



**BC Community Forest Association
Submission to the Rural Development Engagement
Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development**

February 13, 2018

The BC Community Forest Association represents over 90 rural and Indigenous communities across our province. We share a vision of a network of diverse community forest initiatives, where local people practice ecologically responsible forest management in perpetuity, fostering and supporting healthy and vibrant rural communities and economies.

Since its creation 20 years ago, the community forest agreement (CFA) has proven to be one of the best tools available in BC to support rural development. The established community forests are demonstrating how this tenure gives communities the ability to generate economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits. The BCCFA's annual Community Forest Indicators survey shows evidence of these benefits.¹ Organizations like the Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition have also researched and documented the positive impacts of community forests.²

Given the successes of BC's community forests to date, and the ability of the community forest model to achieve multiple, complimentary goals, we offer the following recommendations to the BC Government:

1. Establish new community forests and expand the size of existing ones to facilitate economies of scale. Consider a 10 km zone around communities to be placed into community-based tenures - community forests and First Nations woodlands licences as a core strategy to reduce the risk of wildfire to communities.
2. Approve long-awaited amendments to the Community Tenures Regulation to allow for the expansion of existing CFAs.
3. Support community forest agreement holders to invest in activities such as wildfire hazard reduction, rehabilitation, carbon sequestration, intensive silviculture, and economic diversification by continuing to provide access to provincial funding programs.
4. Prioritize reliable, fast internet connectivity for rural and remote communities.

Community forests are a tangible way to promote rural development. By conferring forest and land management rights to rural and Indigenous communities, the BC Government can help to foster self-reliance, and meet its commitment to rural and Indigenous communities to build their capacity to create resilient, sustainable future.

¹ <http://bccfa.ca/category/indicators/>

² COMMUNITY FORESTS – COMMUNITY BENEFITS: The Economic Contributions of Community Forests to Rural BC Communities
<https://www.bcruralcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SIBAC-Community-Forests-Community-Benefits-Final-Report-1.pdf>

In the pages that follow we offer background information, rationale and additional details on our recommendations. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important engagement process.

History & Status of Community Forests

BC's community forest program was launched in 1998 with the creation of a new forest tenure, the community forest agreement. Since then it was grown from a pilot program to a vital component of the forest sector. Amid the enormous challenges facing the forest sector and forest dependent communities in BC in the past 2 decades, the existing community forests have helped create more resilient and self-reliant communities.

There are now 56 community forests, with another 7 in the application phase. However, community forests currently have a small footprint. To date, they represent a small fraction of the forest sector, with a combined AAC of about 2% of the provincial timber harvest. With the measurable benefits to communities, First Nations, and the province, their potential is much greater.

The Benefits of Community Forests

Over the past 3 years, the BCCFA has collected data from our members through the Community Forest Indicators Project. Community forests report annually on a set of 18 indicators that measure the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits. The survey data demonstrates how CFA holders work to leverage their tenures to create local jobs and diversify their local economies. The survey has found that in forestry, logging and support services, community forests create 50% more jobs than the industry average.

Ninety three percent of the operating community forests in the BCCFA's membership responded to the last survey. Most are small rural communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with an average population of 3,500. Sixty-six percent of respondents represent communities of under 3,000 people and 32% percent represent communities under 1,000.

The community forest organizations operate relatively small forest tenures, with an average Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) of 41,000m³. Over 60% have an AAC under 30,000 m³. Despite their small size, the interplay of the results reported on the 18 indicators tells the story of how important community forests are to their communities and the province.

Community Forest Indicators Survey Results Highlights

Economic Benefits

- Community forests create local jobs. On average, community forests created 0.33 full time jobs/1,000 m³ in forestry, logging and support services, which is 50% higher than the industry average.
- Community forests boost local economic activity. They contributed an average of \$1.9 million to their local economies, most of which have populations of 3,000 people or less.
- Community forests support local priorities by sharing their profits. They contributed an average of \$257,000 cash and in-kind to local projects.
- Community forests are investing in the future economic return of the forest. On average, they spent \$77,000 of their own funds on intensive silviculture, with an

additional \$155,000 from outside sources, and treated over 270 hectares each. The combined investment in the reporting year was \$2.3 million, treating 3,600 hectares.

Social Benefits

- Community forests support education. Sixty-nine percent of respondents invested funds and/or time in education, collectively spending \$115,000 and 1,320 hours.
- Recreation is a key benefit. Community forests invested an average of \$21,000 in recreation and built or maintained 20 km of trail. In total, respondents built or maintained 284 km of trail in the reporting period.
- Community forests are working to protect residents from the threat of wildfire. In the reporting year, they treated an average of 95 hectares and spent \$52,000 of their own funds to reduce wildfire risk. To date, the reporting community forests have collectively treated 3,522 hectares and invested over \$1.8 million for wildfire mitigation. They managed an additional \$4.6 million from outside sources.
- 70% of respondents collaborated with their local government on Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative projects.

Cultural Benefits

- In BC, nearly half of the operating community forests are held by First Nations or a partnership between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous community.

