

Wilderness Tourism Association



BRITISH COLUMBIA | CANADA

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July 20, 2012

John Rustad, MLA Nechako Lakes
Chair, Special Committee on Timber Supply

Norm Macdonald, MLA Columbia River-Revelstoke
Deputy Chair, Special Committee on Timber Supply

C/o Office of the Clerk of Committees
Room 224, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4

Dear Committee

Re: Final Submission to the Special Committee on Timber Supply

Please accept this as our final submission to the Committee, following up on our presentation of July 9, 2012. As an industry sector that relies on forest and land use values and objectives (i.e. visual quality and other land use objectives) for the experiences that we sell to the world, the recommendations of your committee regarding mid-term timber supply in British Columbia will be of critical importance to us.

The Wilderness Tourism Association (WTA) exists to ensure a sustainable future for BC's wilderness tourism industry or nature based tourism. We represent the hundreds of small businesses that offer nature based tourism activities throughout British Columbia and contribute significantly to BC's economy. These businesses are small and localized, and provide stability, diversification and job creation in their communities. The WTA has been involved in planning initiatives and discussions relating to forestry and land use in British Columbia for decades.

We would first like to acknowledge the creation of this committee in response to the critical forestry and land use issues that need to be addressed, and your efforts to deal with the devastating effects of the pine beetle infestation on the forest sector. We would also like to acknowledge the committee members that have been appointed to sit on this important committee. You collectively have the depth and breadth of experience required to find solutions to these issues and to put forward prudent recommendations.

Most of our concerns and comments in our submission relate to the potential action related to "harvesting of the areas currently constrained from timber harvest in order to support other

"Ensuring a sustainable future for BC's wilderness tourism industry through leadership, advocacy, and stewardship."

resource values” as identified in the Committee Discussion Paper. However we will also provide brief discussion on some of the other identified potential actions and/or options.

It is critical for your committee to keep front of mind the full range of values, products and experiences which flow from, or are attached to, our provincial forests, and not just timber supply. In this context, we are concerned about the committee’s terms of reference, and specifically the lack of mention or acknowledgement of other key socio-economic values such as tourism and recreation values. We would also suggest that making the assumption, in the Committee’s terms of reference and discussion paper, that mid-term timber supply needs to be increased fails to acknowledge a more holistic approach to forest management. With the current approach, sectors like tourism and recreation, non-timber forest products, and other sectors may be impacted or their opportunities lost.

Tourism makes a significant contribution to our local communities and the overall provincial economy. Nature based tourism alone generates \$1.6 billion for BC and is a major driver of BC’s \$13 billion plus tourism industry. Many tourism businesses in British Columbia are directly dependent on the forest land base for their tourism product. Fishing lodges, guide outfitters, and backcountry adventure lodges (skiing, mountain biking, trail riding, etc.) to name a few, all depend on a healthy, natural and pristine environment, i.e. healthy and productive fish and wildlife habitats, wilderness landscapes, and spectacular scenery.

Relatively few tourism operations are entirely untouched by forestry decisions, including timber supply management, in the province. Major ski resorts or all season resorts, for example, require the maintenance of viewscapes around the resorts. Hotels, restaurants and other tourism services, even in urban areas, derive some portion of their income from visitors attracted by the natural beauty and attractions unique to British Columbia’s forests.

Tourists come to British Columbia because of our wilderness and natural reputation, supported by our *Super, Natural* brand. Our natural endowments such as healthy, intact forested landscapes are major drawing cards that attract tourists to B.C. They are also a major reason why many British Columbians spend their vacation dollars at home, exploring their own province. Our highways and other travel corridors, and recreation areas are an integral part of this experience. The actual dollar value of managing or protecting forested landscapes to the tourism industry is hard to quantify. But we know that it is a significant travel motivator.

There are several issues and concerns raised by the tourism industry regarding the impact of forestry development on their operations including (but not limited to):

- Quality of viewscapes;
- Wildlife and fisheries values;
- Recreation features and trails;
- Changes in access;
- Environmental practices, and safety hazards;
- Seasonal operations; and,
- The rate of planned development, harvest and reforestation.

We would also like to highlight our concern with a process that may consider changing land use objectives. Forestry objectives and other land use decisions have been realized after years of deliberation, review, analysis and planning with strong participation from volunteer

stakeholders and the public. Now, in the space of a few months, this planning could be thrown aside for minimal short-term gain for the forest industry, but with long-term negative implications for biodiversity, wildlife and tourism.

We are certainly sympathetic to the losses that have occurred in Burns Lake and the need to develop economic opportunities and employment for that community and other communities that will be impacted by pine beetle. But again, we need to carefully consider what other values may be impacted with any changes.

