



## George Delisle: seeing the forest for the trees

It's not often you meet someone who speaks about their job in terms of centuries. In fact, if you're having that conversation, there's probably a woodlot licensee in the room. These unique forest stewards approach their vocation with their vision set far into the future, managing a precious resource that will provide social, environmental and economic benefits not only for the present, but for generations to come.

George Delisle is one such steward, and his efforts were recently recognized by MLA John Slater, who named him winner of the Minister's Award of Excellence for Woodlot Management for the Southern Interior.

We've all heard the adage "can't see the forest for the trees." Delisle's uncanny ability to see both makes him an extremely effective woodlot manager. A self-taught forester and silviculturalist, Delisle spent 27 years looking at the forest through the lens of a large lumber mill before redirecting his energies to his 730 hectare tenure in Rock Creek, part of BC's scenic Boundary-Similkameen region.

His approach to forest management is a tempered blend of productivity and preservation. Eschewing the use of fertilizers to improve yields, Delisle instead adheres to a system of thinning, spacing and pruning, giving more room, water and light to the remaining stock. The resulting improvement in growth is significant.

In addition to improving the quality of timber, clearing the forest floor of debris and pruning lower branches removes fuel that would aid in the spread of wild fires.

Despite the current government policy of letting nature take its course and allowing remote forests burn, he is committed to pre-



**George Delisle has spent years finding the delicate balance between preservation and productivity on his woodlot. Delisle was recognized with a Minister's Award of Excellence for Woodlot Management.**

servicing the trees and not allowing fires to spread out of control. In his words, "fire is a blunt instrument compared to harvesting and spacing on a forest." He doesn't try to replace Mother Nature on the job, though – just nudge her in the right direction.

Mother Nature also gets a nudge when it comes to species selection, though Delisle simply takes clues from the signals she gives.

As the terrain grows and changes, certain varieties establish themselves in spaces they hadn't occupied previously. By watching this shift, Delisle is able to supplement a stand with additional planting and take advantage of the favourable conditions that have emerged.

He's also aware that he is providing vital habitat for wildlife and has a well-established population of "cavity-nesters" – birds that build their nests in tree trunks – such as the

rare Williamson's Sapsucker.

By "listening to what the forest" tells him, Delisle has managed to grow stronger trees faster, and he's committed to producing high-quality lumber for timber frame construction and log homes. He firmly believes that BC can establish itself as a premiere source of material for this market, though it may take a certain amount of patience and a willingness to sacrifice quantity for quality.

While growing regions to the far south – such as Brazil – can turn their harvest cycle in a mere 15 years, our climate dictates a cycle in excess of 100 years, however the resulting product is stronger and more appealing for the premium lumber market. Delisle runs his woodlot on a 20-year selective harvest cycle and sees a strong future for his tenure well into the future. Centuries, even.

# Woodlot program exemplifies sustainability

Members of the BC Federation of Woodlot Associations and Woodlot Product Development Council will gather in Harrison Hot Springs this September for their Joint Annual General Meeting to explore Woodlots: International Success Stories.

The United Nations declared 2011 “International Year of Forests” – a year to celebrate the important role our forests play worldwide, and to acknowledge the vital link between our collective actions and the health and longevity of our woodlands. Through this declaration, the UN sought to throw a spotlight on issues surrounding sustainable management, conservation and utilisation of global forests, prompting a dialogue about practices that can be adopted to protect and enhance this valuable resource.

Nations around the globe have observed this occasion with a wide range of activities, from youth tree-planting projects and art exhibits to international planning sessions, in countries as varied as Russia, Brazil, Australia

and England. Topics have included wildlife habitat preservation, commercial options for lumber products, and management of the



The United Nations has declared 2011 'International Year of Forests'. The declaration is an acknowledgement of the important role forests play in the world. In Canada, the woodlot program is an example of locally-based sustainable forest management. LLOYD DAVIES PHOTO

## Woodlot AGM

**When:** September 22-24  
**Where:** Harrison Hot Springs  
**How:** You can register for the conference by contacting Cathy McClary at the Woodlot Product Development Council on 1.888.925.9199, emailing [cjmccclary@shaw.ca](mailto:cjmccclary@shaw.ca) or visiting [www.woodlot.bc.ca](http://www.woodlot.bc.ca)

resource for both social and economic sustainability. The Woodlot program is a shining example of sustainable forestry management, consistent with the spirit of the UN declaration. Since its inception in 1979, the BC Woodlot Licence program – unique to the forestry sector worldwide – has entrusted provincial Crown land to a diverse and dedicated group of foresters who manage this publicly-owned resource under strict guidelines.

Members of the Federation and Council will gather September 22-24, 2011 in Harrison Hot Springs, BC, to discuss the elements that make woodlots successful both at home and abroad. They'll draw lessons from other regions of the world in an effort to improve woodlots and woodlot licenses in the province. And they'll have the opportunity to tour a woodlot

managed by First Nations stakeholders where cultural, environmental, social and economic factors converge.



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