory Group will provide ongoing input as the action plan is implemented. The Minister's Community Advisory Group is made up of representatives from key stakeholder groups impacted by the beetle epidemic.

SIGNATURE:

Minister of State for Forestry Operations, Roger Harris

DATE: MARCH 31, 2004

KEY CONTACT:

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