Harvesting in Constrained Areas

As we have identified, tourism in British Columbia is dependent on a healthy and well managed forest land base, with some protections. As such we rely on forestry and/or land use objectives (or constraints as they are referred to in the forest industry), which serve to protect forest values other than timber whether they be scenic quality, or wildlife refuge or habitat protection (e.g. OGMAs). Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs), for example, consistently comes up in the top 3 issues and concerns raised by the broad tourism industry. Visually sensitive landscapes (also known as viewscape, visual quality, scenic quality) are integral to the BC tourism experience and are key to both present and future tourism use opportunities. All tourism products rely on scenic quality to support B.C.'s global reputation as a provider of a supernatural tourism experience.

We know from the limited studies that have been done that tourists are less likely to return to BC when they experience significantly altered landscapes. Once the visual quality drops below the tourist's acceptable level or expectation, the tourist no longer visits the area and the tourism revenue is lost. Those tourists will go elsewhere for the experience they seek. The mountain pine beetle epidemic hasn't really changed anything. Grey trees are better than logged cut blocks to the tourist. They see the pine beetle killed trees as part of a natural process, which they accept quite readily. In fact, a MOFR study of Public Perceptions of Mountain Pine Beetle Attack and Resulting Salvage Operations found that people prefer grey or dead pine trees over harvesting (Ministry of Forests and Range, 2007). Residents of MPB-affected communities are slightly more accepting of harvesting. In many cases the secondary understory growth is already rapidly 'greening' up the grey or dead trees in VQO areas.

More information on VQOs can be found on the attached document titled: *WTA Fact Sheet - Tourism and Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) in forested landscapes*.

Changing or removing constraints such as VQOs will have little effect on a region's timber supply. This is supported by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (MFLNRO) own analysis. The forest industry doesn't really gain or lose jobs by changing these constraints. What may change is that the forest companies will be able to access a very short-term supply of timber in areas which are closer to mills and therefore cheaper to access. Sacrificing the long-term viability of tourism for short-term forestry gains is neither reasonable, nor desirable for the long-term benefits to our communities and over-all economy.

The accelerated rate of forest development is already placing increasing pressure on the tourism industry's ability to deliver quality tourism experiences. The changing or eliminating of existing constraints will further impact the tourism industry. Such developments will constrain tourism business' ability to operate. It will also make most businesses reluctant to expand, and

discourage investment and entry by new operators. Surely these are not the type of actions we want in our effort to “build upon the *Super, Natural British Columbia* brand as a travel motivator” as identified in our government’s five year tourism strategy *Gaining the Edge*. It should be noted that landscapes under VQOs have actually decreased across the province since 2004 by approximately 500,000 hectares, contrary to the perceptions of many government and forest industry officials.

The forest industry is facing difficult times and we all acknowledge that. This situation is expected to only get worse. But changing constraints to accommodate more logging is myopic and extremely shortsighted. Now with the dire predictions in the forest industry, what we really need to be doing for our local economies is not removing constraints and objectives, but rather strengthening our tourism economy by increasing VQOs and associated land use objectives that support tourism.

MFLNRO has done a good job at laying out the implications of other values on timber supply, but hasn’t provided the same analysis in terms of what relaxing constraints would have on non-timber values. In order to address this gap, the tourism industry would expect a full cost/benefit analysis of all forest values before any possible changes to the constraints are considered. As noted, forestry and land use decisions were realized after years of deliberation, review, analysis and planning in provincial land use planning processes. So we need to be very cautious about how changes to these constraints and objectives and the land use plans that govern them will occur. We would expect the tourism industry to be active participants in any analysis where any decisions or recommendations could impact our sector.

Marginally Economic Timber and Accelerating Timber Availability

While we are not sure what “marginally economic timber” species the committee is considering in their proposed action, we would want government be cautious about a rush to harvest these species without an assessment of what any impacts could be. For example we know that many deciduous species provide critical habitat for ungulates and other wildlife.

We assume that the action of accelerating timber availability could mean either removing the green-up adjacency provision or lowering the age at which a tree is considered mature and available for cutting (i.e shortening the rotation period.). In keeping with our comments pertaining to the harvesting in constrained areas, we would be concerned about impacts to tourism related values. For example, measures such as the attainment of “green-up” on a cut block before logging can proceed in adjacent areas is critical for visual quality. Shortening rotation periods may also have impacts of wildlife habitats.

It is also important to note that the landbased elements of land use plans, to which we all participated and agreed, were predicated on a long cutting cycles of 60 to 80 years or more. This would give time for green up, access management and other transitions to occur while non forest values were managed over time.

