

Community groups unite to reform forestry

Community Organizations form a province-wide coalition to improve forest industry planning and practices.

Community organizations across the province are fed-up with forestry operations that pose risks to water quality, recreational values and slope stability due to the lack of government oversight that has resulted from the professional reliance system brought in 16 years ago. Consequently, they have formed the BC Coalition for Forestry Reform to demand significant changes to forest industry regulations and practices, that will enable communities to have more influence over management of BC's forests.

"For years, we've known that the Forestry and Range Practices Act (FRPA), which is based on professional reliance, is far from acceptable," stated Van Andruss, a spokesperson for the BC Coalition for Forestry Reform. "FRPA ignores all values other than timber, including air, water, soil, wildlife, tourism and recreation. In this era of climate change, this policy is neither reasonable nor practical," he added.

Throughout the province, there is a growing distrust of logging companies that carry out cutting plans without adequate government oversight and without proper consultation or approval of the people who live in the affected watersheds.

The new grassroots coalition welcomes the Ministry of Environment's professional reliance review. "We view professional reliance as a system that creates a conflict of interest for industry professionals who must continue providing wood fibre for the mills while also supposedly protecting non-timber values," explained Andruss. As of January 19th, the deadline day for public input, there were 51 stakeholder submissions to the review. The final report is due this spring (see <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/professionalreliance/about-the-project/>).

Ever since the FRPA was put in place, communities have witnessed increasing damage to wildlife habitat, recreational values, watersheds and steep slopes due to logging and road building activities that went ahead without adequate review by either the public or government staff.

Examples of impacts include high turbidity in creeks; landslides and debris flows; loss of recreation and tourism values; increased flooding, loss of critical habitat for endangered mountain caribou; and low stream flows. See backgrounder below for more details.

"Given that there is a new government in Victoria that is committed to making positive changes, we see there is an opportunity to reform forestry to make it more accountable to the communities that depend on healthy forests," declared Andruss. "We look forward to more community groups joining with us to work for change," he added.

For more information, visit the Coalition's website, bccfr.org.

Contact:

Taryn Skalbania, 250-767-6456, cell 864-8644
Van Andruss, 778-770-1649

BACKGROUND

The BC Coalition for Forestry Reform had identified these seven goals for reform:

1. Forest management according to long term, landscape-level planning, including a mandatory shared decision-making process with local communities.
2. Landscape-level plans to be made fully available for public review and that fully incorporate public needs and values.
3. Full recognition of timber and non-timber values, including water, fish and wildlife habitat, biodiversity, tourism, and recreation.
4. The restoration of clear government discretionary powers with regard to the approval of harvest plans and practices, including an updated Forest Practices Code with accompanying Guidelines.
5. Full recognition and guidance of forestry planning on the basis of scientific data. Full recognition, for example, of global warming and adjustment of forest policies accordingly.
6. A vigilant monitoring system, well budgeted and independent of corporate control, with particular attention given to riparian zones.
7. Staffing levels and budgets adequate to support the proposed changes.

Coalition members to date:

- Apex Property Owners Association
- BRVCA Valley Wide Forestry Committee
- Glade Watershed Protection Society
- Juan de Fuca Forest Watch
- Peachland Watershed Protection Alliance
- Shuswap Environmental Action Society
- Swansea Point Community Association
- The Upper Clearwater Referral Group
- Yalakom Forestry Committee
- Cherryville Water Stewards

Examples of problems related to FRPA:

- The Swansea Point community at **Mara Lake** has endured damage from two massive debris torrents that were in part due to irresponsible logging and road building. More logging is planned on the steep hillside above the community and

under FRPA there is no mechanism for the community or the government to prevent the logging or the expected aftermath.

- North of **Castlegar** is the 29² km Glade Creek watershed, which provides domestic water for the community of Glade. The watershed is in recovery after historical fires and horse logging, flooding, and recently, some conventional logging occurred. High turbidity, small landslides, and proposed logging by two licensees are a concern to residents. As there is no mechanism under FRPA for water protection, the Glade Watershed Protection Society began working to find other measures that will protect this vital resource.
- The **Apex** Property Owners Association (APOA) is the non-profit organization representing property owners in the 500+ homes of the unincorporated Apex Mountain Resort community in the south Okanagan. APOA strives to support the sustainability of the Apex resort community; the environmental, recreation and tourism resources on which it is based, and the attendant economic and social values of the Apex alpine area. The Apex area was officially designated an “Intensive Recreation Area” in 2001. Regardless, years of clearcutting have altered, damaged, and constrained its recreation and tourism values.
- In the view of the **Peachland** Watershed Protection Association, Professional Reliance has been a dramatic failure. They have endured the logging of our upper watersheds in the Trepanier and Deep Creek watersheds and now these watersheds are being logged lower down in the valley. Recent watershed data from forest hydrologist Rita Winkler, has shown that 70% of the snowmelt is running off 40% faster, which likely contributed to last year’s flooding in Okanagan Lake. Also last year, the Munro Forestry Service road slid into Deep Creek in late March, which resulted in a boil water advisory for the residents of Peachland that lasted four and a half months. In addition, logging near the Brenda Mine site resulted in Macdonald Creek flooding and washing out a Highway 97C access ramp, and logging in the Jack Creek watershed resulted in Law Creek flooding and washing out MacKinnon Road, which cost \$375,000 to repair.
- **Juan de Fuca** regional residents are deeply troubled by the staggering rate and volume of deforestation in their region and believe nearby forests are being grossly mismanaged.
- The Yalakom Community, near **Lillooet**, has recently made complaints to both Compliance and Enforcement and the Forestry Practices Board about the damaging outcomes of Professional Reliance. Concerns include logging of the only major stand of old growth forest in the area and excessive clearcutting on steep hillsides in full view of our community that are a violation of visual quality objectives. Discussions

