



CLOSING LETTER

FPB/IRC/73

File: 97250-20\010346

June 27, 2002

Dear Participants:

Re: Resolution of Complaint File 010346 – Puggins Mountain Road

This is the Forest Practices Board's report on the resolution of the Puggins Mountain Road complaint.

The Complaint

The Puggins Forest Service Road (FSR) runs west from Highway 52, approximately 55 kilometres to Puggins Mountain, southwest of Dawson Creek. It provides access to Crown land for outdoor recreationists and the forest and oil and gas industries.

On September 28, 2001, two long-time users of the road discovered that almost 100 waterbars had been constructed across the road, making it impassable to car traffic and difficult for pick-up traffic. Waterbars are shallow ditches dug across the surface of a road at an angle. They are used to prevent excessive water flow on the road and erosion of the road surface.

These men have used the Puggins FSR without incident for more than 40 years, and they could not understand why the waterbars were required. They contacted the Ministry of Forests Dawson Creek forest district and their Member of the Legislative Assembly, and on October 11, 2001, they filed this complaint with the Forest Practices Board.

Background

In July 2001, a rainstorm described by the Dawson Creek Forest district manager as a one-in-75 year event hit the northeast part of the province. Highways and roads across the region were washed out.

After the storm, parts of the Puggins FSR road were severely eroded and significant siltation occurred. The ministry considered that the road was unusable and unsafe for public and industrial use, and it posed a risk of environmental damage. The ministry decided to repair and stabilize the road and to establish some drainage control with available funding. No industrial users held a road use permit for the road, so it was government's responsibility to maintain it.

One of the challenges to maintain the road is that recreationists drive on it when it is wet. Vehicle wheels create ruts in the road that channel water along its surface, causing erosion and sedimentation. The ministry decided to use water bars to channel water from the ruts off the surface of the road to maintain stability.

The ministry hired a contractor who used a rubber-tired backhoe to construct 97 waterbars between the 23 kilometre and 55 kilometre points of the road. Although the road was still passable in a two-wheel drive pickup truck, it took longer to drive its length because drivers had to slow almost to a stop to ease through the waterbars. The edges of the waterbars were also very sharp and steep, so it made for a rough ride.

Resolution Efforts

The Board encourages parties to work together to resolve complaints wherever possible. At a meeting with Board staff in November 2001, the ministry acknowledged that the waterbars could have been better constructed, and perhaps there were too many. In the interest of resolving this complaint, the ministry agreed to look at the road with Board staff once the snow had melted to determine which waterbars were necessary, and whether the waterbars could be made more drivable. The complainants agreed to participate and a site visit took place on June 19, 2002.

The site visit confirmed that some waterbars were angled in the wrong direction, placed in poor locations or were simply not needed. The waterbars had also become more drivable through a combination of public use and weathering. Unknown road users had also filled some waterbars in with soil and rock.

The ministry listened to and appreciated the complainants' desire for two-wheel drive access to their favourite camping spots, and the complainants gained an appreciation of the challenges the ministry faces with respect to maintaining the stability of a road and minimizing risk to forest resources with limited funds. At the conclusion of the meeting, all parties agreed that it had been worthwhile. The parties also agreed that where waterbars were necessary, they could be constructed in a way to make them more drivable.

Conclusion

There are no firm plans for the Puggins FSR at this time. At some point a licensee will need the road to access cutblocks and haul timber, so it will assume maintenance responsibilities for the road under a road use permit. In the meantime, government is responsible for maintaining the road. While funding for maintenance is scarce and by no means certain, the complainants are satisfied that the ministry will take their concerns under consideration when maintaining the road. The ministry has also agreed to keep the complainants informed of any developments.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the complainants and the staff of the Dawson Creek Forest District for their forthrightness, willingness to listen, and flexibility in coming to a resolution of this complaint. Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

W.N. (Bill) Cafferata R.P.F.
Chair