

Terms of Reference for a Special Report

Harvesting Young¹ Stands of Timber on the BC Coast—Does Age Matter?

BACKGROUND

Government has established objectives for resource values,² including timber, in the *Forest Planning and Practices Regulation* (FPPR). The timber objective is, in part, to maintain or enhance an economically valuable timber supply. The timber supply, or annual allowable cut (AAC), is determined within each timber supply area (TSA) through timber supply reviews (TSRs). TSRs incorporate assumptions about the forest inventory, current management practices, land base constraints, stand harvest priority (including minimum harvest age³) and requirements for non-timber resource values.

Government issues timber harvesting rights through tenures that stipulate a portion of the AAC that the licensee is obligated to harvest within the TSA—usually the tenures are free of stipulations regarding the types or ages of stands to select for harvesting and few such provisions exist in regulations and policies. Instead, government relies on forest licensees and their professionals to plan, prescribe and select appropriate stands.

The Board is aware that some stands in coastal TSAs are being harvested below the minimum harvest ages assumed in TSRs but is not certain of the extent of the practice or why it is occurring. Extensive harvesting of these young stands could have a negative impact on the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) timber objective to maintain or enhance an economically valuable timber supply. Strong concerns have been expressed to the Board that this practice may threaten sustainability and stewardship.

¹ “Young” stands in the context of this report are those that are harvested earlier than anticipated in the relevant timber supply review work.

² Government objectives in FPPR are for soils, timber, wildlife, water, fish, wildlife and biodiversity within riparian areas, fish habitat in fisheries sensitive watersheds, water in community watersheds, wildlife and biodiversity at the landscape and stand level, visual quality and cultural heritage resources and can be viewed at: http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/14_2004#section5

³ Minimum harvest age is an estimate of the earliest age at which a forest stand will have grown to a harvestable condition, usually defined by merchantable stand volume, piece size, or when mean annual increment is maximized.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the project is to explore the extent of young stand harvesting in five coastal Timber Supply Areas and comment on issues related to harvesting at young stand ages if this practice is extensive. The project may comment on:

- potential impacts of harvesting stands younger than anticipated on the timber supply;
- potential implications of harvesting young stands on maintenance or enhancement of an economically valuable timber supply;
- reasons for young stand harvesting;
- issues affecting the selection of stands to harvest; and
- potential impacts on non-timber resource values.

SCOPE

The special report would consider forest management and harvesting for the past 10 years on 5 coastal TSAs: Arrowsmith, Fraser, Soo, Strathcona and Sunshine Coast.

APPROACH

The special report will involve interviews and field visits with licensees, district staff involved with field operations, and branch staff involved in forest analysis, growth and yield, and resource management. Existing government policies, reports and other information for each TSA will be reviewed. Provincial databases will be analyzed to determine implications for future harvest opportunities.

TIMELINE

Interviews and site visits will occur in 2015 with the final report anticipated by summer 2016.

REPORTING

The Board will prepare a special report under section 135 of FRPA. The report will describe the extent of young stand harvesting and the potential impacts of this practice on timber supply. It may also comment on factors contributing to selection of young stands for harvesting and impacts on other resource values.

The report will not be an audit of planning practices. Results for individual licenses will not be presented. Results describing differences between TSAs will be presented as appropriate. The report may make recommendations on improving legislation, policies, planning and practices to address issues regarding young stand harvesting.