with the local company went nowhere, as concerns resulted in only miniscule changes.

- The Upper **Clearwater** Referral Group is a citizen committee convened by the BC government in the year 2000 and mandated to uphold the terms of a formal land-use agreement signed into effect by the BC Forest Service in the year 1999. The *Guiding Principles* agreement was intended to give Upper Clearwater residents a meaningful say in local forestry decision. Though quietly abandoned by the BC Liberal Government a few years later during transition to FRPA, this agreement continues to garner respect locally both by industry and the Ministry of Forest, Lands, and Natural Resources (FLNRO), who profess to abide by its terms. Unfortunately, recent interactions with unscrupulous professionals working under the cover of Professional Reliance have created insurmountable problems for the Referral Group's mandate including: (1) a Professional Hydrologist who signed off on cutting plans without taking into account the downstream hydrological risks associated with deepening climate change; (2) an RPBio with little expertise on caribou biology who nonetheless signed off on cutting plans highly detrimental to the local Mountain Caribou herd; (3) the industry RFT who hired these consultants and then later refused unencumbered access to their reports; (4) a FLNRO District Manager who claimed to be legally obligated to award cutting permits that directly contravene the *Guiding Principles* on several points, and (5) a succession of RPFs, PTFs and RPBios unable to explain who would be held accountable and to what extent in the event of downstream damages arising from their land-use recommendations. After 17 years, these and other iniquities of professional reliance recently forced the Referral Group to shift from its watchdog function to a temporary advocacy role.
- When **Chilcotin** rancher Randy Saugstad first heard about Tolko's plans to log in the watershed above his ranch in 2009 he went to the FLNRO, who told him they agreed with his concerns about the impact to his water but explained that they did not have the power to stop the company. After Tolko clearcut 300 acres, problems began, including flooding in the spring and low flows in the fall and winter. In a 2010 report on Saugstad's case, the Forest Practices Board concluded, "there is fundamental weakness in the ... system that allows one tenure holder to hold the power of decision over another tenure holder." Saugstad later claimed in the lawsuit against Tolko that was settled out of court, that clearcut logging about 5 to 15 kilometres upstream from his property "dramatically altered the amount, timing and course of the water flowing" in Twinflower Creek. The effects included increased spring flooding, streamside erosion, lowering of the water table, reduced water later in the year, and freezing in winter. He said he lost about 35 hectares of land for pasture and hay production.
- In 2017, numerous severe erosion events including landslides and debris torrents tore down hillsides in the **Shuswap** region. Homes were destroyed, highways were

damaged and one person was killed. Many of these slides were in part caused by logging and road building operations on the steep slopes above the destruction. As a result of the concerns expressed by a number of local communities, the Columbia Shuswap Regional District took the unprecedented action to support the call for a moratorium on logging above Swansea Point (see above) and it asked the company to do a better job of communicating with residents. In addition, the regional district took a resolution to their local government association that called for the province to ensure that logging companies hold comprehensive public consultations in communities that could be affected.

- In June of 2011, approximately 80 **Cherryville** residents were given a tour of Cherry Ridge by Tolko, in their effort to “address peoples’ concerns” about the future logging (and subsequent herbicide spraying) above them. When the Tolko staff were asked if they had any hydrological reports, or geotechnical studies to reassure residents living below the ridge, they replied that when “they” think it is an issue, they will call in the professionals. The locals who had lived on the hill for decades, some of whom actually rode on their father’s lap on the bulldozer that cut the original roads in the fifties, were dismissed as alarmists, even though they know that drainage like the back of their hand. The homeowner, who eventually had a debris flow at his doorstep from the logging above, was scolded that day for being confrontational when he expressed dissatisfaction at their lack of data. Given that a once beautiful, reliable, cascading creek is gone and no one knows where this creek water now flows, and given that residents had to endure a four-year run-around when using the Freedom of Information Act; then this is one more example of how reliance on professionals while ignoring the knowledge of residents can result in significant damage to watersheds and property.