

BCCFA Conference May 27 2025

Breakout Session: Forest Policy: Shaping the Future

Session description: This session will spark meaningful dialogue on the policy initiatives driving change and the challenges and opportunities ahead for community forests. Panelists, including representatives from the Ministry of Forests, First Nations Forestry Council and BCTS Review Task Force, will discuss:

- Expanding Community Forests: The push to grow community forest opportunities and enhance their impact.
- First Nations Leadership in Tenure: How evolving policy is empowering Indigenous participation.
- Rethinking BC Timber Sales: An update on the BCTS review and its potential to reshape fibre access and market dynamics.

Speakers:

- Matt Austin - Assistant Deputy Minister, Integrated Resource Operations Division
- Brian Frenkle – District of Vanderhoof, Councillor and BCTS Review team member
- Jennifer Gunter - Executive Director, BC Community Forest Association
- Melissa Sanderson– Assistant Deputy Minister, Timber, Range, and Economics Division
- Lennard Joe – CEO of BC First Nations Forestry Council and BCTS Review team member

Moderator - David Elstone, Spar Tree Group

Notes compiled by: Maeve McAllister

Main Topics Discussed

- **Forest Policy Modernization:** Shifts in forest policy in BC over the past 5 years, including the Coast and Interior revitalizations, permitting issues, the Forest Landscape Planning (FLP) initiative, and the BC Timber Sales (BCTS) review.
- **Community Forests (CFs):** Role, expansion, and future of CFs in tenure systems, wildfire mitigation, stewardship, and policy advocacy.
- **Indigenous Empowerment and Reconciliation:** First Nations' inclusion in forest policy, governance, and economic participation; importance of trust, partnership, and recognition of responsibility.

- **BCTS Review:** Engagement process, inefficiencies, modernization efforts, support for community based and First Nations stewardship, and integration with broader forest health and economic strategies.
- **Social License and Public Trust:** The importance of communication, transparency, community engagement, and diverse tenure models in gaining social license.
- **Pricing and Fibre Access:** Challenges in timber pricing, fiscal constraints, volume availability, and the need for flexible, localized pricing and tenure systems.
- **Future Harvest Targets:** Premier's target of 45 million cubic meters annually; strategies to support sustainable harvest levels through planning, stewardship, and reconciliation.

Key Takeaways

- Forest policy is at a crossroads; modernization is critical to meet evolving economic, environmental, and social needs.
- Community Forests are central to future stewardship models and can enhance reconciliation, local planning, and forest health.
- First Nations must be at the table for any meaningful forest policy reform, not just for equity but to fulfill stewardship responsibilities.
- BCTS must evolve structurally and culturally to support diverse objectives like wildfire mitigation, economic resilience, and co-management.
- Sustainable harvest targets must be approached with adaptable systems, experimentation, and community support, not rigid quotas.
- Submit final recommendations for BCTS review by July 15.
- Explore creation of alternative pricing models for Community Forests.
- Develop clear policy linkages between BCTS and CFs, especially around co-management and stewardship.
- Evaluate fibre fold and pricing models

Key Discussion Points from Audience and Panel Discussions

- Forest policy initiatives should align and support interconnected efforts such as the BCTS review, Indigenous empowerment, and community forests.
- Timber pricing must account for operational realities to attract investment and ensure economic viability.
- Forest tenure models need flexibility to reflect the unique conditions of different landscapes, such as wildland-urban interface zones.
- Strong social license is a key driver for community forest investment and long-term success.
- There is potential for existing tenure holders (e.g., TFLs, woodlots) to contribute timber toward fulfilling BCTS mandates.

- Current BCTS sales focus on marketable wood rather than full forest profiles, raising concerns about meeting AAC targets.
- Achieving the provincial harvest goal of 45 million cubic meters requires realistic assessments of available volume and appropriate policy support.
- Community forests play a significant role in fostering community identity, cohesion, and environmental stewardship, beyond timber production.
- Identifying reliable sources of additional fibre is critical to reaching provincial harvest targets.
- Meaningful partnerships and co-management structures are essential, especially in collaboration with First Nations and in modernizing BCTS operations.
- Forest policy and programs must be designed to reflect current environmental and economic conditions in order to build investor confidence and long-term sustainability.
- Tenure structures (replaceable vs. non-replaceable) must be thoughtfully applied based on ecological and community context.
- Expansion of the Community Forest Agreement (CFA) program should be approached with caution to ensure models are context-appropriate and effective.

Important Quotes

- “new relationship forming/unraveling with the US, duties and tariffs doubling in August, pressures increasing all the time.”
“Conversation at a crossroads in the last 5 years, more so today.”
- “Need more government involvement in forest policy.”
“Transition to more community-based tenure systems... holds more water now than it ever has.”
- “45 million – it’s a number, what the sector believes is needed to maintain a healthy industry in our province. What we heard from the community forest panel this morning is how important it is to get an AAC that’s real. We need reliable data and a land base that can support 45 million cubic meters, incorporating local planning, combining western science with local knowledge, and includes community support. Harvest level that is real, from the bottom up, and sustainable. Maybe lower than the sector would like, but in 20 years we’ll have a healthier forest with more volume. AAC must be set through these processes. We cannot be picking a number.”
- “The changes people want to see are happening in community forests.”
“Let’s start talking about what BCTS could become – significant reforms that could be made.”
“Everyone we work with in government understands that community forests are unique.”

- “Community forests – fundamental place where people can have direct connections with forest – predicated on worldview.”
“Community forests – conservation ethic – direct contact with nature worlds, You don’t get inspired in a seminar.”
“Pricing is what is limiting growth of community forests – not a secret.”
“Whatever we do, it has to be dynamic... build systems that are adaptable.”
- “What more can BCTS be doing?”
“Extensive engagement – 36 associations, 250 written submissions.”
“Loss of social license in the BCTS.”
“Significant investment from the province – the land base is designed to achieve harvest levels.”
- “Everyone is in someone’s traditional territory, carry the knowledge and loss that reflect that, first nations are very diverse in how they appear and practice, reflection of the lands that they have a task to look after, not about the right to be at that room and at that table, about the responsibility that they carry”
“Trust is not the same as liked.”
“Don’t wait for a First Nation to come to you – take some responsibility and go to a First Nation.”
“Economy and cultural side need to be in balance for the health of future generations.”

My Thoughts/Observations:

The panellists brought up excellent critiques of the 45 million cubic meters mandate and the issues concerning BCTS. Specifically, consequences for geographical differentiation and issues with a high yield mandate that may be incommensurable with community values, social licence, and forest health.

Resources Mentioned:

- Abbott-Chapman Report
- FLP (Forest Landscape Planning)

Feedback/Suggestions:

The open discussion format and mix of high-level policy commentary with grounded practitioner experience was effective, especially the decision to allow for audience questions and follow-up. The density of technical information (e.g. BCTS metrics, fibre flow, pricing

models) may have benefitted from clearer framing or visual aids to help attendees track complex policy threads.

Given the July 15th deadline mentioned for BCTS recommendations, attendees would benefit from a clear outline of how to continue engaging with the review process—whether through written submissions, workshops, or consultation channels.