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Ministry of Forests

RESULTS-BASED REGULATIONS REVITALIZE RESOURCE SECTORS

VICTORIA – The new Forest and Range Practices Act regulations will help restore competitiveness to the forest and range sectors by promoting industry innovation and reducing red tape while upholding environmental standards, said Forests Minister Michael de Jong.

“Since the focus of the regulations is with ‘practices on the ground,’ government was able to eliminate duplicative and unnecessary paperwork – reducing regulatory requirements from the previous code by 55 per cent,” said de Jong. “At the same time, we’re setting clearer objectives for environmental protection and backing it up with stiffer penalties for non-compliance, ensuring that our international markets continue to have confidence that B.C.’s forests are sustainably managed.”

Once the act is fully implemented, the Ministry of Forests’ overall regulatory count will drop by about 50 per cent. The forest stewardship plan replaces three operational plans previously required under the Forest Practices Code. As well, 18 approval steps are eliminated.

The results-based framework promotes innovation in the forestry and livestock industries while upholding high environmental standards. The new regime is supported by tough penalties; for example, the maximum penalty for non-compliance has increased from \$100,000 to \$500,000. As well, for the first time, government has the authority to intervene to prevent environmental damage; and clearer objectives are set for key environmental values.

The new regulations require licence holders to prepare plans that are consistent with resource management objectives that have been established by government. As just one example, the objective set by government for wildlife is to conserve sufficient habitat for the survival of species at risk, specified ungulates and regionally important species.

“For the first time, forest resource planning regulations provide clear and consistent direction for balancing the values British Columbians want and enjoy from their forests,” said John Allan, president and CEO of the Council of Forest Industries. “For example, there is an objective for timber that addresses the need to maintain an economically valuable supply of commercial timber. However, this must be done in a manner that takes into consideration all other objectives such as water, soil, biodiversity, fish and wildlife.”

“The Forest and Range Practices Act improves the protection of ecosystems, water quality, and critical fish and wildlife species by setting clear objectives and high standards for conservation,” said Water, Land and Air Protection Minister Joyce Murray. “By focusing on results rather than paperwork, we can better protect our forests and our environment.”

“The beef industry will benefit from having more options on how they manage their livestock and rangeland,” said David Borth, executive director of the B.C. Cattlemen’s Association.

“This is a positive step forward for woodlot operators,” said Brian McNaughton, general manager of the Federation of B.C. Woodlot Associations. “By being more flexible, the new regulations allow woodlot licensees the freedom they require to do business more efficiently and practice better forestry.”

The new regulations go into effect Jan. 31, but forest and range licence holders have until Dec. 31, 2005 to operate under the old Forest Practices Code or switch to the streamlined Forest and Range Practices Act and regulations.

A key element of the shift to results-based forest practices includes strengthening the role of resource professionals in the development and delivery of credible and workable resource management strategies. Professional foresters, agrologists, biologists, hydrologists, geoscientists and other experts are charged with applying their knowledge, training and expertise to ensure resource management decisions are based on the best available science that balances the principles of sustainability and protection of the environment.

Training on the new regulations will begin in early February for almost 7,000 government and industry personnel.

The minister noted that this initiative has been two years in the making and was highly informed by public input, input from the Forest and Range Practices Advisory Council and input from the resource sectors. “I am confident that this new results based approach represents a fair and balanced way to manage our important forest and range resources,” said Minister de Jong.

Additional information on the Forest and Range Practices Act and regulations is available on the Ministry of Forests Web site at www.for.gov.bc.ca/code.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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