

Private Managed Forest Land Program – Adventure Tourism Coalition Introduction

Background:

BC's first *Adventure Tourism Strategy* is an unprecedented, collaborative effort initiated by a coalition of 19 diverse adventure tourism sectors engaging with public recreation and industrial user groups.

Adventure tourism is a cornerstone of the provincial traveler experience and buttresses the Super, Natural British Columbia™ brand which annually helps to contribute over \$18 billion to British Columbia's visitor economy.

The Adventure Travel Visitor Economy Alone

- **Supports 32,000 BC families** (21,000 direct, 11,000 indirect) in communities through all regions of the province
- **Propels 2,200 businesses and employment** ranging from managerial occupations, trades and technical positions, and seasonal, entry-level employment.
- **Generates over \$3 billion** in direct annual visitor spending
- Provides partnership opportunities for First Nations and rural areas in BC.

Additional Benefits for BC Residents

- Health & Well-being
- Education
- Stewardship
- Backcountry Access
- Emergency Response

Foundational Pillars for Adventure Tourism Sectors

- Social
- Cultural
- Economic
- Rural Development
- Environmental

Increasingly, adventure tourism is the face of BC's tourism brand; it offers transformative experiences for visitors to experience aboriginal tourism and interact with BC's natural and cultural values. Rural communities are looking to adventure tourism as one of their sustainable socio-economic drivers.

Forestry activities are one of the most significant and long-standing issues affecting the viability of Adventure Tourism. Whether it be from changes to viewscape, loss of tourism infrastructure, conflicts with timing or lack of consideration of other economic activities on the land base; forestry and tourism are not working in harmony at the present time. The objectives and organizational culture stemming from the Private Managed Forest Land Program is one of the sources of the problem and it needs to change if the province hopes to maintain and achieve its stated tourism objectives.

General Observations

Adventure Tourism Coalition (ATC) member organizations annually deliver a world-class wilderness experience to visitors across BC, particularly in rural areas.

At times, visitors to BC have experienced visible devastation, in part by witnessing less than stellar forest harvesting processes on crown land and on private property. The result of this process can, and has affected rural communities by damaging vegetation, water quality, wildlife habitat and trail networks.

The regions of Vancouver Island and the Kootenays are popular tourism destinations due to high scenic and natural environment values, proximity to transportation corridors, and medium-sized population centres. As noted in the introduction to the PMFL review, these same areas have experienced considerable community expansion and population growth, an increase in land values, a decline in endemic species populations, and changes in societal expectations towards environmental management and protection. These regions also coincide with the majority of privately managed forest lands. The shifts in land use and public expectations are leading to increased land use conflicts on both private and public lands, changes are required.

The issues facing the Private Managed Forest Land Program (PMFL) are the same as those on publicly managed forest lands. However, the solutions for private lands are likely to be more varied. The primary problem with the PMFL Act and governance model is its lack of rigour in several key areas including: public consultation, species and habitat protection, environmental management, and loss of public recreation access.

There is also a significant question on the balance of the value proposition between the taxpayer forgoing tax income versus the landowner's tax break and exemption from municipal bylaws. The latter is fundamental to what benefits each party should derive from the arrangement going forward.

One of the other concerns regarding logging on private lands, is the lack of recourse when our ATC member operations are directly or indirectly impacted by these actions. What's more, affected businesses and communities have no means by which to mitigate the impact, stop the destruction, or even communicate their concerns to the land holder.

Public and privately managed forests are the lifeblood of our entire eco-system as a primary source for clean water oxygen and food, as well as habitat for wildlife and other foliage aside from trees. It is incumbent on all stakeholders to address this integral ecological footprint in British Columbia to ensure long-term sustainability on all fronts (environmental, social, cultural, economic), particularly in the context of climate change, usage and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The ATC recommends the following regarding the (PMFL)

PMFL ACT and Governance:

In order to improve and upgrade the PMFL Act, the ATC recommends greater requirements for legal visual quality obligations being identified and adhered to. The Province may wish to fund an inventory of tourism features for areas affected by privately managed forest lands. Managing these areas is critical to the ongoing viability of adventure tourism operators.

