
Executive Summary

Forests figure prominently in the well-being of British Columbia's environment, economy and communities. Ensuring sustainable forest management is therefore vital to the province's health on many levels.

British Columbia's progress in achieving sustainable forest management is challenging to assess, not only because of the subject's complexity, but also because of the varying opinions and viewpoints people bring to the topic. An understanding of current conditions and of the adequacy of information to assess them will provide a basis on which to make informed decisions into the future.

This report is part of the Ministry of Forests' efforts to enable assessment of sustainable forest management across the province. The purpose is two-fold:

- To provide information and links to enable readers to assess for themselves the province's progress in achieving sustainable forest management.
- To provide the ministry's assessment of that progress.

The information and assessment provided in this report are for six of 24 indicators that merge national-level frameworks of indicators with issues important to British Columbia. The ministry is committed to publishing a second report in 2005 that will add 6 more indicators and a third report in 2006 that will cumulatively address all 24 indicators.

Summaries for the first six indicators covered in this report are presented below and in Figure 1.

Environmental Indicators

Information and the ministry's assessment are provided for 2 of 10 environmental indicators: [Ecosystem diversity](#) and [Protected forests](#).

British Columbia's rich natural resources include vast and diverse forests. In terms of forest types and ages, most of this diversity still exists 150 years after the start of European settlement.

A reasonably representative 10% of the province's forests are today protected in parks and other protected areas. These protected forests, along with other forest areas, provide large tracts of natural habitat for plants and animals, as well as undeveloped areas for scientific study and wilderness recreation.

Some forest types and their associated plants and animals are threatened by development.

Despite the substantial databases already assembled for these two indicators, information needs for assessing sustainable forest management in these areas are being only partially met.

Ministry's partial assessment based on these two indicators

Despite some concerns, the prospects for environmental sustainability in British Columbia's forests are positive.

Economic and Social Indicators

Information and the ministry's assessment are provided for 2 of 10 economic and social indicators: [Timber harvest](#) and [First Nations involvement](#).

Much of British Columbia's economic development in the 1800s and 1900s depended on the forest sector. After a century of rapidly increasing timber harvest, the level of cut stabilized in the 1990s and is forecast to be sustainable. However, significant decreases in some local timber supplies are expected and will require transition strategies for forest-dependent communities.

The involvement of First Nations people in the timber-based economy has increased in recent years and is expected to grow further. While First Nations participation in forest management has increased, many issues regarding aboriginal rights and title remain to be settled.

Many of the information needs for assessing sustainable forest management are being met for these two indicators, but some gaps remain.

Ministry's partial assessment based on these two indicators

Despite some localized timber supply problems and the need to complete treaty negotiations with First Nations, the prospects for economic and social sustainability in British Columbia's forests are positive.

Indicators of Governance and Support

Information and the ministry's assessment are provided for two of four governance and support indicators: [Law](#) and [Certification](#).

British Columbia continues to develop new laws and policies to support sustainable forest management, and has done so since before the 1992 Earth Summit – the United Nations Conference on Environment and

Development (UNCED). Concerns about high operational and administrative costs were addressed through a recent redesign of the legal framework to improve economic competitiveness while maintaining high environmental standards. The province's legal framework includes compliance and enforcement activities, and public reporting by the independent Forest Practices Board. To enable continual improvement, the effectiveness of the law in achieving sustainable forest management is being systematically reviewed.

Forest certification led by non-government organizations complements the governance provided by British Columbia's legal framework. British Columbia's forest industry is a leader in forest certification in North America. It has pursued this course to maintain access to markets and demonstrate the province's high quality of forest management. Progress in achieving certification varies considerably by tenure type.

Many of the information needs for assessing sustainable forest management are being met for these two indicators, but information on the ultimate effectiveness of governance and support is still in an early stage of development.

Ministry's partial assessment based on these two indicators

The prospects for legal and other means to ensure governance and support for sustainability in British Columbia's forests are positive.

Conclusion

British Columbia has made substantial efforts to ensure sustainable forest management is carried out in the province, and these efforts have been largely successful. Overall, the prospects for sustainability are positive.



















Summary of Ministry of Forests' Partial Assessment			
Environmental Indicators	State	Trend	Information
Ecosystem diversity - underlies ongoing environmental, economic and social sustainability	 good	 mixed	 partial
Protected forests - provide natural habitats for plants and animals	 good	 improving	 partial
Economic and Social Indicators	State	Trend	Information
Timber harvest - supports a large part of the province's economy	 good	 mixed	 partial
First Nations involvement - recognizes their cultural and economic relationship with forests	 mixed	 improving	 adequate
Governance and Support Indicators	State	Trend	Information
Law - ensures the government's management objectives are enforced	 good	 improving	 partial
Certification - provides non-government verification of well-managed forests	 good	 mixed	 adequate

FIGURE 1. Summary of the Ministry of Forests' partial assessment, based on six indicators, of British Columbia's progress in achieving sustainable forest management.