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Ministry of Forests

PROTECTING KEY ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

The results-based framework for forest practices meets government's New Era commitment to create a leading edge forest industry that is globally recognized for its productivity and environmental stewardship.

The Forest and Range Practices Act and its regulations maintain the high standards established by the Forest Practices Code, and further enhances them by:

- setting clearer objectives for key environmental values;
- streamlining the ability of government to set objectives;
- increasing the accountability of commercial operators for their practices; and
- creating flexibility to allow better practices to be used.

The new approach reduces the regulations not by reducing or eliminating environmental protection, but by, for example, eliminating duplicate approval processes and by requiring fewer but more comprehensive plans by forest and range operators.

Setting clearer objectives

The Forest and Range Practices Act and regulations set out government's objectives for managing and conserving environmental resource values, and makes it clear who has the statutory authority for designating areas and for establishing objectives for special management.

Some objectives are stated directly in regulation. These include:

- Planning and practices regulations for forest and woodlot tenure holders that set clear objectives to protect values including soils, timber, wildlife, water, fish, biodiversity, and cultural heritage resources.
- Planning and practices regulation for range tenure holders sets clear objectives for values including soils, forage and plant communities, water, fish, wildlife and biodiversity.

Under the Act, the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection has clear authority to establish:

- categories of species that are endangered, threatened or vulnerable;
- categories of regionally important species;
- categories of ungulate species for which winter range is required;
- wildlife habitat, and objectives and measures for these areas;
- identify fisheries-sensitive watersheds, and objectives for these areas,
- designate temperature-sensitive streams to help conserve fish; and
- establish water quality objectives for community watersheds.

The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management will shortly introduce an objective to establish old growth forest retention targets to be met in all forest stewardship plans. Previously, there were no province-wide objectives to protect old growth stands.

Objectives set by government are an important component of the new results-based code, since forest licensees are required to prepare results or strategies for established objectives in their forest stewardship plans. These objectives define the environmental outcome government expects forest licensees to implement on the ground.

Streamlined ability to set objectives

Government's ability to set objectives has been streamlined and improved. Under the regulations, government is able to set localized objectives for values including interpretive forest sites, recreation sites, recreation trails, wildlife habitat areas, ungulate winter ranges, lakeshore management zones, water quality for community watersheds, fisheries sensitive watersheds and visual quality.

Increased accountability measures

Under the Act, forest and range agreement holders are now directly accountable for delivering environmental results or strategies they commit to in their operational plans. Accountability is strengthened through increased reliance on professional resource managers and a rigorous compliance and enforcement program.

Additionally, government now has the power to intervene before a contravention occurs, for example, if there is an unacceptable risk of damage to the environment or public health and safety. This power did not exist under the Forest Practices Code.

Under the Act and regulations, there are strong enforcement provisions backed by joint compliance and enforcement resources of both the Ministry of Forests and the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

The independent watchdog role of the Forest Practices Board has been maintained.

Flexibility to produce better results

Under the Act and its regulations, government specifies the on-the-ground standards (practice requirements) for field activities such as stream crossings, insect control or the construction, maintenance, and deactivation of roads, bridges, and culverts that must be followed by all operators. As well, there are default standards for certain activities. Licensees may follow these standards or propose alternate strategies consistent with objectives. In this way, the results-based approach enables a higher level of environmental protection to be adopted.

