



Terms of Reference for a Special Report

Clarifying the status and implications of not satisfactorily re-stocked forest in BC

September 2011

BACKGROUND

One of the Forest Practices Board's strategic interests is "whether a resilient forest is being established and maintained consistent with public expectations and assumptions."¹ An integral part of that topic is the status and implications of, what is known in BC forestry parlance as, "not satisfactorily re-stocked" (NSR) areas. NSR is broadly defined as "an area not covered by a sufficient number of well-spaced trees of desirable species."² Setting aside the need for definitions of the words "sufficient", "well-spaced" and "desirable" (effectively the definition of a stocking standard³) it is important to note that the definition:

- implies that being NSR is something that requires remedy (i.e. it is not satisfactory); and
- does not contain any restrictions on why the area is NSR (i.e. whether it is human harvesting or natural disturbances).

Late in the last century the principal issue around NSR related to reducing the "backlog" of NSR area created prior to 1987; when the legal requirement to re-forest harvested areas was enacted. Over the last 10 years a different NSR issue has become increasingly important to forest managers; that is, the NSR areas created by the current mountain pine beetle outbreak and recent large fires.

In the summer of 2010 the extent of that issue, and resulting implications, became a matter of both concern and confusion among the public and some policy makers; partly because of a flurry of letters to the editor on the topic.⁴ Despite efforts to clarify the situation⁵ confusion seems to remain; fueled, in part, by the continued publication of sometimes contradictory opinion editorials,⁶ letters to the editor⁷ and "grey literature" articles⁸ on the topic.

¹ Board Newsletter #4 http://www.fpb.gov.bc.ca/FPB_Newsletter_Issue_4_Winter_2010_11.htm

² <http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfd/library/documents/glossary/Glossary.pdf>

³ "The range of healthy, well-spaced, acceptable trees required to establish a free-growing stand. . ."

⁴ <http://www.wsca.ca/Media/Multimedia/Feb%203%20-%20NSR%20-%20FPB%20Backgrounder%20-%20Marvin%20Eng.pdf>

⁵ Notably by the Western Silvicultural Contractors' Association at their annual meeting in Feb. 2011.

⁶ <http://www.vancouversun.com/technology/policies+needed+save+forests/4580168/story.html>

⁷ e.g. <http://www.vancouversun.com/news/todays-paper/forest+practices+aren+working+address/4695008/story.html>;

http://www.abcfp.ca/publications_forms/BCFORmagazine/documents/BCFORPRO-2011-4_AllArticles/BCFORPRO-2011-4_Letters.pdf

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Board in producing this special report will be, to the extent possible, to provide clarification on what is meant by the term NSR and what is known and unknown about the current amount of NSR area in British Columbia. The Board will also provide an opinion on strategic issues arising from that clarification.

SCOPE

This project will be provincial in scope although there will be an emphasis on examining issues related to NSR in the areas affected by the current mountain pine beetle outbreak and recent large fires.

APPROACH

In general, the approach to the investigation will be to:

1. Conduct an assessment and summary of “the facts of the matter” that is as complete and transparent as possible. This assessment would:
 - Clarify the terms used to discuss the topic of NSR;
 - Describe what is known and what is unknown about the amount of NSR area; and
 - Provide the Board’s “best estimate” of the current amount of NSR area in the province.

The assessment would be based on a review of relevant publications and a critical evaluation of the information, methods and assumptions used by others who have recently provided estimates of the amount of NSR area.

2. Develop a discussion of strategic issues arising from “the facts of the matter” including:
 - What is the significance of the unknowns to decisions that are made involving the topic and what is government doing to address important information gaps?
 - What is government doing to address the amount of NSR on the land base and, to the extent possible, what are the socio-economic and ecological consequences of government’s strategy and actions for addressing NSR?

⁹ e.g. Britneff, A. 2011. NSR and British Columbia’s reforestation crisis. BC Forest Professional, May-June 2011:8-9; Kosman, K July 22, 2011: Reforestation and NSR – British Columbia, Madison’s Lumber Reporter, Vol 69(29):8;

The discussion will be developed using the “facts of the matter”, described above, as a basis for formal and informal interviews with a selection of policy makers, forest managers and those that attempt to influence public opinion on the topic.

REPORTING

This report is not intended to be an audit of the state of NSR. Results for individual licenses will not be presented. Results describing differences among geographical areas within the province may be presented as appropriate.

The special report would be intended for the general public and policy makers. The intent of the report will be to inform decision makers and those that try to influence them. The report may make recommendations on improving the effectiveness of the current regulations and planning processes related to the reporting and management of the amount of NSR area.