



CLOSING LETTER

FPB/IRC/115

File: 97250-20/050674

October 24, 2005

Dear Participants:

Re: Resolution of Complaint 050674 / Round Prairie

This is the Forest Practices Board's report on the resolution of the Round Prairie complaint.

Nature of the Investigation

On September 7, 2005, a resident of Elkford filed a complaint asserting that Tembec Inc. (the licensee) was needlessly harvesting Douglas fir trees while harvesting pine beetle stands and had been leaving merchantable logs and excessive slash on site. As well, the complainant asserted that the Ministry of Forests had not responded appropriately in the circumstances.

Background

The complainant questioned why logging trucks appeared to hauling loads that consisted primarily of Douglas fir from an area with heavy mountain pine beetle damaged stands.

The complainant also observed that several recent cutblocks contained a large amount of slash and debris on the site. The complainant was concerned that the slash was excessive, likely not rotting by the next rotation of timber, and that the excessive slash would inhibit the movement of elk. The recent cutblocks contrasted with nearby, slightly older, harvested blocks that had little debris on site and were quite uniform.

The complainant contacted the licensee about these issues and on September 9, 2005, they jointly went to the sites to discuss the current and past harvesting. After the site visit, the complainant was somewhat satisfied but requested independent verification by the Board that the practices were indeed appropriate.

Resolution Efforts

The Board encourages participants to work together to resolve complaints wherever possible. To that end, all participants agreed to meet on site and discuss the issues on October 6, 2005.

The licensee explained its mountain pine beetle strategy and how it was focusing its harvesting operations on infested and susceptible pine stands. The licensee explained observations of a heavy fir component on some logging trucks as due to:

- harvesting on private land and from clearing in nearby open pit mine operations,
- sorted woodpiles, where firs harvested incidentally while logging pines are stacked separately from the pine until a full load has accumulated,
- harvesting of fir bark beetle damaged trees, and
- other licensees' operations.

The site visit of licensee-harvested blocks confirmed that the licensee was focusing on primarily pine stands. All participants considered this issue to be resolved.

The site visit also confirmed that the licensee was leaving significant coarse woody debris and slash distributed throughout its blocks. This is different from previous practices of piling and subsequently burning slash on roadsides. The change reflects an increased effort to apply current concepts of maintaining biodiversity during harvesting operations. On the ground, this translates into the licensee establishing targets for leaving representative levels of coarse woody debris (basically, logs larger than 30 cm in diameter, that will remain on site well into the next rotation); designation and protection of old growth management areas; planting a mixture of species on site; and distributing slash uniformly across the cutblocks. These measures create more biologically diverse cutblocks. The licensee and Ministry of Forests staff agreed that the strategy of leaving coarse woody debris and slash on site can result in the benefits of: providing moister micro sites for tree seedlings which can increase survival and regeneration success; limit access to all-terrain vehicles and livestock, both of which can spread noxious weeds; limit establishment of grasses which compete with seedlings and attract cattle; physically block access to cattle; enhance habitat for a variety of smaller wildlife species; and provide some protection from elk grazing on seedlings. Specifically in terms of the recently harvested cutblock where the complainant had concerns with slash levels, the licensee provided documentation of the levels of woody debris on site. The Ministry of Forests had surveyed the site for waste and residue levels and confirmed that the waste left on the block was within acceptable levels.

All participants agreed that the visual impact of more coarse woody debris and slash on site contrasted with the biologically sterile but visually appealing uniform plantations of the past. The licensee's cutblocks were now being designed to maintain physical structure in cutblocks for ecological benefits, but the public may not be aware of this shift in management strategy.

Lastly, the licensee discussed plans to post public information signs to explain the mountain pine beetle infestation and the resulting harvest strategies. The licensee may also produce signs for individual trees that would explain their value as wildlife tree patches or sources of coarse woody debris. These signs may help with public education and to deter firewood cutters from unknowingly harvesting valuable wildlife habitat attributes, such as standing and fallen dead trees.

Conclusion

The licensee is rapidly modifying its forest practices in the expectation that they will result in a range of ecological benefits. The complainant, and other members of the public, has not yet had time to learn about, or evaluate, those modifications. Visually, the current cutblocks are less aesthetically pleasing than the old. However, all of the participants were satisfied, once the principles and practices

were explained, that the current forest practices offer enough promise for ecological improvement that they are worth implementing.

I would like extend my appreciation to the complainant; staff of the Rocky Mountain District of the Ministry of Forests; and the staff of Tembec Inc. Their forthrightness, willingness to explain and listen, and professional conduct were central in resolving this complaint. Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Fraser, PhD
Chair