

Challenges and Solutions – An Industry Perspective

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Abstract

Alex Ferguson is a registered professional forester and holds the positions of Chief Forester, Canadian Forest Products Limited and Chair of the interior forest industry's Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force. In presenting this paper, Mr. Ferguson outlines three challenges facing the forest industry in dealing with the mountain pine beetle epidemic across the interior of BC. He talks about the challenges in dealing with the substantial volume of beetle-killed timber and the problems in finding adequate markets for this dead pine. He also raises the question of the environmental impacts of the epidemic on land use plans, and concludes with community stability implications of the expanding epidemic.

Mr. Ferguson addresses the issue of the possibility of allowable annual cut (ACC) fall-down in the future, due to the increased AAC currently in place to access greater volumes of dead pine. Mr. Ferguson calls upon the provincial and federal governments to initiate mitigation strategies for affected communities. He encourages communities to begin looking at "Life after Beetles" and encourages the Premier's Office to maintain a lead role in the process of developing solutions. He concludes by stating the industry is very much willing to play a major role in finding solutions.

Introduction – "The Challenges"

The information provided in this paper is intended to build upon the presentation that was made earlier in the symposium by the province's Chief Forester, Larry Pedersen, RPF. The Chief Forester provided information concerning a recent government analysis of twelve selected management units in the central interior of British Columbia (BC) and addressed the impacts of the mountain pine beetle epidemic. In summary, Mr. Pedersen stated that significant reductions in allowable annual cut are anticipated due to the considerable reduction in mature live lodgepole pine. The situation is expected to continue to worsen until Mother Nature steps in with much colder weather. This information represents significant challenges for the interior forest industry sector and this paper addresses three specific challenges.

Firstly, the prolonged attack on lodgepole pine has resulted in the accumulation of a large inventory of dead pine. There is now a need to deal with this increasing inventory. To date, management efforts have been focused on the leading edge of the epidemic as a necessary strategy, but they have been unable to keep pace with the rapid expansion of the epidemic. Manufacturing facilities have only a limited capacity to cope with beetle-killed timber even if all facilities operate on a three-shift basis. The

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industry must also find suitable markets in which to sell the extra fiber, especially given the current trade situation with the United States. Most customers in the Pacific Rim prefer non-stained lumber, leaving only those U.S. customers who recognize that the quality and strength of beetle-killed timber have not been compromised. While the industry has focused on timber supply impacts, limited attention has been directed toward the opportunity that may exist with mountain pine beetle damaged fibre. There may be real opportunities to allow new entrants to the industry including First Nations companies to get involved in mitigating the impacts of the increased volumes.

Secondly, the challenge exists for dealing with the environmental impacts of the mountain pine beetle epidemic. During the 1990s, many people in BC participated in land use planning tables, grappling with how land surrounding their communities should be used, and for what purpose. Eventually, there were a series of land use plans adopted by the provincial government to guide resource development. In some areas, these basic plans have been further refined to landscape level plans, identifying visual quality and ecosystem management objectives. There is the need to understand the impacts of the epidemic on these plans. Further, there is a need to understand how mammals, fish, birds and the myriad of other species that live in our interior pine forests are adapting to the changing environment. In addition, other resource users such as guide-outfitters, resort and lodge operators, trapping and backcountry tourism, are being impacted. Answers to these issues are required before solutions can be considered.

Thirdly, the impact on local communities must be considered. This may ultimately be the most important challenge. While the success of the forest industry is directly linked to timber availability and market, and it will live and die by these factors, the communities are “there” irrespective of the market or timber supply situation. The implication of the Chief Forester’s earlier message is there could be increased timber supply due to the expanded volume of beetle killed timber and commensurate economic activity over a possible 10- to 15-year period. Although this has positive implications in the short term, the longer-term implications are more crucial.

Discussion – “The Solutions”

From the Chief Foresters’ message, it is conceivable that he will further increase annual allowable cuts to maximize the opportunities to salvage as much of the dead pine as possible. The scenario should and could provide a number of positive opportunities for new products and new forest industry players. However, with an increase in allowable annual cut over the short term, comes the possibility of a fall-down over the longer term. For those areas that will experience a fall-down in available timber supply in ten, fifteen or twenty years, now is the time to begin collaborative planning for new directions and new opportunities for our forests and our communities. The communities have “time” on their side.

With help from both the provincial and federal governments and the forest industry, most communities have the knowledge and motivation to plan for and realize minimal impacts from this epidemic. There is time to plan now for the future stability of our forest-dependent communities.

For the environmental impacts of the epidemic, the process for assessing impacts and preparing options to mitigate these impacts must be initiated. Land use groups involving all stakeholders including government, agencies, resource users, as well as First Nations, must determine the impacts of the epidemic on their own specific areas and plans, and develop their own mitigation strategies.

Conclusions

While this paper is not intended to provide a long list of solutions, it is a call to action. There is only one BC and as exhibited in the response to this summer’s fires with the province coming together as never before, the same collective action must be taken to deal with the mountain pine beetle epidemic. While the fires have had an immediate outcome with destroyed infrastructure and resources, the mountain pine beetle epidemic may have a more critical effect, with destroyed communities and economies, if long-term strategies are not put in place.

BC's Premier Gordon Campbell has recently announced a mountain pine beetle symposium to be held in Quesnel later this year. It is hoped that he will empower the communities to produce long-term strategies to deal with the upcoming challenges. The solution that may be suitable for Quesnel may not be the solution for Vanderhoof. Conversely, the Vanderhoof solution may be ideal for Kamloops. With continued leadership from the most senior government official in BC, our community leaders can produce plans aimed at mitigating long-term impacts of the mountain pine beetle on their respective communities. It is important to recognize that communities outside the immediate areas of infestation will also feel the impacts; therefore, they too must become involved. Our communities must begin to consider "Life after the Beetles" and the Quesnel process needs to be the catalyst to begin this thinking process. The forest industry is certainly prepared to take an active role in finding solutions.

Acknowledgements

The impetus for this paper comes from the forest industry's Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force, a group that was formed in 1999 to promote communications and action on the epidemic. From the outset, the Task Force has promoted strong interaction between its members and government officials in finding and promoting solutions to deal with mountain pine beetle. Both industry and government officials working on and through this Task Force are to be commended for their foresight.

Alex Ferguson is Chief Forester, Canadian Forest Products Limited and Chair, Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force.