



Investigating Innovative Ways to Improve & Enhance the Forest Resources in Alberta

**Submitted to Honourable Devin Dreeshen
Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
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Report to: Hon. Devin Dreeshen Minister of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

“Confidential”

Introduction

The Alberta Forest Products Association (AFPA) appreciates the opportunity to provide you with our report. This work will support our mutual goal of maintaining a healthy forest industry that will benefit all Albertans economically, while ensuring sustainable management of public forest resources. As circumstances change, it is necessary to examine current practices and opportunities to improve industry access to Alberta’s forest resources.

The Alberta Forest Products Association (AFPA) appreciates the opportunity to participate in this project, which was initiated by your staff at a collaborative meeting on December 6, 2019. The challenge you presented to industry and government forest managers was to explore Alberta’s capacity to increase wood supply from Crown land, without jeopardizing sustainability.

In response to the request, a Steering Committee made up of industry and government staff was formed in early January 2020 to compile recommendations within the following themes:

- increasing the forest land base
- growing the forest faster
- improving forest management policies & strategies

To complete the project, industry provided funds with the support of the Forest Resource Improvement Association. These funds were used to engage independent consultants to interview subject matter experts (SMEs) from academia, consulting practices, independent public experts (retired), government staff, and industry. They provided a diversity of perspectives, best-in-class advice, and a level of independence, to advise the Steering Committee in their development of recommendations. The following are recommendations to Alberta Agriculture & Forestry from the Steering Committee. Please note that these recommendations were developed without direct involvement from AA&F staff. We have also enclosed, under separate cover, the SME report that was developed and distributed to all Steering Committee members in early March.

The forest industry is well-positioned to continue contributing to Alberta’s social, environmental and economic goals. As long as Alberta’s forest tenure system provides secure access to forest land and adequate timber supply it will continue to incent the industry to invest in manufacturing facilities and carrying out sustainable forest management on behalf of Alberta which ultimately benefits all Albertans. The AFPA believes that the recommendations presented in this report, when implemented, will further increase the forest industry’s economic contribution to Alberta and ability to remain competitive in the global market.

Recommendations to Increase Wood Supply

The following is a summary of the Steering Committee’s recommendations:

1. Improving or enhancing the forest resources by **adding landbase** to the working forest

Maintaining and increasing the forest landbase is the quickest way to maintain/increase the forest industry’s contribution to Alberta. Landbase additions can be accomplished by:

- Allowing access to forested areas in the White Zone
- Allocating Forest Management Units that are not currently allocated
- Responsible management of disturbance within protected areas
- Reducing operational constraints.

Opportunity	What will it take
White Zone: the White Zone has forested areas that remain Crown lands and could represent an opportunity to supplement forestry in a region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ most areas likely require updated management plans and eligibility for tenure ♦ some areas may require new forest inventories
Unallocated Forest Management Units (FMUs): adding productive forest landbase from the Green Zone is the easiest approach to increase or maintain harvest levels in Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ would require a regional assessment to determine socio-economic viability as well as most suitable tenure type and allocation method
Protected Areas: will be more challenging due to social expectations. However forest managers recognize that protected forest landscapes require some intervention in order to lessen the risks from natural disturbances, thus ensuring their values can be sustained for the long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ forest health in parks and protected areas is a serious issue where timber harvesting should (could) be a management tool to proactively address wildfire, Mountain Pine Beetle and other forest health risks, and as a post-event recovery treatment
Modification of existing operational constraints: various constraints applied to conserve other values have the effect of reducing volume and/or forest landbase when other options may exist if based on adequate effectiveness monitoring (adaptive management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ modifying existing operational constraints while still respecting non-timber values ♦ managing for other values needs to take in the entire landscape including the passive landbase within the working forest, and the forests in adjacent parks and protected areas ♦ using science as the driver: acceptance that strict protection may not always assure the value is protected - consider forest management’s long-term value

2. Improving or enhancing the forest resource by **growing the forest faster** and/or increasing yield

The SMEs outlined that longer-term forest resource investment to increase industry’s contribution to Alberta can be accomplished by:

- advancing our understanding of forest growth and yield
- enhancing forest management practices and tree improvement.

Sound silvicultural practises are the mainstay of the current forest management systems in Alberta. Prompt reforestation efforts support not only sustainable timber harvesting but also other forest values, public trust, and hence continued access for economic development.

