

Terms of Reference for a Special Investigation

Are Appropriate Reforestation Choices being made in the Interior Douglas-fir Biogeoclimatic Zone?

BACKGROUND

Forestry licensees and BC Timber Sales (BCTS) have a legal obligation under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) to regrow stands of trees after logging. Reforestation efforts must result in successful regeneration of trees and growth to healthy maturity. This is important both to ensure a sustainable flow of economically valuable timber into the future and to maintain broader environmental and community values in BC's forests.

FRPA provides licensees and BCTS with some latitude to achieve their reforestation obligations through their reforestation methods, tree species planted, and silviculture treatments. Companies have an economic incentive to use the flexibility under FRPA to meet these obligations in the least time possible and at the lowest cost. Issues arise when short-term objectives are inconsistent with longer-term objectives for forest resources. For example, poor choices for tree species composition could result in lower value timber as well as risks to wildlife through altered habitats, effects on other resource uses, reduced resilience to insects and disease and the potential effects of climate change.

Interior Douglas-fir ([IDF](#)) forests in BC's southern interior support a number of different uses and values, including timber, range, wildlife and species at risk, recreation, and visual quality. Some IDF ecosystems are often dominated by Douglas-fir trees of mixed age and size with a grassy understory. A common species for planting after logging is lodgepole pine because seedlings have a high survival rate and grow quickly above competing vegetation. Tree species composition in these ecosystems is reported to be shifting from fir to pine with potential implications for timber and non-timber values.

Concerns about reforestation in the IDF are timely as licensees are increasingly focussing on the IDF forests as a source of timber now that they have completed salvage logging in beetle-killed pine forests. In addition, wildfires in 2017 damaged extensive areas of IDF forest and government and licensees are grappling with strategies to salvage and reforest the damaged timber and to address resource objectives. The Board is concerned with the implications of changes in the IDF for future forest values and uses.

OBJECTIVE

This objective of this report is to assess whether an appropriate mix of tree species is being maintained in the Interior Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone of southern BC and implications for both timber and non-timber values if it is not.

This investigation will examine pre- and post-harvest tree species composition and assess:

- Compliance with FRPA requirements for reforestation; and
- Effectiveness of reforestation choices in achieving long-term objectives for timber and non-timber values and resilience to forest health issues.

SCOPE

This special investigation will focus on reforestation activities in the Cariboo, Thompson-Okanagan, and Kootenay Boundary Natural Resource Regions in areas logged under FRPA between 2008 and 2017. It will include forest licences, tree farm licences, woodlots, First Nations woodland licences, and community forests.

APPROACH

This investigation will examine approaches to reforestation in the IDF to assess whether there has been a shift in tree species composition. Board investigators will:

- Summarize and compare existing objectives for timber and non-timber values in IDF ecosystems at the local, regional, provincial levels.
- Analyze data on pre- and post-harvest tree species composition using government data (RESULTS, vegetation resource inventory, harvest billing system) to identify where changes have occurred.
- Conduct field visits to confirm tree species composition on selected sites.
- Where changes are observed in tree species composition, work with specialists to assess potential risks to timber and non-timber values.
- Interviews will be conducted with staff from government, licensees and BCTS, as well as First Nations and stakeholders.

REPORTING

The report may make recommendations on reforestation approaches in the IDF or provincially.

This report is not intended to be an audit of forest planning practices. Observations will not be attributed to individual licensees. .