

STAKEHOLDER SUBMISSION - PROFESSIONAL RELIANCE IN NATURAL RESOURCES
“All British Columbians deserve a voice in how our natural resources are managed”.

This is the first statement on the government’s website exploring professional reliance in the management of public resources. Every British Columbian can get behind this sentiment, and I applaud the government for recognizing the importance of this simple fact. The question is, does the Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA), and the professional reliance model that it enshrines, accomplish this? The simple answer, across the province, is ‘No’.

According to the Association of Professional Foresters, “The results based FRPA legislation was supposed to allow both government and industry forest professionals to better focus on the on- the- ground results as well as environmental and resource protection, rather than process and paperwork.” There is no doubt that foresters are efficient managers of the timber resource. The question that continues to arise is, what about other resource values? How are the forests in areas with conflicting values being managed?

Forest professionals, especially those working with a forest corporation, are immersed in a corporate and professional culture with the over-riding goal of timber harvest for profit. This means that professionals working for a company necessarily have a bias toward timber values. Some forest professionals are not receptive enough to the concerns of other stakeholders in conflict areas. FRPA offers no incentive for forest companies to modify harvest plans in a way that would protect other values such as wildlife, water or the needs of the tourism industry. If considering other values involves reduced harvest volumes, as it often does, forest companies will be resistant, and their employees will feel obligated to comply. With good forest management, the province could protect important non-timber values and have a strong forest industry. FRPA was supposed to give professionals the flexibility to implement creative forest practices on the ground to help achieve this goal. Instead, we have had a clash of values through-out public lands. The following paragraphs describe a few of the instances which I have personally been involved in which have compromised stakeholder’s values on public land and have eroded the public’s confidence in the way our forests are managed.

I am from Clearwater a small resource town with the big advantage of being next to a provincial park. The valley which is the entrance to the park stretches along about 16 km of road from Clearwater north into the park. There are many stakeholders involved in this area. The steep slopes running down the valley walls from the alpine highlands hold streams which feed over 50 water licenses. Caribou have historically roamed the valley from the bottom to the mountain slopes. Now, tourists increasingly enraptured by the wilderness feeling here continue to come in greater numbers. In 1999 these conflicts came to a head and the Ministry of Forests hired a contractor to facilitate a consensus land use process. The resulting Local Use Plan was called ‘The Upper Clearwater Guiding Principles’. The final version of this document was approved in writing by the statutory decision maker and District Manager at the time. There was a committee set up to communicate with the Ministry and industry regarding the principles set forward in that document. For years this document stood the test of time. But, as timber resources grew scarcer, CANFOR turned their attention to the valley.

In January 2012, CANFOR met with the Upper Clearwater Referral Committee. The committee was told that CANFOR planned to log in the planning area and that under FRPA CANFOR had no obligation to adhere to, or incorporate, any of the guiding principles that comprised the public input document into any of their logging plans. FRPA allowed the company to disregard two years of work by the community to reach an agreement by a Ministry facilitated process. This act eroded the communities’ trust in the Ministry which, after all, initiated the process that produced the plan, but in the end, was unable to defend it, or insist that the forest company respect it.

Clearwater has a strong and growing wilderness tourism industry. Much of the area’s wilderness reputation relies on a very short stretch of road which accesses Wells Gray Park. Despite years of input and requests for a higher Visual Quality Objectives in the area, CANFOR completed clear-cuts in the valley to a modification or lower designation. There is no doubt CANFOR could have harvested in a visually less impactful way. There were many members of the public that asked them to do so. But, they had no obligation under FRPA to implement public input and they did not. More clear cuts are planned for the short scenic corridor that Clearwater bases its wilderness reputation on.

