



Social Licence and BC's Woodlot Licences



Mountain biking on a Quadra Island woodlot licence.

By LISA MARAK

BC's forests are a publicly owned resource, which must be managed and administered in the best interests of British Columbians. The provincial government is the designated caretaker, while those with forest tenure are the practitioners and have been entrusted by the public to manage and care for their forests.

The origin of BC's Woodlot Licence Program dates back to 1948 when government amended the Forest Act to allow farmers to obtain small areas of Crown forest to manage as farm woodlots. This is seen by many as an early form of social licence; i.e. to achieve a broader

societal objective which, in this case, was to help support and promote farming.

As the program has grown over time, it has remained connected to the farming and ranching sector, but has been expanded to address other social values notably;

- As a form of tenure available to local residents to manage forests in close proximity to their residence or community;
- To encourage the long term, sustainable management of private forest land by allowing it to be included in a woodlot licence; and
- To provide a source of wood for small milling and manufacturing operations.

But perhaps most importantly from a social

licence perspective, are the contributions woodlot licences make on the landscape. Societal demands on our forests include such things as clean water, recreation, visual quality, recreation, cultural heritage, healthy plant communities, wildlife and timber. By virtue of being a small, area-based tenure managed by an individual who lives nearby, licence holders are closely connected to local interests and values. A licensee is more sensitive to concerns as they must interact with their neighbours and community members on an ongoing basis. Communication tends to be better and the individual responsible for managing the forest and its multiple values is readily accessible.

A good example of where this worked is Quadra Island, where, in decades past, industrial

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The Federation of BC Woodlot Associations' 29th and Woodlot Product Development Council's 19th annual general meetings and conference will be held **September 29 to October 1, 2016 in Prince George, BC**. The theme is **"Beyond the Beetle"** with conference topics such as future timber supply, wildfire, log sales, brush management and meeting free growing obligations and includes a field tour to woodlot licenses impacted by the mountain pine beetle.



Charles Bloom Secondary School woodlot's certified faller Allen working with student Rylie to fall trees. Charles Bloom Secondary School has woodlot licence #1908 located in Lumby which acts as the outdoor classroom for the school's forestry program.

operators and BC Timber Sales found it difficult to operate. Relations between the community and forest resource operators (including initial woodlots) were contentious. Today woodlot licences are able to thrive because the individuals managing the woodlot licences are connected to the land and community. Over time, woodlot licensees have gained community confidence in their ability to operate sustainably and responsibly on the landscape. With 11 woodlots this was no small feat. The heart of sustainable development is the ability to collaborate with community stakeholders – residents, tourism groups, trail committees (10+km of maintained trails within woodlots), and government. It is not uncommon for a licensee to modify plans or systems to accommodate a favorite mushroom picking site, a mountain bike trail, or an adjacent landowners viewscape.

The current Woodlot Planning and Practices Regulations requires a Woodlot Licence Plan to describe how a licensee will manage an area to achieve management plan objectives while taking into account the local operating conditions. It is an effective vehicle for engaging society as it involves a call for all those interested to bring forward their values, including social values, to be considered and incorporated into the plan both at the strategic and operational levels.

The challenge for woodlot licensees is balancing multiple and competing values and delivering these values in a way that satisfies all parties. Sometimes what is being asked for is not deliverable and often compromise is needed. Sometimes there are trade offs that need to be made; keeping in mind that a key social objective is for a woodlot licence to be financially viable and help support families.

This can be particularly challenging for woodlot licences often located in what could be considered contentious or hard to manage areas, such as being located in close proximity to settlement areas and in transportation corridors where the supply of environmental goods and services are at a premium.

As part of the social licence, woodlot licences provide socio-economic benefits back to the community through the creation and development of small community-based forest businesses by employing people and buying goods and services. Woodlot licensees are a diverse group with many interests and as a local business they tend to invest their money back into the community in which they live.

Some of the woodlot licences' in BC have a unique social licence, as they are managed for timber as well as for education or recreational purposes such as high school forestry programs,

camp, cross country ski club and research forests to name a few.

While the small size of a woodlot licence may have advantages when it comes to social licence, when the program began it was a relatively unknown forest tenure. The citizens of BC were unaware of the woodlot licence and associated the forest industry with large mills. As the woodlot program grew licensees formed local associations and eventually the Federation of BC Woodlot Associations, a provincial organization to promote small scale forestry and represent the interests of the more than 860 woodlot licences around the province today.

For over 60 years, BC's Woodlot Licence program has been meeting the public's expectations regarding the management of the province's forest resources, often in some of the most challenging areas to manage. Given its past successes and considering societies' ever increasing demands on forests, woodlot licensees are well positioned to be a forest tenure of choice when considering social licence. After all, a measure of success for most woodlot activities is public acceptance of a job well done.

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