Opportunity	What will it take
<p>Growth & Yield: growth and yield advances have been proven in other jurisdictions to provide significant gains in long-term sustained yield (similar to the agriculture sector). There are knowledgeable and experienced growth and yield experts in the province, and additional resources are readily available worldwide to improve our knowledge of growing Alberta’s forests with acceptable levels of risk or doubt.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ planning processes and monitoring will allow flexibility (i.e. adaptive management) in order to address risk ♦ we need to consider learnings from other jurisdictions ♦ willingness to think outside the box and accept a level of risk while awaiting monitoring results – promote innovation and adaptive management
<p>Enhanced Forest Management (EFM): EFM could reduce rotation ages while maintaining the desired log profile for industry, resulting in increased Annual Allowable Cuts (AACs). Shortened rotation ages would result in reduced risks from other natural disturbance factors (e.g. fire). There are good EFM opportunities across all forest types in Alberta – and these likely would be worthwhile to implement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ current policy supports this (clause within Forest Management Agreements) ♦ timely acceptance of adaptive forest management principles ♦ there are opportunities to be gained by applying principles that have been proven in other jurisdictions to guide decisions while waiting for long-term monitoring to verify expected forest development ♦ EFM also supports other objectives (i.e. climate change and carbon sequestration)
<p>Tree Improvement Programs: A robust tree improvement program can positively impact the amount of sustainable timber supply available in the province. For example, it can either shorten rotation ages (e.g. ~60 yrs.) with an equivalent fibre yield or retain existing rotation ages with an increase in fibre yields. This flexibility provides options to implement varying forest management strategies across the landscape</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ establish a provincial “stretch” target for genetic gain including the requirement for a joint government/industry plan to achieve the target. The concept of industry and AA&F working cooperatively to achieve a common goal is paramount ♦ promote courage and a level of risk that is aligned with the “stretch” target

3. Policy improvement for better forest management of Alberta’s forest resources

Alberta’s current forest management policies support the principle of “Sustained Yield” that are meant to achieve community stability through even flow forecasting of Annual Allowable Cuts for decades (e.g. 200 year forecasting). The SMEs suggested ideas to modernize the current sustained yield policy in Alberta to provide for improved management of all forest values, security of tenure, forest management planning, incentives, and dealing with ever changing risk management.

Opportunity	What will it take
<p>Sustainability of forest values and resources: there is a need to change our collective position on what constitutes sustained yield because of climate risks, such as fire and MPB</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ management for other values needs to include the entire landscape including the passive land base within the working forest and the forests in adjacent parks and protected areas ♦ recognition that the “even flow” is not always part of sustainable forest management ♦ explore alternatives to the current definition of sustained yield ♦ acceptance of a more adaptive approach to sustained yield determination over the long-term
<p>Forest Management Planning: Alberta’s forest management framework needs to be updated, expanding concepts and approaches to more contemporary forest management thinking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ create a policy that places value on timber when conducting timber supply analysis ♦ secure access to actively manage forested landscapes to manage for other values such as future caribou habitat, watershed management, climate change, risk, etc. ♦ a quote from the SME Report - “Current timber supply planning in Alberta is becoming more of an impact analysis on other values as opposed to projecting and designing a future forest”
<p>Constraints vs Incentives: all forest managers (GOA, industry and academic) must be recognized for the great work of the past and acknowledge the need for continuous improvement. There is a growing need to be collectively promoting forestry, to enhance trust between GOA and industry, and to place accountability where it needs to be. The opportunity to reward performance and stop under performance by some is in the mutual best interest of all forest managers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ look to where industry needs to be in future and define what you want from your forests in the long term, not simply the next couple of years ♦ incent innovation and investment in forest management, versus constrain and direct
<p>Risk and Tolerance: forest managers (GOA and industry) need to collaboratively recognize and prioritize forest values at risk, identify levels of risk, and then work towards ensuring that forestry operations are focused on reducing these risks for both the benefit of wood supply and other forest values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ need to incorporate risk management directly into the forest management planning process ♦ clearly define what we want from our forests and then design systems to get there ♦ instill a higher tolerance for risk, reduce continual demands for more information before implementing

Summary

Our report was derived from the views and opinions of subject matter experts and industry leaders who freely shared their considerable knowledge to support our shared goal of improving the forest sector's economic contributions to Alberta. One underlying theme that was present throughout much of the feedback, but not captured in the summaries, was the different tolerances for risk that industry and government are willing to accept in forest management policy and practice. This was also expressed as a lack of trust between forest managers resulting in perceptions that we do not share the same goals. We understand, and accept, that industry must retain a high level of accountability for delivering on commitments to Albertans for their forest resource. We also believe there is room for some additional risk in forest management policy without compromising key social and environmental values that we share. It will be difficult to attain your goal without accepting some additional risk. We recognize there is a delicate balance and we look forward to finding that balance under your guidance. The adaptive management approach we follow in Alberta will always ensure we adjust as we go to minimize that risk to our forests.

The AFPA is very encouraged by your initiative to increase Alberta's annual allowable cut. There are many significant opportunities that are worthy of dedicated investigation. The AFPA is fully prepared to engage with you and your Ministry to further this important work. We look forward to your direction regarding the next steps in this process. Should you decide to proceed, we commit to providing regular progress reports to keep us accountable to you. Thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations.