

BC Community Forest Association's Key Recommendations & Priorities

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Community forest agreements (CFAs) are managed by local governments, First Nations, and community organizations. They focus on sustainable forest management that supports community values. These community-based initiatives prioritize local involvement and have demonstrated effective stewardship in socially, culturally and ecologically sensitive areas. CFAs are a powerful tool for:

- Building partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities;
- Reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires and building climate-resilient communities; and
- Energizing rural development.

There are currently 61 active community forests in the province, representing just 3% of the annual timber harvest. The BC Community Forest Association (BCCFA) advocates for expanding the community forest program as a key strategy for resilient forests and communities. Our vision is a network of diverse community forest initiatives across BC, where local people practice ecologically responsible forest management in perpetuity, fostering and supporting healthy and vibrant rural communities and economies.

By expanding the number and size of community forests, the provincial government can achieve multiple objectives, including enhanced wildfire risk reduction, increased economic opportunities for rural and Indigenous communities, and the sustainable management of BC's forest resources.

The following priority actions support our vision

Expand the CFA Program:

- Make CFAs widely available to communities and First Nations, particularly in a proposed 10 km zone around communities for wildfire mitigation and rural development¹. This pragmatic and important vision can be realized through a strategy to re-apportion AAC to create new community forests and to expand existing ones. Recent legislative changes² support this path if coupled with upfront government investment. This expansion will significantly contribute to reducing wildfire risks and fostering local economic growth.

Effective Wildfire Risk Reduction

- Continue supporting wildfire risk reduction in CFAs by providing multi-year funding and work with the BCCFA to ensure that regulations support effective management of the wildland urban interface. CFAs play a key role in mitigating wildfire risks and should be empowered to strengthen this capacity. Through the BCCFA & BC Wildfire Service Partnership, continue to enhance the positive role of CFAs in wildfire preparedness, prevention, response and recovery.

¹ The Union of BC Municipalities and the BC Flood and Wildfire Review made the same recommendation.

² The Forest Amendment Act, 2021

Maintain Stumpage Rates for CFAs

- Preserve the current timber pricing policy (tabular rate stumpage), which is crucial for CFAs to operate sustainably, create local jobs, and provide economic benefits while managing for multiple values on the land.

The BCCFA must remain engaged in forest policy reform discussions in BC to ensure new policies support innovation and community forest operations. Empowering Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to build new community forest partnerships and to incorporate Western science and Indigenous knowledge to enhance ecosystem health is essential. A flexible approach to ecosystem management is needed to address natural disturbances, climate change, and community safety, with an emphasis on active forest management. Additionally, investing in improved data and transparency in policy implementation will support informed land use decisions.

Community Forests: The Context

The community forest tenure was established to empower local communities to manage nearby forests in alignment with their specific objectives and values. The Community Forest Agreement is an area-based license between the provincial government and the agreement holder, granting the exclusive right to harvest timber and manage forest products within the designated area. These licenses are long-term, spanning 25 years, and are renewable every 10 years. Since the inception of the community forest tenure in 1998, British Columbia has issued 61 community forests, with 3 more in the application process. These licenses are held by a diverse range of community-based legal entities, including Limited Partnerships, Societies, Co-Ops, and Indigenous and local governments.

Today, 1,941,455 hectares are managed by Community Forest Agreement holders, with a combined Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) of 2,257,353 cubic meters, representing approximately 3% of the provincial AAC.

Through various partnerships, over 100 Indigenous and rural communities in British Columbia are now engaged in community forestry. Half of the operating community forests are either held by First Nations or in partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The BCCFA is dedicated to prioritizing forest management that respects First Nations' rights and cultural values, fostering understanding and cooperation between rural communities and First Nations. By actively including Indigenous knowledge and values in forest management, we can advance innovative, forward-thinking stewardship of our forests.

Since 2014 the BCCFA has conducted an annual survey of its members to measure the benefits that community forests generate. Eighteen indicators provide tangible, quantitative information on the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits of community forests.

Visit www.bccfa.ca to learn more.

The Case for Community Forestry

Community forests, often located on provincial forest lands surrounding communities, play a vital role in managing essential social values and ecosystem services. These areas, which are at high risk of wildfire, include community and domestic watersheds, culturally significant sites, and recreational zones. Expanding community-based tenures can significantly improve the management of these critical areas, with a focus on climate change adaptation, forest health, and community wildfire protection.

The following sections outline how expanding the community forest program will help the government achieve multiple objectives, including enhanced wildfire protection, increased economic opportunities for rural and Indigenous communities, and the sustainable management of BC's forest resources.

1. Local Management and Social Licence: Community forests are uniquely managed by the communities they serve, ensuring that public engagement is a core component of their operations. This local approach builds strong relationships and secures social license, as these forests consistently go beyond tenure requirements to address community needs. The BCCFA supports these efforts by providing educational resources and fostering understanding and cooperation between government and local stakeholders.

2. Increased First Nations Participation: Community forests also offer a proven method to enhance First Nations' involvement in the forest sector. Currently, half of BC's operating community forests are either held by First Nations or managed in partnership with non-Indigenous communities. This collaboration respects Indigenous rights and cultural values, strengthening relationships and cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

3. Support for Diverse Forest Products Sector: Community forests play a crucial role as independent suppliers of wood and fiber, supporting both major industries and smaller, value-added manufacturers. Expanding the community forest program can further bolster the growth of a diverse forest products manufacturing sector, which is essential for sustaining and enhancing local economies.

4. Rural Development and Economic Resilience: When the BC Government grants forest and land management rights to rural and Indigenous communities, community forests can leverage even small harvest volumes for various economic activities, such as supporting small mills and creating jobs through partnerships. This approach promotes greater self-reliance and resilience, enabling these communities to thrive.

5. Long-Term Sustainability and Wildfire Mitigation: Community forests are motivated to invest in the long-term sustainability of forest resources. They lead in proactive wildfire risk reduction, making them essential in the sustainable management of BC's forests.

Potential Outcomes of Expansion:

- **Revitalization of the Social Contract:** Local control over resources allows community members to see the direct benefits of harvesting, strengthening the connection between communities and their local environment.
- **Enhanced Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Partnerships:** Expanding community forests encourages more partnerships, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration.
- **Tenure Diversification:** This diversification can stabilize local economies and provide consistent timber supply, attracting or supporting manufacturing facilities.
- **Increased Domestic Log Supply:** By focusing on community forests, the province can ensure a steady supply of logs for domestic processing, enhancing local manufacturing capacity.

In Conclusion

Communities across BC are increasingly seeking greater control over local resources to develop local solutions, diversify their economies, and enhance self-reliance. Community Forest Agreements (CFAs) are pivotal in expanding participation in the forest sector, promoting sustainability, and strengthening local connections. These agreements empower both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to manage local forests sustainably, create meaningful employment, and uphold a wide range of local values.

We are committed to advancing reconciliation with First Nations, prioritizing people, and fostering a competitive, sustainable forest sector. The BCCFA remains dedicated to working collaboratively to achieve these goals and to fully harness the potential of CFAs for modern, inclusive land stewardship.



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