

A Commitment to Environmental Sustainability



British Columbia is a world leader in sustainable forest practices. High standards for environmentally sensitive forestry were set in the Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act in 1995. But the code's costly, prescriptive approach has prevented industry from adopting new sustainable forestry practices as quickly and cost-effectively as possible.

Government is committed to setting the standard for environmentally sensitive forestry in the years to come, and to acting on its New Era promise to adopt a scientifically based, principled approach to environmental management to ensure sustainability, accountability and responsibility.

Action: Central to this mission is the introduction of the Forest and Range Practices Act, which governs forestry operations in B.C.'s public forests. The act requires industry to meet clear standards for a range of values, from water quality to wildlife, and from old-growth stands to soils. It maintains or exceeds the standards set by the Forest Practices Code, which it replaces. But it allows flexibility in meeting those standards. This flexibility, combined with ongoing investments in research, and an improved role for professional foresters, agrologists, biologists and engineers, ensures B.C.'s forest practices remain world class.

Benefits: The Forest and Range Practices Act is described as "results based" because its focus is on-the-ground

results, not costly, time-consuming paperwork. It introduces more efficient planning by eliminating a number of separate plans and steps. For example, companies must now complete one comprehensive forest stewardship plan instead of three operational plans. Before companies can cut a single tree, they must also produce site plans that are available for public and First Nations scrutiny.

Compliance and enforcement

As part of forest stewardship plans approved by government, companies must outline how they will meet environmental standards. In this way, they can be held accountable for achieving the results they promise. A team of specialized staff at the Ministry of Forests will conduct thousands of inspections every year.

In cases where there is an unacceptable risk of damage occurring, the act gives government the power to issue stop-work orders to prevent environmental damage.

In addition, the Forest Practices Board provides objective, independent investigations on forest practices. It investigates complaints, participates in appeals and issues special reports. The board recently reported that responsible forest practices once considered outstanding are becoming standard operating procedures in B.C.

Forests for the future

Certification

B.C. has emerged as one of North America's leaders in forest certification. Almost every major forest products company has met or is pursuing the requirements of the International Standards Organization's environmental management system, or sustainable forest management certification by the Canadian Standards Association, Forest Stewardship Council or Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

Logging levels

Each year, B.C. harvests only about one-third of one per cent of total forested land – less than one per cent of the area supporting the current allowable annual cut. How many trees can be cut in a year is decided by the province's chief forester, who makes allowable annual cut determinations for timber supply areas and tree farm licences throughout the province. Each of these decisions is based on careful and scientific analysis.

Protected areas

More than 12 per cent of B.C.'s land has been set aside in parks or protected areas, including about four million hectares of old growth.

Reforestation

Provincial law requires logged areas to be reforested and managed until the new forests are well-established. Unlike many other places, B.C. uses native species – none of them genetically modified – on all regenerated areas of public land. In 2002, B.C. planted its five billionth tree.

