

A Voice for Forests

It stings a little every time I read an article or comment online that mischaracterizes forest management in BC or the role of forest professionals. I imagine many forest professionals likely feel a similar way, because a career in forest management is not just a job; what we feel for the forest is both personal and professional — and those feelings have deep roots.



For many, choosing a career in forest management began with a connection to the forest. Connections may have formed in childhood while exploring, playing, and camping in the forest, or from experiencing the restorative power of a walk under a forest canopy, or bird watching or hunting with family. Perhaps that deep connection was cultivated growing up in a forestry-dependant community, experiencing first-hand the economic

benefit well-managed forests generate, such as jobs for individuals and benefits for their families and the community at large.

Whatever the inspiration for our forest education and careers as forest professionals — years spent working in forestry only deepens our connection on both a personal and professional level. No wonder most forest professionals feel a deep sense of responsibility to defend and speak out about forests.

As a result of this passion, the hundreds of comments submitted in the recent registrant survey came as no surprise to me: many forest professionals are concerned about misinformation about forests and forest management. Many respondents expressed a desire to see FPBC combat misinformation and provide unbiased information on areas of public concern. Registrants also suggested public education campaigns about the state of the forest, forest management practices, and the role of forest professionals; and they suggested looking for ways for forest professionals to be engaged in respectful, informed debate about forest management policies and practices.

I couldn't agree more. FPBC is working on these things, just not at the scale I believe many desire. There are clear limitations about how and what FPBC can advocate for, and there are practical limitations based on our staff size and budget; however, we will continue to have a voice in forests and there are ways we can work together to amplify it.

The *Professional Governance Act* (PGA) limits the advocacy scope of FPBC, but the PGA did not take FPBC's voice, or the voice of its registrants.

It is true that FPBC cannot advocate in ways that compromise its neutrality and oversight as a regulator — in other words, FPBC cannot advocate for interests and positions that directly benefit its registrants. For example, FPBC cannot advocate for the salary and compensation of forest professionals. FPBC cannot advocate for how government

chooses to allocate timber rights, or the role of the forest industry in the economy (there are other forest industry-related organizations that focus their advocacy efforts on this already).

What FPBC can advocate for is supporting the profession and public interest in professional forestry.

Public Awareness and Education: Promoting public understanding of the forest profession's standards, forest management and professional practices, and the value it brings to society. FPBC delivers a public campaign each year, primarily online, to best leverage a small budget for the largest possible impact.

Support for Professional Standards: Advocating for the adoption and enforcement of best practices and ethical standards within the profession to improve quality and protect the public. This is foundational to our regulatory work, and a sustained business priority and focus for staff.

Forest Policy and Practice Recommendations: Providing evidence-based, impartial and objective recommendations to policymakers to improve regulations and management practices for the care of the forest, based on the expertise and experience of its registrants. FPBC makes progress in this area and aspires to find even more ways to foster more frequent, deep engagement.

Professional Development: Advocating for and supporting continuing professional development and training opportunities to ensure forest professionals maintain high standards of competence and stay updated with advancements in the field. FPBC efforts in this area are established with a well subscribed annual conference each year and its annual series of webinars.

Combatting misinformation about forests and forestry professionals in online spaces, media, and public forums was identified by many survey respondents as a way for the forest profession to build greater public trust. FPBC's efforts in this area are primarily proactive, including occasional advertorials, editorials, and other outreach. However, with a small staff and broad regulatory duties, FPBC cannot feasibly respond to individual media articles or online commentary, and the subject matter is often constrained by the PGA.

In contrast, the thousands of individual forest professionals regulated by FPBC are not bound by the same advocacy limitations. Code Standard 8, Professionalism, encourages forest professionals to promote public knowledge with truthful, accurate information on forestry matters.

I urge all practising forest professionals to use their expertise and voice to help combat misinformation about forests and forest professionals today, and join the ongoing efforts of FPBC to grow our collective impact. ✪