



Community-based tenures in the Wildland Urban Interface

British Columbia faces pressing challenges. There is an urgent need to reduce fuel loading and protect communities from the risk of wildfire and other natural disasters; to create more resilient and self-reliant rural economies, and to build shared prosperity by advancing reconciliation with First Nations.

Communities have said for many years that they want to be more engaged in the forest sector, and the government is listening. Premier Horgan, as quoted in the Vancouver Sun on February 14th, stated: “We have lost, I believe, the connection between resources and communities over the past number of years...I want to re-establish that relationship. I want to make sure that every log that is taken from a public forest, the benefit is maximized to the people in the community.”¹

Community forests offer a proven way forward. Given the successes of BC’s 56 community forests to date, and the ability of the community forest model to achieve multiple, complimentary goals, the BC Community Forest Association (BCCFA) is proposing an expansion of the community forest program, for both new and existing community forests, primarily in the wildland urban interface (WUI).

Our concept would see a 10 km zone surrounding communities placed primarily in community-based tenures: Community forest agreements, First Nations woodlands licences and woodlot licenses. These long-term, area-based and community-held tenures are the most appropriate mechanism to meet urgent priorities for rural development and community protection. While the BCCFA’s purpose is to promote community forestry, we see the benefit of an integrated mosaic that includes all community-held, area-based tenures.

This initiative would lead to more partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The community forest tenure has already resulted in many such partnerships – half of the operating community forests are held by First Nations or a partnership between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. The potential for positive outcomes is great.

We have chosen a 10 km zone for initial discussion purposes. This is a critical zone for community protection as confirmed by many communities and forest professionals that experienced wildfires last summer. Often referred to as the “front country”, this zone also

¹ <http://vancouversun.com/opinion/columnists/vaughn-palmer-b-c-government-trying-to-re-connect-resources-to-communities>

encompasses areas around communities where other critical social values and ecosystem services intersect, including community and domestic watersheds, sites of cultural significance, and recreational areas. Further, this zone is of prime importance to First Nations and rural communities as they invest in economic development to become more self-reliant and sustainable.

Our analysis area includes land within BC Fire Protection Districts that is also within the Provincial Strategic Threat Analysis (PSTA) 2km WUI buffer, plus an 8 km buffer. There are 13.6 million hectares in this 10km WUI buffer. Currently, community forest agreements operate on 5.7% of that area (they account for 1.8% of the landbase provincially). Attached we have provided a map of the analysis area on a provincial scale with an accompanying table showing the distribution of tenures and land ownership in that zone. Also attached are more detailed maps, using the Cariboo and West Kootenays as examples.

Implementing this concept will require a significant re-apportionment of management rights to communities and a new vision for the lands that surround them. Considering the provincial government's commitment to implement UNDRIP, coupled with the need to reduce the threat of wildfire to communities, a significant change like this is worthy of serious consideration.

Furthermore, by increasing the size of the community forest program, the BC Government can facilitate the growth of a diverse forest products manufacturing sector. Community forests are independent log sellers. They sell the full spectrum of species and logs available on their land base on the open market to a range of customers. By delinking the woodlands from the major manufacturers each log can find its best market and end use, capturing more value for the wood.

Community-based tenures hold the potential to address community wildfire protection, create sustainable local jobs, and help government achieve its broad objectives. The BCCFA's experience demonstrates that community forests are powerful tools for:

- Building partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities
- Energizing rural development in a manner consistent with the principles of community economic development;
- Protecting communities from catastrophic wildfire and adapting to climate change.

By providing increased rights and responsibilities to manage adjacent forests, the province can empower communities to become true partners in modern, collaborative, and sustainable land management.