Area based tenures

We have been asked to comment on the potential action of “shifting to more area-based tenures and associated more intensive forest management”. The WTA would generally be supportive of this action. However, there are two provisions that we would like to put forward if

this shift were to happen and the opportunity it provides. The first provision is that the tourism industry is also provided a secure working landbase to operate. This would generally be tied to existing tourism land tenures and significant tourism and recreation features where the primary management objective would be tourism and recreation. In some cases these areas would be free from or have minimal timber harvesting. Tourism and recreation zones adjacent to communities should also be considered.

The impact or the threat of impact of timber harvesting on wilderness characteristics on which tourism depends has been severe in some locations around the province. There are numerous provincial examples that highlight tourism businesses being significantly impacted in particular by MPB salvage logging operations and the uplift in ACC in response to the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic.

The land use plans (e.g. the CCLUP) had relative success in addressing land use needs and values due to the use of regional land use zones: e.g. Enhanced; Integrated; Special and Protected Areas; and the use of overall resource access targets. However, over time the need has arisen to define the requirements of the different land use sectors on a much more site-specific basis. As well, the rapid expansion of the nature-based tourism industry and community outdoor recreation has not been adequately addressed. As such, these plans, and government's management of our lands, do not adequately account for current tourism related land and resource use issues and values. Our management approach is also based on the concept of "multiple use" where the prime use of the land is either forestry or mining/extraction of underground resources. Tourism, and any other activity can take place on the land as long as these "primary" uses have priority and aren't unduly interfered with. Consequently, tourism is subservient to forestry management decisions.

If tourism is to expand in rural British Columbia, land and resource security needs to increase in key areas of operation. A land use and/or tenure system where forestry has priority over its working land base in certain areas, and where tourism, recreation, and/or wilderness has priority in other areas would be a win/win system. A higher level of certainty (over land and resource availability) would provide all sectors with the ability to continue the normal business practices of investment, marketing and expansion, while at the same time building stronger, more diverse local economies with increased employment. It would also avoid conflicts and build better relationships between local First Nation peoples, industry, communities, and government. There are a few examples where this type of approach has been used in BC successfully.

We would strongly recommend that government undertake an additional process to analyze the existing land tenure system and explore ways that it can evolve, including the advantages and disadvantages of increased area-based management of our public forests. We would hope to be active participants in such a process.

Another provision for shifting to area-based tenures would be appropriate communication and notification regarding harvesting plans, and consideration of tourism's interests and concerns. Forest licensees are required under FRPA to notify all registered interests in the land, including tourism operators tenured under the Land Act, about Forest Stewardship Plans (FSPs). One of the problems with volume-based FSPs is that because the areas are so vast and there are so many ways to manage resources and meet the minimal objectives, the information is either too

broad or too high level to be meaningful for tourism operators and other stakeholders. We would hope that FSPs for area-based tenures would allow for better planning and management, and for better communication of important information.

In addition, we would hope for improved notification and consideration of interests at the site planning stages. In addition to prior notification during the initial FSP planning processes, the tourism industry also requires respectful communication regarding the details of proposed cutting and road building plans before site plans are developed and the appropriate permits are applied for.

Summary

While forestry has been the traditional backbone of the rural economy in BC, tourism is more and more becoming a promising new opportunity for growth. Both sectors use trees: the forest industry for processing into wood and paper products; tourism for viewsapes, the harbouring of wildlife, and as a setting for recreational experiences.

Tourism businesses rely on delivering to their guests the *Super, Natural* wilderness experience they come to British Columbia for. According to the recent BC Tourism Strategy endorsed by Premier Clarke and Minister Bell, the primary provincial marketing focus is to “Build upon the *Super, Natural British Columbia*® brand as a travel motivator”¹. This is our wish also, however this is impossible if trails and other features are rendered un-useable, and viewsapes in travel corridors and surrounding tourism operations are deemed unsightly by heavy forestry development activities.

We also need to consider future tourism opportunities, opportunities we don’t even know about yet. Tourism development and/or enhancement opportunities are very sensitive to social desires, economic, and cultural forces. New activities can become popular in a short period of time and are often difficult to predict in the short term.

We urge your committee to consider tourism and recreation values in your recommendations. Rural British Columbians are resilient and enterprising people and they will get through this temporary “fall-down” crisis. But we all need a diverse, healthy forest to sustain our collective wellbeing. If collaborative and equitable planning between all forest related sectors could be achieved there is great potential for all industries to co-exist and thrive. This would be good news for rural communities across BC intent on economic health and diversification.

Respectfully,

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¹ Gaining the Edge, A Five-Year Strategy for Tourism BC, page 3.