Environmental Benefits

- Community forests operate in challenging areas around communities. Forty-three percent of the land base of the reporting community forests is deemed sensitive.
- Forty percent of community forests made investments in forest stewardship, incremental to legal requirements, averaging a \$108,000 investment and treating 4,500 ha each.

The following 3 quotes exemplify of how community forests are promoting rural development:

Profitability is very important to our community forest. However, profitability for a community forest is measured by different metrics than used by industry. While profitability for a community forest can definitely be measured in cash, no less important are more intangible benefits such as the long-term health and sustainability of our forest; recreation, employment and development opportunities for community members and harmony with all the other users of the forest. -

McLeod Lake Mackenzie Community Forest

*The **Monashee Community Forest** is a partnership between the Village of Lumby and the Splotsin First Nations people of Enderby. The Community Forest is in its 4th year of operations and has added significantly to each community and to the regional economy both in jobs and financial returns for community infrastructure and social programs. Both are rural communities with deep ties to the land and a long history of forest use and management. It is with great pride that both communities are working together to co-manage a local community forest with significant cultural and economic importance. The success of this initiative has spurred the partners to look at additional joint opportunities in the future.*

The West Boundary Community Forest uses 100% local employment in all phases of management. We have a strong relationship with the Osoyoos Indian Band and have been highly profitable since day one. The fibre generated from the WBCF helps to maintain our local community mill, which in turn, is the foundation for the small rural towns of Midway and Greenwood. Our focus on forest health has improved pine beetle and root rot stands, and our strong ties to the local recreational organizations has initiated the development and improvement of local trails. We have addressed fuel management in the well documented wildfire corridor of Rock Creek, while developing two Ecosystem Restoration Projects in conjunction with the MFLNRO. Our local communication with the public has been praised, with Ministry staff stating, "The immediate success of this community forest from a financial, environmental, and social licence standpoint is unbelievable."

Background information on the Community Forest Indicators survey questions and methodology as well as an electronic copy of the report can be found on our website at www.bccfa.ca.

Expanding the Community Forest Program

The BCCFA recommends an expansion of the community forest program by creating new community forests and increasing the size of existing ones. The greatest challenge facing many of the existing community forests in BC is their size. They are too small to achieve economies of scale, much less fulfill the vision held by their communities. Community forests must be large enough to be efficient, economically viable, and able to provide the maximum benefit to local economies. Of immediate importance is the approval of the Community Tenures Regulation to allow for the expansion of existing CFAs.

In light of the devastating 2017 fire season, the BCCFA further recommends that the province consider designating a 10 km zone around communities where community tenures and wildfire management are prioritized. This is a critical zone for community protection. This zone also encompasses areas around communities where other social values and ecosystem services intersect, including community watersheds, sites of cultural significance and recreational areas. Further, this zone is of prime importance to Indigenous and rural communities as they invest in economic development to become more sustainable. Community-based tenures - the community forest agreement and the First Nations woodlands licence - are the most appropriate mechanism to meet urgent priorities for rural development and community protection.

There are 13.6 million hectares in this 10km buffer. Currently, community forest agreements operate on 5.7% of that area (they account for 1.8% of the landbase provincially). By giving communities the opportunity to manage more of the lands in this 10 km buffer, the province can empower them to be part of the solution.

To implement a concept like this would 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 exploration. In BC, close to half of the operating community forests are held by First Nations, or a partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. This is a model that fosters understanding and cooperation between rural and Indigenous communities and can be a powerful tool in reconciliation.

Our concept would see communities taking on a stronger stewardship role. Where appropriate, more partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities could be created. The community forest tenure has already resulted in many such partnerships, and the potential for positive outcomes is great.

Supporting Investment

Community forests are uniquely incented to make investments in the forest resource for long-term sustainability. A community with a long-term, area-based tenure must live with the consequences of their decisions, and conversely, is motivated to invest for future benefit. For the same reason, CFA holders are proactive in managing for a range of objectives, including:

- wildfire mitigation & community protection
- climate change mitigation and adaption
- enhanced forest stewardship and incremental silviculture
- conservation of culturally significant areas and values.

We recommend that the BC Government continue to support community forest agreement holders to invest in activities such as wildfire hazard reduction, rehabilitation, intensive silviculture, and economic diversification by providing support through provincial programs. Fuel management is a top priority, and community forests are uniquely positioned to serve as leaders in the coordination and management of wildland urban interface areas. Community forests have the mandate, the ability, and the interest to manage the threat of wildfire to create more resilient communities and forests. With financial support, they can deliver community protection.

A significant problem we are hearing about from community forest representatives in smaller communities is how constrained they are because of the lack of reliable, fast internet connectivity. Internet technology has revolutionized forest management (as it has all aspects of our lives), and rural communities that lack access are being left behind. Connectivity is a crucial element in the success of community forest initiatives, and in any further economic diversification in rural BC.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Community forests are a powerful tool for:

- Building partnerships with 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 implementing the BCCFA's recommendations to establish new community forests and expand existing ones in the 10 km zone around communities, while continuing to provide support for priority investments such as wildfire hazard reduction, the BC Government will take significant strides in meeting its rural development mandate.

For more information about the BC Community Forest Association, visit www.bccfa.ca or email info@bccfa.ca