



## Is it time for woodlot tenure reform?

By BRIAN MCNAUGHTON

Like BC's forest sector, the woodlot license system needs to evolve into something more than it is today.

From a public perspective, the woodlot licence is an important tenure because it captures many of societies' objectives when it comes to managing and caring for our forests. For example, woodlot licenses are usually held by local people, which achieves the public's desire for more control over local resources so that more of the economic, social and environmental benefits accrue to nearby communities. Forest management is sustainable, acknowledging that healthy and resilient forests and ecosystems are keys to economic success in the short and long term.

The bigger question is, are woodlot licenses all they can be? The answer is, probably not.

There is a great untapped potential within woodlot licenses, not just in growing higher volumes of better quality wood, but with respect to supplying food, medicine, water, clean air, storing carbon and producing a variety of other products. These products are not unknown to those who make a living from the



Increasingly, woodlot owners would like to have the option to manage their land and licenses for multiple value streams, such as maple syrup (left), silvopasture (top) and mushroom harvesting (above).

land. They are often referred to as non-timbered forest products, agro-forestry and environmental goods and services.

In order for these products to emerge and become commercially valuable, the woodlot tenure needs to be reformed allowing a woodlot holder the rights to manage for and harvest these products. Currently the woodlot tenure only grants rights to harvest timber so the

tenure holder has virtually no incentive to invest, produce or market these products.

There is an interest in producing these products. Many woodlot licensees manage and harvest them from their own land. It's not that far fetched for them to do the same thing on Crown land. After all, a successful woodlot holder re-invests in the community in which they live and work.

## From idealism to realism: beginnings of woodlot forestry in BC

It was F.D. Mulholland, a senior government forester in the early 20th Century and author of the landmark 1937 resource analysis, *The Forest Resources of British Columbia*, who was one of the first to seriously examine the non-industrial private forestry sectors of Northern and Central Europe with a view to adopting their model in BC. In the forest tenure policy debates during and following World War II, Fred Mulholland argued vigorously for a larger role for family tree farm enterprises.

The origins of the program began in 1948 when the Forest Act was amended to allow farmers to manage Crown land, referred to as farm

woodlots. A farmer was limited to about 40 hectares on the Coast and 100 hectares in the Interior. But it wasn't until 1976 when the Crown Woodlot Licence program of today was introduced with the Pearse Commission.

While there were only 37 licences in the province at that time, there have been periods of rapid expansion in the 1980s and 90s. Today the Ministry of Forests and Range is in the process of awarding another 65 to 70 new woodlot licences in various locations. When this phase of program expansion is complete in 2012, there will be about 900 woodlot licences scattered throughout BC.

# How woodlots contribute to my local community

By CODY TURNER

FBCWA awards a \$1,000 scholarship each year to a student attending a post-secondary institution, preferably in a forestry-related program, who is related to a woodlot licensee and/or a private forest land owner. Applications include an essay. The essay topic for 2009/10 was How do woodlots contribute to my local community? This is Cody's winning essay.



Cody Turner spent much of last summer fighting the Martin Mountain Wildfire, which unfortunately claimed the vast majority of his family's woodlot — WL#318 in Pritchard, BC.

Woodlots are very important in British Columbia as forestry is a major industry that employs many individuals in several small communities. Woodlots keep jobs close to home as they are small in size compared to large operations such as Tolko. Due to the small size of operation, many tenure holders employ people from the surrounding area, keeping money in the local economy.

Due to the criteria (pre-2009) that one must meet in order to be issued a woodlot, woodlots are put into the hands of the people that care about the environment and the sustainability of the operation. Part of the criteria is that the tenure holder should live close to the woodlot, resulting in healthier forests as the operator is looking after land that is close to his home. Also, the criteria that the tenure holder should have some private land to include in the boundaries of the woodlot, which is to be looked after in the same manner as the crown land, makes one care more about the land that they are managing.

As many ranchers and farmers have large areas of private land that could be forest, many received a woodlot. When my father obtained his woodlot, many ranchers were getting a licence in the local area. This licence helped to stabilize the income in an

industry which has many ups and downs.

Like other woodlots where I live and hope to spend the rest of my life, our woodlot is located in an area that serves more than one use for our family. Our Crown grazing leases for the ranching side of the business and the creeks to which we hold water rights and supply our drinking water are also located in the same area as our woodlot. As there are many important resources grouped together with our woodlot there is an even greater need for the land to be managed correctly so that the forest will be healthy for many generations to come and not just for the current generation. As I am the fourth generation on our ranch, the health and well being of the forest and surrounding area has always been of great importance to me.

Since my father first received the woodlot

in the 1980s he has employed many people including young people from the community in which we live. Some of the employees have saved their money to buy a vehicle and go through university to pursue a career in a field of interest, some of whom are pursuing a career in forestry related disciplines.

Although the forest industry is not in good shape at the current time, woodlots have helped families in my local community through these poor economic times and continue to play an important role in the well-being of British Columbia's forests.

Woodlots play a large role in the welfare of many communities in British Columbia and will continue to do so into the future. Through employment opportunities, proper management, and job experience, woodlots are a benefit to everyone.



## FEDERATION OF BC WOODLOT ASSOCIATIONS

381 Pheasant Road • Williams Lake, BC, V2G 5A9  
Tel (250) 398-7646 • Toll Free: 1-866-345-8733  
Email: gen\_manager@woodlot.bc.ca  
www.woodlot.bc.ca

## WOODLOT PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL THE WOODLAND ALMANAC

Box 10033, Prince George, BC V2K 5Y1  
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