

Bulkley Timber Supply Area Pilot Proposal – Executive Summary

The intent of the Bulkley Timber Supply Area Pilot Project is to test results-based forest practices guided by revised legislation, and to produce efficiencies in costs and administration for both licensees and government agencies.

The pilot area is the Bulkley Timber Supply Area within the Bulkley/Cassiar Forest District in the Prince Rupert Forest Region. This proposal is unique in that it covers the entire timber supply area (TSA), and comprises approximately 9.6% of the allowable annual cut (AAC) in the Prince Rupert Region.

Project proponents include all major licensees operating in the Bulkley/Cassiar Forest District: West Fraser Mills Ltd., the Bulkley District Small Business Forest Enterprise Program, Skeena Cellulose Inc., and the Moricetown Band Council (managed by Canadian Forest Products Ltd.).

Perhaps the most noteworthy asset of the project is the fact that the Bulkley District has a cabinet-approved Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) that was formulated by a Community Resources Board, with inter-agency participation. The Community Resources Board continues to play a role in monitoring LRMP results, and fine-tuning and/or refining LRMP content.

The Bulkley District also has Landscape Unit Plans (LUPs) for most of the operating areas. Within the landscape units, biodiversity objectives are considered higher level plans, while other objectives (e.g., wildlife, timber, recreation) are considered District Manager Policy. Publicly approved higher level plans form the basis of forest management in the Bulkley TSA, and will continue this role in the pilot proposal.

There are three phases to the Bulkley pilot project:

Phase I – streamline and reduce redundancy in operational plans.

Presently, there is significant replication in licensee operational plan and application submissions that consumes valuable time for both industry and agency professionals. Phase I of the pilot project would see much of the redundant administrative content removed from individual submissions and placed within the forest development plan (FDP). An investigation by local district and regional staff will determine the maximum change permissible without requiring legislative revisions.

Phase II – encompass all operational planning requirements and approvals into “one plan” -- an improved FDP.

With much of the operational plan redundancy being eliminated with Phase I, and the majority of significant content being incorporated into the FDP, Phase II would shift all agency review and approval, and public review processes, to the FDP. Silviculture prescriptions, road permit amendments, logging plans, and other site-specific operational plans would be reduced in size and format, and kept on file for audit or inspection purposes.

The FDP would contain all necessary information to review operations planned for a period of greater than five years (with the suggestion to go to a 20-year plan, with a five-year approval and one-year operating plan, similar to Alberta). The FDP would also detail how the planned development meets the objectives and strategies outlined in the LRMP and LUPs (or would provide rationale for variances from the strategies or objectives).

Opportunities for First Nations input into the development of 20-year plans will be provided in areas identified as having cultural significance.

Phase III – streamline and/or eliminate information requirements and approvals; incorporate adaptive management principles in resource management to shift legislation from a prescriptive framework to a results-based framework.

Phase III allows for increased reliance on professional judgement and improvement of business practices. A key component is the ability to adapt and change practices over time.

Examples of areas where the pilot proponents feel changes in practices may be advantageous and workable include:

- riparian management -- licensees would be allowed to vary riparian management areas, depending on site-specific conditions. Riparian management prescriptions would be developed prior to harvest and included in operational plans. Success of the prescriptions would be evaluated following operations.
- deactivation -- deactivation measures would be determined as a result of joint ministry/licensee field reviews. Areas of high risk for environmental concerns would be prescribed for deactivation. Areas of moderate to low risk would be deemed a Crown resource, and would not be deactivated.
- road construction -- no road permit amendments would be required if certain sections of road require assessments following the initial permit application; the recommendations of these assessments could be incorporated into the FDP through an amendment.
- drainage structures -- rather than applying a strict Q₁₀₀ rating to all drainage installations, where professional designs and local knowledge permit, allow structures less than Q₁₀₀ to be installed (with the assumption that water quality and fish passage are maintained).
- silviculture -- remove the requirement for periodic stocking status reporting (silviculture surveys) under the Silviculture Practices Regulation, with the only formal submission being the free growing survey (all other stocking information to be recorded by the licensee in an auditable in-house format). Regeneration delay reporting would be incorporated into inventory labels on forest cover map updates.
- stand-level biodiversity -- rather than referencing a specific number from the Landscape Unit Plans, stand structure can be managed at the cutblock level by prescribing wildlife tree patch and coarse woody debris requirements dependent on the habitat values in the block. The result would be site-specific direction to protect stand-level biodiversity.

- FDP -- to further streamline FDPs, the potential exists to take sections of the FDP that are essentially the same for each licensee, and move that information into the Landscape Unit Plans as District Manager Policy (or a District Development Plan or Management Plan). The District Development Plan or Management Plan could be the source of “known” information, and could also be the mechanism for reporting landscape-level information requirements (i.e., patch size distribution and seral stage requirements) in a coordinated manner.
- compliance and enforcement (C&E) -- opportunities would be reviewed to move the C&E role of the Ministry of Forests to a results-based monitoring role. This would require more reliance on professional accountability and adaptive management, and a shift to an enforcement role (perhaps similar to how WCB regulations are enforced). This shift in the C&E role would not apply to the Small Business Forest Enterprise Program.

Review of results would include FDP open house meetings and audit results (internal, ministry, and Forest Practices Board). In terms of public accountability, the Community Resources Board (with a wide range of perspectives represented) would be called upon to view reports verifying results and to view sites in the field.