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Working with other Ministries, such as MECC, MFLNRORD should identify and designate critical wildlife habitat on PMFL lands and introduce legal objectives for management of these lands, this shouldn't be left as a voluntary activity.

MFLNRORD many want to utilize environmental provisions in FRPA while adjusting long-term forest health of adjacent lands. A significant portion of old growth forest resides on private lands, government should consider setting legal targets for old growth retention on these lands as part of the forest health objective.

Consultation:

Indigenous, public, and community consultation on harvesting and access plans needs to be a legal requirement under the Act. The consultation process needs to be conducting in a timely, meaningful manner. This should increase transparency, avoid surprises and reduce conflicts, and be standard practice.

We recognize that these new requirements will add costs to the landowner's use of the land. However, given the deteriorating state of the natural environment, the proximity to communities and other economic interests, we believe greater value needs to be returned to the taxpayer for the tax relief benefits they receive under the PMFL Act.

Community Access to Privately Managed Forest Lands:

Aside from viewsapes and environmental health, the right for the public to access private lands for recreation has been one of the long-standing issues in communities around the Province, particularly after landowners decided the liability risks were too high to let past practices continue. In our view, the Province and private landowners need to be more proactive in addressing these disputes rather than through the costly legal system.

We recommend that the Province and landowner identify and agree on where these recreation opportunities are, and make allowances as part of the PMFL agreement on a specific property. This could be achieved through a land covenant, land purchase, or long-term contract that will assure continued public access. Usage conditions for public access would need to be drafted and published that addresses, among other things, the concern over risk management and indemnity for the landowner and Province. These guidelines would help reduce the annual confrontations around land use and public expectations.

PMFL Tax Break & Bylaw Exemption:

Property and forest product values have risen significantly on both public and private lands since the original legislation was introduced. At the same time taxes have increased substantially, along with restrictions and requirements on land use both municipally and provincially. While the PMFL Act has undergone some amendments, it has not kept pace with societal changes and expectations.

The value proposition on tax relief needs to be reviewed and re-balanced so that communities and other industries realize some benefits environmentally, socially, and materially from privately managed forest lands. In other words, government needs to

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reassess the practice of giving landowners of private forests both a tax break and exemption from municipal by laws.

The penalty exemption component of the Act is particularly problematic. It's inconceivable that a private landowner under the guise of the Private Forest Managed Lands Program, could conceivably harvest trees for 15 years and receive annual tax breaks, then pull out of the program with no consequences. What is the benefit to the Province, or in particular, the local community in view of a decimated landscape?

Perhaps a better strategy might be to apply a covenant to all privately managed forest lands over 50 hectares that sets a higher standard whereby landowners benefit if their land is held to that standard. Only then do landowners receive a tax break after a prescribed period.

Points for Consideration

- A. The ATC favours greater requirements for legal visual quality obligations being identified and adhered to. In this regard, the Province should fund a tourism features inventory for areas affected by privately managed forest lands.
- B. The Province needs to access, identify and designate critical wildlife habitat on PMFL lands and set legal obligations for management of these lands;
- C. Indigenous, public, and community consultation on harvesting and access plans needs to be a legal requirement under the Act:
- D. The Province and landowners need to identify and agree on the public's right to access private lands for recreation, and make allowances as part of the PMFL agreement on a specific property;
- E. The Province needs to reassess the practice of giving landowners of private forests both a tax break and exemption from municipal bylaws;
- F. The Province should consider a covenant that compels landowners to commit to a higher standard for managing their properties, and being subsequently rewarded for adhering to that standard over the long term.

Summary

The ATC and its member organizations look forward to working together with the Provincial government in order to support your efforts to modernize the Private Managed Forest Land Program.

We value ecosystems that a healthy forest and progressive, inclusive forest harvesting practices will support. If there is anything that the ATC or its member organizations can do to help move this initiative forward, please let us know. We look forward to hearing from you.

Brad Harrison

Chair - Adventure Tourism Coalition
e: ed@blbca.com / p: 250-819-9774