The Ministry of Forests has undertaken a Visual Quality assessment in the area. However, as their stewardship officer stated in a letter to a member of the public, “within the Forest and Range Practices Act context, unless direction is legally established, there are no legal requirements to be consistent with [the new visual quality guidelines]” In other words, even if the consultant recommends that higher visual quality designations are warranted for the valley, CANFOR is not required to be consistent with them unless they are legislated, a process that will take too long to save the visuals in the valley for this rotation age. The forest company does not have a stake in the long-term success of the tourism industry, and the professional reliance model does not provide any mechanism whereby

they must harvest in a way that considers that value. No matter what the intent of FRPA was originally, there is example after example of forest companies harvesting in their tenures to the detriment of other values when other harvesting systems or methods might have been the compromise needed to allow timber harvest and to insure the protection of non-timber values. One environmental activist has summed up his frustration with the situation by saying that ` [the forest companies] were being allowed to burn the furniture on their way out`.

Extensive logging on the slopes above the Clearwater River has changed the hydrology of the area to such a degree that it has affected stream flow and quality. The road into the park has been subject to debris flows and has washed out numerous times trapping residents and tourists alike on the other side, and costing the province millions of dollars. A geomorphologist wrote a report to CANFOR expressing concern about the stability of these slopes if further logging was undertaken. Many residents whose water was affected, or who were cut off by washouts, also expressed concerns. CANFOR commissioned a report. This report is one page. CANFOR will not make it public. The Forest and Range Practices Act and `professional reliance model` means they don't have to. The interesting juxtaposition here is that if the `results` of logging the high-country are damages to downstream values, CANFOR is not liable for that damage.

In 1999 Jim Munn, then district manager for the Ministry of Forests in Clearwater, wrote a letter stating: Area G (the east side of the Clearwater River valley and one of the most important places for caribou habitat) has been heavily impacted by past activities. Any new or existing activities must respect the wildlife and water values". Despite this, Canfor proposes to resume logging in the high elevations along the border of Wells Gray Park. They have not planned cuts for caribou, they are not trying to ensure they have food, habitat, or travel corridors, they are logging for volume in forests which have historically supported caribou without considering the impact they will have on the animal's recovery. The Mountain Caribou of Wells Gray Park are moving closer to extinction, yet CANFOR has clear-cut, and is planning to continue to clear-cut, in federally designated Caribou habitat. In a private meeting with CANFOR foresters I was told that "they really didn't believe the Caribou had a chance to recover" so there was no reason to adjust logging plans.

Canfor commissioned a report to be written on the Caribou in their harvest area. Despite there being biologists that are known for their expertise in Caribou, they hired an owl expert. This is perfectly acceptable if other stakeholders can read this report and provide comment. But none of the reports written regarding the harvest have been released. The only way to read them is to go to their rather remote office. To read the reports a person must sit with a forester. If you start to make notes, they protest. The reports are not to be photographed or copied, even at private expense. There is no way to discuss or corroborate the information in these reports with citizens or experts concerned with the long-term survival of the Mountain Caribou. Clearly this forest company does not value the long term survival of the Mountain Caribou to the degree that the average British Columbian does, yet it is the forest company that will make the ultimate call on where to log and what logging system to use within B.C.'s professional reliance model.

The industry professional tasked with bringing this timber to harvest will do so according to the guidelines given him by his company and this clash of values is where FRPA fails. His values lie with his company's best interest, as it should if he is a good employee. Sometimes what is in the forest company's best interest conflicts with what is in the best interest of the public which owns the resource. That is why forest management that relies totally on a `professional results model` will often represent timber values to the detriment of other natural resource values that British Columbians care about, even when the alternative offers a stronger economic case. As it stands, the current legislation does not encourage the public input that would result in the highest and best use of our public lands. Nor does FRPA provide for any Ministry decision makers to step in and provide representation for other land-based values. The Ministry's hands are tied, and the most important aspects of decision making power on a large portion of British Columbia's land base lie in the hands of large corporations whose main motive is profit for the corporation. This is not in the public's best interest.

In the interior we are not harvesting forests which have grown up after previous logging. As our timber supplies diminish, forest companies will push into areas of higher use conflicts. We must enact legislation which requires companies to plan harvests which respect non-timber values on the land base and give Ministry officials the ability to step in when logging plans fall short of this goal.

Sincerely,